

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Imagine the story of Jesus without His chosen disciples; or, the enlightening epic Ramayana with no Hanuman or army of monkeys. Would the story of Lord Krishna be so enchanting without the *gopis* and *gopalas*, Radha, Arjuna and the other Pandavas? The saga of Sathya Sai, in exactly the same way, without His students is like the Sun with no heat and light. If there is one facet of His *Avataric* drama which has always remained constant, and continues to reveal itself in so many unique ways, fascinating you every other day, it is the Love that Bhagavan Baba has for His students.

Right from His childhood, when He would collect a band of boys and train them in song and dance to form the “Pandhari Bhajan Group”; or the days of His early Avatharhood when He revamped the High School in Bukkapatnam infusing vibrancy and values into the campus; or the early sixties when He set up the *Veda Pathashala*, an institution to impart the Vedas and ancient wisdom of India to a band of eager youngsters and said, “This *Pathshaala* will blossom into a University...the boys will grow into strong pillars of *Sanathana Dharma*...they will be the leaders and guides of this land...I shall take care of them as the apple of My eye, more than any mother”; or the seventies when He established the college in Prasanthi Nilayam, right up to the unfurling of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (now Sri Sathya Sai University) in 1981 after which began the golden era of Sai Education - His immense Love for the youth and keen involvement in carefully moulding their character has been the Avatar’s continuous agenda. And He does this in ways that are manifold, and at times, mystifying.

Whether it is the unique chances of interaction He grants to them during every Darshan; or the intimate sessions He awards inside Trayee Brindavan in Bangalore; or the opportunity to travel with Him to Kodai Kanal and observe Him at close quarters; or the chance to sing and speak, act and dance in front of Him throughout the year – the sole Mission of the Divine Master is to make masterpieces of men and women. And how does He do it? How does He instill immortal values in the minds of the young and the restless so that they are embedded in their being for eternity? The cover story of this issue will give you a glimpse of this glorious and insightful aspect of the Lord’s present Incarnation.

When you read “His Boys – His Voice”, you will know how the Master Sculptor uses the Convocation Drama, which is one of the many ‘tools’ that He has created, to chisel and cut, sharpen and straighten, the ‘raw boulders’ He has brought into His ‘workshop’ so that they stand out and shine as icons of integrity and purity. You will realize that while the screen play, acting, costumes, sets, music, etc. are excellent in these dramas, and the Lord spends hours of His precious time perfecting the minutest parts concerning all these areas, the brilliant performance on the final day is probably not even one tenth of the Lord’s complete objective. What is important to the Divine Director is the message that seeps into the awareness of the audience, and even more significant is the purifying effect it has on the participants themselves.

When you read the stories of transformation, instances of revelation, examples of Divine compassion, and anecdotes of amazing love that subsume the whole process of preparation, practice and performance of the Convocation dramas, you will know how the Lord invests His valuable time and why He does it. For Swami, the students are His Property, which He has stated any number of times. In fact, during the 32nd anniversary of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust in September 2, 2007, addressing the boys, He said, "Without you I cannot exist. When you exist, I exist, and when I exist, you exist. I and you are one." That is how much the boys mean to Him and that is the precise reason why He takes every opportunity to make them reflections of His Love. But at the same time, 'boys' here do not refer to the students of His University alone. For, as He once said, "To be a Sathya Sai University Student is to be a student of Sai for just a few years, during the tenure of education; but to be a Sathya Sai Student is to be a Sai Student for Life!"

Bhagavan's Love knows only expansiveness. In His own way, He has showered His immense attention on children and youth from all over the world, just like He has done for His University students, and for the same mission. An interesting example is the story of two boys, Sathya and Dominique, that you will find in the feature article "Sai Movement in Germany". How the frustrating antics and attitudes of the little Dominique, dramatically transform through the medium of a play - just as it happens during Convocation dramas with the students of His college - is truly fascinating. Dominique, today, is a Sai Student to emulate.

And such gems crafted by the Lord are many. When you read the account of Mr. C. B. S. Mani, an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University sharing how he is able to adhere to the principles of "Speak the Truth and Follow Right Conduct" in the competitive and abrasive corporate jungle of today, it will hearten you. Again, in the Sai Seva section you will find another inspiring tale. A group of youth from Argentina traveled 1500 kilometers carrying 7200 kilograms of relief material into a place called "The Green Hell" inside deep woodlands to share Love in the form of essential needs to a population who have only wild animals for company and a few fruits and local produce to eat. But once they are touched by the selfless love of the sevadals, a joy, they have never experienced before, engulfs them.

It is the same experience with Shweta too – a young promising lady, whose life had turned from dreams to dust, when she heard the prognosis of her doctor. But thanks to the power of Pure Love, today she says, "I have found the true meaning of service, loving and selfless service." This is after she visited the Sri Sathya Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield. When you read her life-altering experiences in first person in the Healing Touch section, you too will envision a new direction in life.

"Service to man will help your divinity to blossom, for, it will gladden your heart and make you feel that life has been worthwhile," Swami said in a Discourse on December 5, 1964. And this is the crux of the message conveyed through Convocation dramas too, enacted under His Divine Direction by His boys, year after year. Through these revealing plays the Lord teaches that whatever

talent we may possess, let it be dedicated to the service of the rest of humanity, indeed, of all living beings. For, therein lies fulfillment.

Let every act of ours be like a flower, free of ego and full of fragrance, to be offered at His Lotus Feet. Let our beings be like a flute, hollow, clear and pure, so that we can be effective conduits of His Love. Let us be a perfect puppet in the Hands of the Divine Puppeteer, who alone is Permanent.

Loving Regards,
H2H Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Why We Exist

Human life is noble, sacred and precious. The way to realize this truth is to feel that you are a part of the Divine. Only human beings are endowed with the faculty to experience this truth. It is, therefore, the duty of every human being to strive for the realization of this truth.

The human body is constituted by the *Pancha Bhuthas* (five elements), *Pancha Koshas* (five sheaths) - *Annamaya* (food), *Praanamaya* (Life-force), *Manomaya* (mental), *Vijnaanamaya* (intelligence) and *Aanandhamaya* (the sheath of Bliss). While other living beings have only the first three sheaths, the human species alone has all the five. Man is encompassed by attachment to worldly desires, which produce delusions of various kinds related to the three attributes (*gunas* - *Sathva*, *Rajas* and *Thamas*). To attain liberation man has to rid himself of these desires. The mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation. It is only by controlling the mind that man can achieve liberation.

Everyone is proud about the body, the mind and the intellect, forgetting the indwelling *Aathma* (spirit), which is the basis for all of them. The *Aathma* has no birth or death. It is the root of a tree, which sustains the branches, the leaves, flowers and fruits. It is the basis on which the superstructure of life rests.

The Meaning of True Renunciation

The *Vedas* (ancient Indian Scriptures) have declared that man can attain immortality by *thyaaga* (renunciation) and not by any other means, be it actions, wealth or progeny. What is it that has to be renounced? One has to renounce one's bad qualities. Men today are only human in form, but are filled with beastly qualities. To manifest their inherent divine nature, men have to cultivate love of God, fear of sin and adhere to *sanghaneethi* (social morality).

When people have fear of sin and love for God, they will not indulge in immoral acts. Thereby morality in society will automatically be ensured. It is meaningless to be born as a human being and lead an animal existence. God can be known only by experience and not by experiments. And for this, spiritual practice is necessary. Men who are engaged in exploring space do not make the slightest effort to explore the Divine within them. Of what use are experiments aimed at exploring space, while there is no genuine cultivation of human qualities and the practice of such basic virtues as showing reverence for the mother, the father and the preceptor? Everyone should act up to the motto – 'Help ever, hurt never'. Every educated person should engage himself or herself in selfless service to society, with humility and a pure heart.

All academic distinctions or even observance of spiritual practices are of little use if there is no love in the heart. The heart is called *Hridhaya*. It is made up of the two words, *Hri* and *Dhaya* (compassion). The Lord is described as *Hridhayavaasi* (the Indweller in the heart). Love and Compassion are inherent in every person. Each has to share his love with others. Failure to share one's love is gross ingratitude to society, to which one owes everything. One should give one's love freely to others and receive love in return. This is the deep significance of human life.

- *Divine Discourse in the Sai Ramesh Hall, Brindavan, on June 5, 1994.*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

SATYOPANISHAD – PART 1

- Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear reader, the second article in the *Spiritual Blossoms* section of *Heart2Heart* has been “*Conversations with Sai*” for the last 40 issues. We serialized completely Dr. John Hislop’s book “*Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*” from October 1, 2004 till the last issue. Responding to positive responses from many readers to this section who prefer the “question-answer” format in finding answers to issues connected with spirituality and personal growth, from this issue we serialize another popular book, this time by Prof. Anil Kumar, entitled “*Satyopanishad*.” Published in two parts by the author, this revealing dialogue with the Divine has topics as wide-ranging as the origin of evil, goals of human life, the aspect of God – embodied and formless - to price hikes, women’s liberation, vegetarianism and the generation gap. Unlike Dr. Hislop’s book, the 270 questions in these volumes are neatly grouped and presented in nice chapters under three parts. We start in this issue with the first chapter of the first part called “*The India Eternal*.”

Chapter 1 - The India Eternal

Prof. Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! India (Bharat) is the land of religion and spirituality. All the incarnations have taken birth in Bharat. What is the reason behind this?

Bhagavan: Bharat is *yogabhumi*, the land of spirituality. Bharat is *punyabhumi*, the sacred land. Bharat is *karmabhumi*, the land of sacred activity. Bharat is *tyagabhumi*, the land of renunciation. Here saints, sages, seers, aspirants, seekers and devotees pray to God to enjoy His proximity. This necessitates the descent of God in human form or incarnation. In response to their fervent appeals and prayers, God, out of His grace and compassion, descends on earth or incarnates and moves amidst us. Devotees, then, experience bliss and follow Him.

Here is an illustration. You asked why Bharat alone has always been the birthplace of the incarnations. You know that the train has an engine in the front with several carriages connected to it. The power or energy generated there in the engine pulls the carriages forward. Where do you find the driver? Naturally, he sits in the engine monitoring the train, does he not? Similarly, in the train of the world, Bharat is in the position of an engine and the carriages are the several countries attached to it. God is the driver. The engine is His place. Just as we find heat and power generated there, we also find the same elements produced as a result of sacred rituals such as *yajnas* and *yagas* (sacrifices) performed from time to time in this land of Bharat.

In the great epic, the Mahabharata we find Arjuna and Bhima always following Yudhisthira. Here, Arjuna stands for intelligence, while Bhima symbolises physical strength. Now, Bharat is in the position of Yudhisthira. America is Arjuna, while Russia is Bhima. Just as you find Bhima and Arjuna obeying the command of Yudhisthira, America and Russia should follow Bharat.

In the very name "Bharat" we have three letters. (Written in Telugu, "Bharat" comprises three letters). Bha, the first letter stands for *bhava* or feeling; ra, the second signifies *raga*, tune or melody; and ta, the third indicates *tala* or beat. Thus, Bharat is the country where the glory of God is sung with proper feeling, melody and right rhythm. This country has another name "Hindudesam" which means a country that shuns violence, 'Him' means, *himsa* or violence and 'du' refers to "dura" or shuns. For these reasons God has chosen to incarnate or descend in human form in Bharat.

(AK): Swami! We find people of every religion following a specific sacred text and a particular path. But in Sanathana Dharma (ancient Indian practice), we have numerous paths, texts, and procedures such as dualism, qualified non-dualism and nondualism, the nine paths of devotion, the six *Darsanas*, the four Vedas, numerous *Sastras* (scriptures), and so on. How are we to understand these and practice the principles of Sanathana Dharma?

Bhagavan: Sanathana Dharma is the most ancient spiritual way of life. Its diversity matches the spectrum of human behavioral tendencies, temperaments and mental attitudes. It is practical and confers divine experiences.

A small example. You buy a piece of cloth and give it to a tailor to make a suit for you. The tailor will get your suit ready according to your measurements, does he not? You cannot wear a dress made for someone else. It may be too loose or too tight, too long or too short. Therefore, your dress must be according to your size. Similarly, some may like Rama, some Siva, Krishna, and so on. They find it easy to concentrate on the deity of their choice, whereas the followers of other faiths may have to wear one dress of one and the same size.

Another example. You may know the *nadasvaram*, the South Indian musical instrument required to be played on every auspicious occasion. To maintain *srti* or rhythm by way of an accompaniment, one person plays an instrument in the same way all through. On the other hand, with *nadasvaram* you can play any number of *ragas* or tunes. Sanathana Dharma is like the *nadasvaram*.

Yet another example: Whatever be the combination of optional subjects you may take in Science during your undergraduate programme, be it 'M.P.C.' (Maths, Physics and Chemistry) or 'C.B.Z.' (Chemistry, Botany and Zoology), you get a B.Sc. degree. Similarly, in the university established by Sage Vyasa, you can opt for any course like the *Sastras*, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, etc. This is the significance of our ancient Sanathana Dharma, which gives ample freedom for you to select and follow.

Here is one more example: A pharmacist and a cafe owner had a headache on the same day. Seeking relief, the pharmacist went to the cafe for a cup of coffee, and the cafe owner to the medical shop for a tablet. So, one has faith in a cup of coffee while the other trusts a tablet. In the same way, you should follow the spiritual path you believe in, and the text that is convincing and appealing to you.

(AK): Swami! Muslims go to a mosque every Friday to pray (*nama*), and Christians go to a church every Sunday. Then, how is it that Hindus do not meet in a temple like other religious groups?

Bhagavan: You are wrong if you think Hindus should. They are not required to specially meet on a specific day like others. Why? Every Hindu has a *puja* room or an altar in his home particularly meant for worship. He prays there every day. So there is no need for him to assemble for mass prayer or to pray on specific days like people belonging to other religions.

(AK): Swami! Since God is omnipresent and omniscient, do we need temples and should we go on pilgrimage to holy places like Shirdi, Puttaparti, Tirupati, and so on?

Bhagavan: This is a foolish question. You are exhibiting your ignorance and your 'fashionable' way of thinking which, more often than not, is perverted. There is no relationship between what is said and what is experienced. You say that God is everywhere. But it is merely an expression, vocal and verbal. Do you really have strong faith that God is present everywhere? Do you have that experience of the divinity, which is all pervasive? You are simply speaking like a parrot.

Here is a simple example. Blood circulates throughout the body of a cow. But you can draw milk only out of the udder! You can't squeeze the ear or twist the tail of a cow to get its milk, can you? Therefore, the all pervading God can be visualised and experienced in a temple and at a holy pilgrim centre.

(AK): Swami! Why did the ancient *rishis*, sages and saints, choose forests to undertake *tapas* or penance? Why did they prefer solitude?

Bhagavan: There is significance undoubtedly. Why did they choose forests for penance? Here is an example. Suppose an exhibition is organised in a city. Naturally, the stalls there and the articles kept there for sales attract you. The music, eatables, clothes, etc., draw you. The exhibits attract your senses since you find them right before you. But, in a forest, there is nothing to attract or distract your attention.

Solitude helps you to maintain the inner peace and tranquility needed for meditation. It provides a congenial atmosphere for spiritual life. So, saints and sages always did penance in forests. In other words, "forest" is "for rest" spiritually.

(AK): Swami! We don't find any understanding between any two persons, but only mutual bickering and differences. We hardly find any unity or brotherhood between man and man. What is the reason?

Bhagavan: There is one thing you should clearly know when you think of unity and differences among people. What is the reason? Today there is no understanding between any two persons. The absence of understanding is the main cause of all the conflicts, enmity, and differences. Therefore, people do not adjust with others. Adjustment is possible only when there is understanding. But, today you are moving in the opposite direction. You think that you can adjust first and then understand each other. But, that is wrong. You must first understand and adjustment then becomes easy.

Here is a small illustration. When there is perfect understanding between you and your wife, she does not mind if you return home late from your office. She pities you and sympathises with you. With all her concern and love, she brings you a cup of coffee. But, if by any chance, there is a slight misunderstanding, and your return from office is delayed even by five minutes, there will be a civil war at home. Why? Misunderstanding is the cause of her inability to adjust. It makes her put questions like: "Where have you been till now? Where did you go? With whom did you spend the time?" etc. So understanding is very necessary for proper adjustment. Many problems of society today can be solved if this is realised.

(AK): Swami! Hindus are criticised for worshipping idols, trees, etc. Many think that this is all superstition and blind faith. What do you feel about this, Swami?

Bhagavan: Bharat (India) is the spiritual centre of the world. This is the country that practised, preached and propagated that divinity exists in all the living and the nonliving, right from an atom to the entire cosmos. You will notice that here, in this country, *putta* (anthill), *gutta* (mountain), *chettu* (tree) and *pitta* (bird) are objects of veneration and worship. An anthill is worshipped as the abode of Lord Subrahmanya, a bird is respected as the vehicle of Lord Vishnu, a mountain is spiritually important as it is viewed as Govardhana lifted by Lord Krishna, and a tree is worshipped as the *asvatthavriksha*. All objects are divine according to our scriptures. This is not superstition. This is not in any way blind faith. Sanathana Dharma wants us to view, feel, and experience divinity everywhere. This is the spiritual path. This is the highest and noblest experience.

CHINNA KATHA

How to Deal With a Bad Habit

One man got into the habit of eating opium. It was not possible for him to control this habit. He was always in a kind of coma.

A saintly person visited his city and was offering advice and comfort to many. The opium-eater also sought the advice of the saint. The saint said that his health was deteriorating and that he should give up eating opium. At this, the opium addict said that it was not possible for him to give it up. He requested the saint to give him some advice.

The saint asked him how much of opium he used to take every day and was shown a certain lump as the quantity being taken every day. The saint got a piece of chalk, equal to the lump of opium and told him that he may continue eating opium but should not take more than the weight of the chalk each day.

The opium eater was quite happy but he was also told that every day he must write "OM" three times on a blackboard with that chalk. In this manner, the chalk was reduced in size every day and so the amount of opium which the person was eating also got reduced gradually and ultimately this habit was removed.

COVER STORY

HIS BOYS – HIS VOICE

“Hrudayavaani” and Heartening Glimpses from Bygone Convocation Dramas

There were no eyes that were not wet that momentous evening. It was as if someone had glanced deep into each one of their hearts and touched those delicate sentiments that are encased in the innermost core of their being, and as a result they had all become so vulnerable. Their overwhelming eyes conveyed all that their hearts wanted to say. For the thousands who had gathered in Prasanthi Nilayam to bask in the bliss of His Presence on the occasion of His 82nd Birthday, it was a soulful treat, that the Merciful Lord had granted, which will linger in the deep recesses of their being for a long time to come.

Evoking the Exceptional

“I have been coming here for the last 37 years and have seen so many performances by His students, but this one was exceptional. I must say, to me it was a spectacular new direction. I have never seen this before...But the glorious moments of that evening was when I became so emotionally involved with the drama that I cried...I was fortunate to be sitting in the same row as Swami, and at this moment, with tears in my eyes, I turned to look at Him and what I saw overwhelmed me more...His eyes too were moist and overflowing....He was, in fact, much more involved in it than me...,” says Mr. Isaac Tigret, internationally acclaimed business magnet and millionaire turned philanthropist and an ardent devotee of Sai.

Mr. Kishan Singhal, a well-known entrepreneur based in Canada, who was also present that evening, said, “The story of the drama was so profound and real that I could not contain myself. It was a ‘slice of life’ script and I could relate to it completely. And the boys depicted the scenes so beautifully – with so much finesse, passion and perfection. The impact it had on me is so deep that whenever I think of it, I am drowned in emotion...”

“This Drama cannot be described in words,” said Father Charles Ogada from Zambia. “It was as if the gates of Heaven opened and what I saw were like gods and demi-gods acting on the stage. It was not just a mere drama, but a rain of Divine Energy. In fact, that evening Ashram was overflowing with people and I was tired too; I was in two minds if I should go for the programme. But Swami within me said, ‘Go’. Then, I replied, ‘Swami, I will go, but please ensure I get a good corner from where I can watch the programme clearly.’ And to my surprise, in spite of the huge Birthday crowd, I got a vantage point. And as the drama progressed, it created a surge of energy within me and filled my whole body with ripples of emotion. Whenever the father of the main actor spoke, floods of tears would well up within me and it was hard to hold them back. All I can say is that this Convocation drama had

the power to penetrate that deepest core of our being where we are one with Love. Simply put – it was ‘InSightful and Heartful’ completely.”

No surprise then that the Divine Lord who, according to the main actor of the drama, Divij, “was truly, the Scriptwriter, Director, Producer, Financier and everything!” had named the Drama “Hrudayavaani” meaning, “Voice of the Heart.” For Bhagavan, His boys are His Voice, and how He used them as His chosen instruments on this occasion to convey certain salient messages to the large concourse of devotees assembled for His Birthday, is a story which is as revealing as it is fascinating.

How the Convocation Drama 2007 was Born

“The conceptualisation of the drama started about October 22, just after the Dasara celebrations,” recalls Mr. Amey Deshpande, a research scholar who was one of the main coordinators of the Drama. “However, we were still unsure whether there would be a drama this year, as the previous year there was no drama because of the inauguration of the Sri Sathya Sai International Indoor Stadium. But on October 26, we were overjoyed; we had received the final ‘go ahead’ from Swami. For many aspiring actors, who had not gone home for the winter vacation, it was the answer to their sincere prayers. But the Lord now was keen to know the story and we were at the drawing board straight away. The Convocation dramas in the recent past have been on a social theme relevant to the current times, unlike a mythological or abstract subject, but at the same time laced with inspiring anecdotes from great epics and history.

“While this was the most significant guiding factor in developing the story, there were many other aspects, by no means less important, which had to be taken cognizance of carefully. For instance, Swami does not approve the depiction of any negative traits. In a previous year’s drama, during the rehearsal, when He saw the boy who was playing the role of an ambitious musician, shout at his friend for not making use of his talent to garner glory and prosperity, and then storming out of the scene in a huff, Swami was visibly unhappy. He said, ‘My boys do not get angry. Unless you have that evil trait in you, it cannot come out. You should be more mellowed down.’”

‘My Boys Should Not Even Get Such Ideas’ - Baba

Dr. Shailesh Srivastava, one of the principal teacher coordinators of the drama, shares another revealing episode. “I remember we had a small skit enacted in front of Him in Kodai Kanal a few years ago. There was a scene where the students working as factory workers go on strike. Then and there, Swami stopped the performance, and asked, ‘What are you doing?’ ‘Swami, it is a strike,’ the boys gently muttered. Perturbed, He asked, ‘Why strike?’ The Lord was completely into the drama. ‘Swami, it is a drama, and in the plot there is a strike,’ the boys cautiously tried to clarify. ‘Drama? No, even in a drama, you should not do a strike.’ Smart that we always think we are, the boys again tried to convince Him that it was a factory scene and the story needed the workers to go on strike. But what Swami said next was very significant. With lots of concern in His Voice, He said, ‘See, in my opinion, our

students should not even get such ideas...’ It is at these times that He gives us glimpses of what He really wants us to become. If you get such an idea, it means there is some element of that inside you. And when you enact a character or a scene like that, a little bit of that can get into you. Very few people can avoid feelings and tendencies seeping into them, He says. That is how much Swami is sensitive to what we do and how we portray it.”

And apart from this, there are many other critical criteria that also had to be adhered to. As Amey explains, “The drama should have an interesting twist which brings cheer and hope to the viewers; songs and music that can touch their soul as it is a more powerful medium than the dialogues; of late, a dance gelling into the story adding colour and liveliness; and more importantly, powerful characters that convey the cream of Bhagavan’s message, candidly and emphatically. There are of course many other aspects too, which are equally crucial, though the details of which are not always obvious, like the sets, costumes, recording, etc. So, it is in this background canvas that we had to sketch a tale of inspiration and transformation that would be worthy of Swami’s sacred Name and Vision.

“By His Grace, we developed two stories so that He could choose one and Swami liked the first one. And this storyline selected by Bhagavan was actually the juxtaposition of two touching tales – one from real life and the other from a famous fable. The ‘real life’ one was, in fact, the story of Pradeep from this inspiring magazine Heart2Heart.”

The Story Chosen by the Lord

To refresh readers’ memories, the story of Pradeep, the son of a poor farmer in Orissa who had the dream of becoming a doctor, was published in the Healing Touch section in the November 2005 issue. To recount in brief, Pradeep, though born into a large family of illiterates in a rural town of Orissa, wanted to study, and successfully cleared the 12th grade. His father had spent all his meager earnings on his studies, even though he wanted him to join him in the fields. Later, when Pradeep persisted with his desire to pursue medicine, after much reluctance, his father gave in. But the most tragic event in their life happened when the health screening done before admission into the medical college revealed that Pradeep had a serious heart ailment, and hence could not be given a seat, unless he was operated upon and his condition corrected.

The family was completely crestfallen and Pradeep’s dreams instantly turned into dust. Now, saving his life was the most critical priority for the family; but the father was helpless as the astronomical amount needed for the surgery was way beyond his means. It is at this time that they heard of Bhagavan’s Hospital in Whitefield, and soon, without spending a single rupee, Pradeep was completely cured. The very next month, H2H had this story in the ‘Healing Touch’ section. And interestingly, reading this account, a doctor from Australia was so moved that he decided to sponsor the entire medical education of Pradeep. During his next visit to India, this kind Sai devotee enquired about the address of this young student in the Radio Sai office and

went to Orissa to meet Pradeep and do the needful. The protagonist of the Convocation Drama 2007 was, in fact, a reflection of Pradeep.

“Apart from this true story,” Amey continues, “the other popular legend on which the Drama was based, is the story of the ambitious son of a rabbi, who vehemently argues with his father against taking up the family profession and in a fit of anger leaves home. Years later, having lost everything, he repents and returns home, only to find out that his father is no more. Devastated, he longs to somehow communicate to his father that he is a completely changed man. The people in the village ask him to go over to a mountain top where a stone with many holes exists. It was believed that any prayer written there would be conveyed to God. The son writes a letter seeking forgiveness, and pleads with God to let his father know that he is indeed transformed. Even as he shoves his letter into one of the crevices, another letter falls. When he picks that letter up, to his utter amazement, it is his father’s letter to God praying Him to forgive his son and look after his well being. The son is overwhelmed with his father’s unconditional love.

“We weaved this famous tale with the true hospital story of Pradeep to construct a storyline that was simple but stirring, infused with the Sai philosophy of education, healthcare and service.”

A Tale to Touch Everyone

Almost everyone in the audience could relate to some character or the other of the Drama and that is one of the principal reasons why it had such a tremendous impact. In fact, one of the main actors, Mr. Ranjan Sharma, recalls, “After the practice session one evening, the day when Bhagavan had come to see the rehearsal, as I was sitting in the jeep to return to Mandir, one person appeared there and kept saying, ‘Sir, this is my story... Please listen to me, this is actually my history.’ Unfortunately I could not get to talk to him.” The story of Convocation Drama 2007 was that real...

‘Hrudayavaani’ – The Voice of the Heart

When the curtains rose to a thunderous applause on the evening of November 22, “Hrudayavaani” stole everyone’s hearts with a scintillating dance, and on the top of the screen was a big banner: “Vidya Mandir Junior College – Farewell Function”.

And then came onto the stage Mr. Vishwanath Verma, the principal of the college, who congratulates the students for their splendid performance and with passionate zeal, inspires them to be courageous, industrious and dream big. Finally, he presents the best student award to Mr. Sudhir for his outstanding record, academically and otherwise. Sudhir is thrilled. He humbly accepts the award and says, “I have read elevating stories of gurus of yore, but today I have seen one. Sir, you are my role model.” And then he shares his dream. “Sir, I want to be become a doctor and see the smile on the face of a cured patient...” The principal is touched and wishes him well. Then enters

an old man, and Sudhir introduces him as his father, Mr. Purushottam, to Mr. Verma who is glad to see Sudhir's parent and begins to talk highly about his son, his dreams and capabilities; but Mr. Purushottam is unimpressed, rather he seems worried.

A Poor Man's Dream Shatters

As the next scene opens, Sudhir is excited about fulfilling his dream and shares his vision of 'Dr. Sudhir' with his father. But he is shocked to hear his father's response. "Give up your dreams of becoming a doctor...! Chasing dreams is a privilege of the rich, not for the son of a postman." Sudhir is confused, crestfallen and cries. His father then reveals, "Today, I stand begging at the doors of destiny for your life...you have a hole in the heart." He goes on to say how he had toiled all his life to save Sudhir but had always kept this fact a secret. Now, the only thing he wants, he says, is: "Money, rupees four lakhs to be precise – an amount that can buy your life." Sudhir soon recovers from the shock seeing the plight of his father and then begins to console him. He tries to infuse courage into him. "Father, all we need is not money, but faith," he says, and continues, "and that is what we have." And then he goes on to narrate the story of the saint, Sri Bhadrachala Ramdas.

Faith in God Instills Courage

The third scene is a flashback which opens to the royal chamber of King Tanesha. Into his majesty's presence is brought the arrested 'culprit' - Ramdas. "I have received reports that you have misappropriated tax money to construct a temple. What do you have to say on that?" the King thunders, while his ministers taunt the pious saint. "All I know is, I have provided shelter to the One who provides shelter to all...if taxes can be used to build forts, citadels and tombs, why not for building a temple for the Eternal Emperor?" Ramdas explains. Tanesha is now only more enraged and orders that the pious tax collector be put to severe torture until he craves for forgiveness. The pure saint begins to plead with his Lord Rama to come to his rescue and bursts into a soulful song.

In the next scene, he is in the prison being tortured and offered stale chapattis to eat by the jailers. But before he puts the rotten food in his mouth, the background screen parts and to a thunderous applause, there is seen Lord Rama and Lakshmana blessing His dear devotee, unknown to him. As soon as Ramadas puts the food in his mouth, overcome by its sweetness, he spontaneously sings to the Lord in praise: "Dear Lord, there is nothing sweeter in this world than your Divine Name." The jailers are enraptured by his melodious voice and sublime feelings; they begin to literally dance to his tune!

The Lord Rescues Those Who Seek His Refuge

And immediately after this, Tanesha turns up at the jail and asks Ramdas for the final time to accept his mistake and seek pardon, or pay up the entire amount spent. The saint humbly submits that he has no money to settle any

account with the King, and immediately cries out to his Lord Rama, "O Rama, it is You who must settle account with the King, as I have spent everything for You..." The Emperor is disgusted and leaves in a huff.

He goes to his inner room, and as he takes to his bed to relax his disturbed mind, exasperatedly he mutters, "Ya Allah..." And in no time, enter into his private room, two handsome individuals dressed in simple attire. The King is shocked. The two introduce themselves as Ramanna and Lakshmana, servants of the Lord's servant whom he has imprisoned. Tanesha laughs out loud and says, "That wretched criminal had to be punished." Lakshmana is immediately enraged, but Ramanna calms him down, and then offers a bag of gold coins to the King, and says, "I have come to pay the entire amount with interest. Count your money, O King." The Muslim ruler wonders how Ramdas could manage such a huge amount. "I owe him much more than this..." Ramanna says as He looks at His brother, and then tells the king: "Now that your account is settled, please release Ramdas."

When the curtain rises for the next scene, it is Sudhir back with his father. "Father, the Lord Himself rescued Ramdas. When intentions are pure, I am sure He will take care..." Sudhir tries to pep his father's spirits up. Purushottam is moved, watching the sterling virtues of his son and bitterly moans, "Oh Lord, why do You want to take away such a precious child from me?...You promised to take care...wherever we are...however we are...I beseech You to come to my rescue." And just then is heard the strains of a bhajan from afar, which soon is more audible. "Rama Anaraada..." which means, 'Call out 'Rama' just once and it will eradicate every problem...' A group of people dressed in white, pass Sudhir's house singing bhajans enthusiastically.

And the next minute, two youth dressed in white come to their house, extend greetings, and then reveal that they have brought Prasadam for them from Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. They inform them: "We are students of Baba's University.... He has told us to go and serve in the villages...today we have brought some of the best doctors for a preliminary check up." Purushottam is immediately interested, but at the same time is apprehensive about the cost. The youth then tell them that Baba has set up magnificent 'Temples of Healing' where they do not have to pay even a single paisa. Purushottam is overwhelmed with gratitude to the Lord for this sudden shower of Grace. Overcome with His compassion, he says, "Oh Rama! There you came to the rescue of Your great devotee Ramadas, and today you are alleviating the suffering of a simple postman!"

Stepping into the Temple of Healing

In the next scene, the stage is empty but on the big white screen behind, a video starts. It depicts Sudhir and his father walking on the rudimentary village road, then taking a bus and alighting in front of the Super Specialty Hospital. Sudhir is overwhelmed looking at the imposing structure. He is then welcomed into the dome of the Hospital by the sevadals. And now he is filled with awe. The serenity of the ambience touches him deeply. Later, he is seen

by a doctor, undergoes tests, is admitted into the ward for surgery and then wheeled into the operation theatre. While his father, worriedly waits outside the complex, he sees a picture of Swami on the wall and pours his heart out in tears. Meanwhile, the operation is over and Sudhir is now in the CCU. The care and concern of the nurses move him. He is absolutely relaxed; a gentle smile plays on his lips. His dear father feeds him with his own hands, while the doctors come to enquire about his condition. And finally, Sudhir, who is almost perfect, is transferred to the normal ward for a few more days of rest. He is a picture of genuine joy and satisfaction.

When the lights return, Sudhir is in the Cardiac ward and enter two gentlemen with Radio Sai T-shirts on. They seek the doctor's permission to interview the patient, and then going over to Sudhir's bedside, they introduce themselves as members of the Radio Sai Team. Then they cordially begin a chat with Sudhir, eager to know more about his story. Sudhir is in fact more eager than them to share his dreamlike experience and goes on to narrate all that has happened till then.

Homesick Cranes Return to their Nest

When the next scene opens, it is a completely different setting - an office in the USA. Two non-resident Indian or NRI doctors are in conversation and one of them seems to be in an introspective mood. When the other prods him to say something, he says, "You know Guna, the past few weeks I have been doing some soul searching, and every time I find myself groping around in darkness." Dr. Guna, then, shares his experience of how he felt so good the other day when he spoke to his parents, and then says, "Today I feel, even as I am pursuing my dreams, age is catching up with my parents. They need me now..." Next, he reveals, "Ashutosh, I am going back home for good...tomorrow." Dr. Ashutosh is shocked, he says, "Guna, is this a joke?" But Guna is serious and Ashutosh is baffled. He tells him that it is the craziest thing to do when his career is peaking in the US. But Guna explains, "My parents gave me life and now can I just leave them to the mercy of destiny? No...Ashutosh, they are everything to me...And frankly, I am not sacrificing anything." And the next moment, he leaves wishing him good luck.

Ashutosh is now in a total mental turmoil. Memories of his parents flash in his mind...he takes his phone and tries to call them, but the number is not reachable. Slumped in the sofa, he introspects and then suddenly breaks down... "When my father told me that he misses me, I told him not to get sentimental....O father, I never understood your love... and mother, you just tearfully watched me leave...never said a word as you did not want to hurt me...I miss you both so much..." Ashutosh is crying uncontrollably. A few minutes pass... and at the end of it, in a state of desperation, he switches on the Radio, swaps a few channels and suddenly hears the powerful voice of Swami: "Mother and Motherland are superior to even heaven...one must love their parents...be ever grateful to them..." These words hit him like a thunderbolt. He gets from up the chair, reinvigorated and strong.

Radio Sai: The Medium is the Message

When the curtains rise yet another time, Sudhir is in his home, joyous and singing gleefully, thanking the Lord. But, Purushottam laments, "I have failed as a father, Sudhir..." The son is taken aback, but the father continues, "When as a child you held my hand to take your first few steps, I had promised myself that I will not let you be like me, languishing in poverty. But alas..." Purushottam's sadness is heavy and unrelenting, and Sudhir is helpless. He holds his father's hands close and tight. Just then there is a knock on the door and enters Dr. Ashutosh. He asks the father and son if they are Purushottam and Sudhir respectively, and when they say, "Yes", he reveals that he heard about them on Radio Sai. And then, revealing more, he adds, "I was deeply touched by Sudhir's story. I want him to become a doctor.... If you permit, I will pay for the entire medical education of Sudhir". The father-son duo is stunned. Purushottam blurts out, "Are you Baba come in human form! Or is this a figment of my imagination!" He is unable to believe it. He asks more probing questions, "Who are you? And where do you come from?"

Ashutosh then states that he is a doctor from USA, and goes on to narrate how when he heard his son's story, he felt Sudhir was calling out to him..." Purushottam is at a loss for words to express his feelings; finally, he says, "You are an angel, son...Blessed are your parents to have a child like you. They must be so proud of you..." At this point, Ashutosh cuts him in disgust. "Please don't say that. No parent would wish to have an ungrateful son like me... Little did I realize that the dreams I had been chasing were just mirages. And then one day the call came. That Voice, commanded me to wake up to my duty. I searched for my parents, but in vain. I enquired about their whereabouts in every nook and corner of Shripuram. I think I have lost them for ever."

The moment Purushottam hears the word "Shripuram", he suddenly remembers something. He goes up to the shrine of his house, picks up a letter and gives it to Ashutosh saying, "This belongs to you...when Sudhir was in the hospital, I went for Darshan one day and that evening Baba Himself came up to me, and handing this letter, He said, '*Aye Postman, Shripuram Doctor ko deliver karo*' (Hey postman, give it to the Shripuram doctor). I searched hard to find the person who suited that description, but now I think I have found the right addressee..." When Ashutosh opens the letter, tears roll down his cheeks. "Oh my God!" he cries. "This is my father's letter to Baba, praying for my wellbeing. Even though I deserted them, my parents had only blessings to give me. Oh God! What have I done? What a wretched, ungrateful son I have been!"

Coincidence, a Miracle Where God Chooses To Remain Anonymous

At this point, into Sudhir's home, enters Mr. Vishwanath Verma, the college principal. The moment Ashutosh sees him, he runs and hugs him tight, and cries, "Oh father! Please forgive me." [Swami's Eyes too are full watching this...His whole being is overwhelmed with emotion.] Mr. Verma comforts his son saying, "Past is past... I have realized that everything that happens in life

is a stroke of an Unseen Hand that is sculpting our lives into an image of perfection. Let us bow down to its mastery.”

And then all the characters in the drama bow down in gratitude to their Beloved Lord, and while Purushottam says, “O Divine Director, how beautifully you have scripted our stories! How wonderfully you have pulled the strings and brought everyone together! Can we ever fathom Thy *leelas*?” Sudhir comes forward and conveys, “Hey *Sutradhari* (The invisible wire-puller)! You have held our hands and led us through every step of the way.” Finally, Ashutosh soulfully expresses, “O *Hrudayavasi* (resident of our hearts), all the hearts beat in unison with love, gratitude and devotion to Thee.”

And then, there is a final song during which all the actors enter the stage in coordinated groups while singing in jubilation about His Love and Kindness, and position themselves into a beautiful formation. The Loving Lord then eagerly wants to come onto the stage, and as He moves, one of the dignitaries sitting beside Him, gets up unmasked and with tears in his eyes, says, “Swami! This drama is so very inspiring. It has touched my heart deeply.” Swami, who is also very emotional, lovingly holds his hands for sometime, and then carries on. Mr. Gokul Das, a businessman and an ardent devotee from Mumbai, gets up next and touched by the story and His moving Mission wants to almost hug Swami. As Swami is now about to go up the stage, Mr. Ramana Rao, a long standing dedicated devotee, falls at His Feet and says, “I have not seen a drama like this ever before...It was a superb and soulful performance.”

The Lord, immensely pleased with His properties’ performance, then comes amidst them on the stage and lovingly interacts with them. He grants them the prized opportunity of having their photographs with Him, blesses them profusely, and then as He enters backstage, all the boys too follow Him inside.

Behind the curtain, Swami expresses His deep satisfaction, “I am very very very happy....all of you have done a great job.” And then allows them to touch His feet, lovingly pats their cheeks, and by the time He leaves, the cup of joy in every boy’s heart is overflowing with bliss. They are virtually swimming in ecstasy.

Yes, for all the participants, this is a moment that will eternally be green in their memory, energizing and inspiring them in their journey through life. But this is not even one tenth of the whole story. Just like for a teenager getting a college degree, all the time spent in the hostel with his mates - the adventures and experiments, exercises and excitements, experiences and enlightening moments - is more precious than the moment of getting the certificate; for the students privileged to be a part of the Convocation drama, all the hours of preparation and practice before the final performance are the sweetest. Because this is a drama whose Director is the One who decides the destinies of all, be it a bee, buffalo, or a human being.

The Lord Looks to Our Feelings

Mr. Divij Desai, who acted as Sudhir in the drama, recalling a revealing episode when Bhagavan taught him how to perfect his performance, says, "There is one scene in the drama where Sudhir, after being cured of his ailment, gratefully sings to his Beloved Sai and prays, 'Lord, I have this desire to become a doctor and serve You in Your very Hospital which has treated me free of cost. Dear Lord, You have given me a new birth, I owe You my entire life from now on...' So, it was a touching song and I remember whenever Swami used to discuss the drama, the first thing He would do is to ask me to sing this. I am not a singer and for the drama this was to be sung by Brother Ravi Kumar (who has a gifted mellifluous voice). But inside the interview room, Swami would ask me to sing, and I used to feel embarrassed, because I could never reach that pitch. So I used to say, "Swami, these two lines are very high pitched, I may not be able to..." But Swami used to stop me. "Forget all that, just sing!" And I used to just do it to the best of my ability. **Only later, I realized that Swami was, in fact, not concerned about my singing; He was actually looking for the emotion that the song expressed. He wanted me to imbibe and assimilate that feeling, and become one with that emotion. That was one instance where I felt that in every act of ours, whether it is drama or real life, Swami looks for the intention. He is interested only in the feelings of our heart, rather than the output.**"

And this has been the experience of Dr. Shailesh Srivastava, who has been the music director for Convocation dramas for over fifteen years now. "For all of us," he says, "When a song is sung, or dialogue is spoken in the drama, the accompanying music, sets, the ambience and everything else matters so much to get into the emotion of the scene; but, for Swami, the moment a dialogue is spoken, He is into it completely. Just as the word and its meaning are intricately bound; for God, the moment a word is spoken, it is already there with Him. He does not need any background music or add-ons to feel it. We cannot imagine a devotee who cries and says, 'Oh Lord! Will You please come to my rescue?' to which God says, "Where is that enriching background music? I am not able to get the feeling of your prayer!" For God, the sincere emotion behind the word itself is enough. And I have seen this on many occasions. **There have been times when we have thought we need to put background music, but when He comes for practice sessions, He just wants to listen to the dialogues.** The background music and other embellishments are only for the sake of the public; because, we human beings, require all kinds of add-ons to feel the scene.

Recollections of Swami's Dramatic Directions

"I remember one significant rehearsal session many years ago. We were in the pit, in front of the stage, and playing background music. Swami was seated in the first row of the auditorium watching the play. We could not see Him as we were sitting in front of Him facing the stage. Suddenly, the drama stopped, and somebody tapped me from behind. I turned, and Swami said, 'Soft... don't play music so loudly'. I immediately rectified. And I have experienced this any number of times. For Swami, it is the feeling and the

word which goes together, and that's what is most important; the tune and other aspects are secondary.

"In 1994, when we had the drama on Saint Surdas, in the month of October we had a few days of winter vacation, and Swami sent instructions for a few of us, from Brindavan, to stay in Prasanthi Nilayam and prepare the music for the drama. And immediately after He returned in the first week of November, He called us in and wanted to hear the compositions. **One aspect of Swami which is striking is that He used to ask the singers to sing the same song again and again for many days, but every time He heard it, it was as if He was listening to it for the first time. It was the lyrics and their meaning which were of prime importance to Him. The tune, if it did not take away the glory of the lyrics, was satisfactory.**

"I remember at the time of the 'Chal re man' drama in , He asked me the exact meaning of a few lines, which I did not know, and then immediately He said, "Without knowing the meaning, what are you trying to compose? A song without meaning is like a tree without fruits – it's of no use". And later, whenever He asked me about the songs of a drama, He would say, 'Have you written the songs? Can you show Me what you have written?' It is never, 'Have you tuned the songs?' There were one or two occasions initially when I did not understand this, and so I took out the paper and started reading it. Then, He used to be surprised. 'Why are you reading it, sing it...,' He would say. Only then I understood that, for Swami the tune has to be there, but the words were most important. And He is the Inspirer of the words, tunes, everything – but He does it in His own way, through us, only if we let Him to. I can tell you how.

'See! I just told him to make a Qawwali and he has done it!' - Baba

"It was the time of summer vacation in 1990 and Swami was in Brindavan. I was all alone in my room in East Prasanthi, and one day I thought to myself: 'Why don't I try composing a Qawwali (a style of singing inspired by Sufi music), though, I had no prior experience. Maybe we will get an opportunity to sing it during the Summer Course to be held after the vacation ends. This was my motivation. And that evening, as I started writing and fitting a tune, Mr. Sai Surendranath, who had just returned from Whitefield on some work, came to me and said, 'Swami was discussing that there should be a music program for the Summer Course, and He told me to tell you that you should tune a Qawwali!' It was a bolt from the blue. Before that Swami had never asked me to compose anything!

"I was so surprised! It was like a stamp of Divine Authority put on my work, because I had just begun the composition, and frankly I never knew how to really go about it. But the moment the word came from Swami, I was extremely happy! I completed the job to my satisfaction and went to Brindavan. There, I had just taught the first part of the song in the Institute green room to two singers – Ravi Kumar and Kabir, and Swami arrived there with a dignitary! He wanted to hear whatever was done, and after He heard that small part, He was extremely happy. It was one of the most satisfying moments of my life. He then looked at the VIP and said, 'See! I just told him to

make a Qawwali and he has done it! *Shraddhaavaan labhatey gnanam* (one who has faith will certainly gain wisdom)! So, though He is the Doer all the time, this is how He works through you and even rewards you!”

Letting Him Take Over

The experience of Dileep, one of the scriptwriters of the recent Convocation drama was something similar. “I had actually never penned down the dialogues for any scene in any drama before 2007. Whatever I had written earlier, was either scrapped or modified to such an extent that only nouns and pronouns remained ...” confesses Dileep. “For this drama (2007), I was supposed to write the script for the Bhadrachala Ramdas episode. With fear and trepidation, I opened the laptop and started typing. At every word I prayed to Him to write through me, and at the end of four and half hours, the scene was ready. I just read it over again and visualized the acting. And, I was so overcome by emotion that tears started rolling out of my eyes. I was then doubly sure that it was He who wrote through me.”

When Sai was the Scriptwriter...

While the Lord was the invisible scriptwriter for the recent drama, there have been occasions in the past when He had literally written the whole script Himself! Dr. Shiv Shankar Sai, the warden of the Prasanthi Nilayam campus, recalls, “The beauty of the drama ‘Radha Bhakthi’ staged in 1985 was that Bhagavan Himself wrote the script! In fact, I vividly remember how Swami dictated the entire drama to me, in Telugu, inside the interview room, three hours at a stretch on each day! It went on for three days! It was such a memorable occasion for me. And Bhagavan also told me that, earlier in His Childhood, He had written a very exhaustive drama on Radha’s life, called ‘Radha Bhakti’ which demonstrated in detail the devotion of Radha to Lord Krishna. But since the Convocation drama cannot be for more than an hour or so, He said, ‘We will have a part of that!’ He selected the parts, dictated the script, and also the lyrics for the songs. He even taught the tunes to a student singer, Mr. S. Kumar, which He Himself had composed! It was a wonderful time! For almost one and a half months, Swami used to call us almost daily, and spend time in revising the dialogues and the songs, taking care of the costumes, acting, dialogue delivery and what not!”

That was Bhagavan’s level of involvement in the Convocation drama. And it all actually started much before 1985. As early as 1961, Swami had directed a drama on the great Maharashtrian saint, Sakhubai, which was performed by the students of the Veda Pathasala, the educational institution that Swami had set up in those days to impart the learning and understanding of ancient Indian Vedic hymns.

Golden Memories from Dr. Ravi Kumar

After this, one notable occasion when Swami took immense interest in the boys’ drama was in 1974. Dr. Ravi Kumar, a faculty member now, who was then a student, goes down the memory lane and says, “Those days we were students of Sri Sathya Sai Arts and Commerce College, Brindavan, as the Sri Sathya Sai University was still in the womb of time. And we got lovely chances from Swami. One day He casually mentioned: ‘I will give you a lot of

opportunities. We will put up a drama in Prashanti Nilayam'. At that time we used to have the College Day function during March every year. And for that year's programme, Bhagavan chose the drama 'Bhaja Govindam'. It was a beautiful drama. Swami selected all the actors for the various roles, and got totally involved in it! In fact, when Mrs. M.S. Subbalaksmi, the legendary vocalist, came for Darshan, He even asked her to sing the songs and had them recorded. He proudly told her: 'My students are putting up Bhaja Govindam drama; it is for that.'

"I think it was more than 95 to 97 days that we practiced in Bhagavan's Presence in Brindavan. In the Old Bungalow, where Swami used to reside then, there used to be an enclosure with huge mirrors! They were probably 20 by 20-25 feet, and were on three sides of the room. And Bhagavan would be sitting in the middle, directing our play. You can imagine what a feast for the eye it was to see the infinite number of 'Swamis' sitting there, watching keenly every single gesture, every instance of inflection in the voice, every line of the song, and then correcting us, guiding us, and making us redo a part any number of times until it came up to His level of perfection!

"A vivid memory for me is this enchanting scene: Swami had selected four of us to sing the *Shiva Panchakshari Stotram*, and early in the morning, when the Sun's rays were just streaming into the room, Bhagavan would be sitting on a rocking chair and we were seated around Him singing the hymn *Nagendra Haaraya*.... It was so beautiful! When we finished singing, He would insist that we chant the *phala shruiti* too, which is usually sung at the end of the sacred song which says that anyone who recites this in the presence of Lord Shiva Himself, will get to the 'Shiva Loka' (abode of Lord Shiva) and attain the Lord. Swami would invariably tell us, 'Hey! You forgot that! Repeat that!' And it is only then we realized He was reminding us that we were, in fact, chanting in front of Lord Shiva Himself, and we didn't know the boons that He was going to grant us!

"After this magnificent marathon practice session of nearly a hundred days, came the College Day and we performed this play. The then Revenue Minister of Karnataka was the chief guest, and at the end of it, when we went inside the Mandir, Swami was talking to the Minister. He was very happy and then suddenly He looked at us and said: 'Yes! This is the need of the hour. *Kaavi*, *khaadi* and *khaaki* – all these three must be given due representation; they must be in their place for society to develop harmoniously.'

"*Khaaki* refers to the law and order in society – the police. *Kaavi* is the renunciant's attire – orange robe, and *Khaadi* is the administrator – the politician who makes rules and governs. Swami then said: 'When all these three are in their place, society will progress.' I remember, the Revenue Minister who was so overwhelmed by then, said, 'Swami, just the sight of so many people in this orange robe (the drama attire), is such an auspicious sign for the entire country!' **Swami said, 'Yes, you are right. It is very, very auspicious for the world, and these boys have made Me so happy! I will fill their lives with happiness!' And then, interestingly, as a physical**

gesture, Swami filled bowls of fruit salad, gave it to us and made us eat it in His presence! While we were amazed at His Compassion, He again said, 'I will fill your lives with happiness from now onwards.'"

That is how precious the interactions of Swami are with the boys during the drama. Every single moment of proximity with Him is laced with such profundity. It could be a word, a smile, a gesture, an admonition, a comment or an acclamation – every act of His is pregnant with meaning. Narrating one more such instance from a drama which was enacted on November 22, 1980, Dr. Ravi Kumar says,

"I had the opportunity to act in the play 'The Kingdom of Heaven.' This was a drama on the life of Jesus Christ, written and enacted by former students, who prayed to Swami to permit them, and the Kind Lord had agreed. Swami then looked through the entire list of actors, picked up one particular role, and said, 'Ask Ravi to do this role.' At that time, I had finished my education in Swami's College and was doing my post-graduation at Anantapur, about 80 kms from Puttaparthi. So they said, 'Swami, Ravi is not here, he is studying there.' Swami then said, 'No, he comes on weekends, he can practice at that time.' I, therefore, was given that role, and it was only much later did I realize how so beautifully Swami had indicated to me what was to come later in my life.

Premonition of Events to Come

"The role was that of a blind beggar, who is cured by Jesus Christ. And during one of those days, when we were having practice sessions, as Jesus was curing me in the drama, Swami entered through the side, and remarked: 'See! Sai Baba came and this fellow got his eyesight!' And we all laughed. The next day, the same thing happened, and again Swami remarked: 'See, Sai Baba came and he got his vision back!'

"The normal tendency after the rehearsal session was to rush to Swami, and He would make a few comments about the drama, ask us to repeat certain dialogues, tell us the correct emotion which should animate the scene, and so on. While this interaction was going on, Swami suddenly asked, 'Did you hear the applause during Darshan?' We had heard the clapping sitting inside the green room, so we said, 'Yes Swami, we heard the applause.' **And then He looked at me and said, 'You know, I gave vision to an 18 year old girl who was born blind!' And, with His Eyes riveted on me, He immediately continued, 'And, I will give you also!' We all laughed because we thought Swami was making a joke, since I was a blind beggar in the drama. But we never realized that Swami was actually indicating to me what was to come in the future - that I would lose my eyesight, and He would give it back! It was five years later that I burnt my eyes completely while doing an experiment in the Chemistry lab and gained my vision back only by His Grace."**

Every session with Swami before the actual performance, therefore, was a boon to the students. Because the Supreme Teacher would take that opportunity to instill attitudes and behaviours, knowledge and wisdom, faith

and conviction into the hearts and minds of His wards, which could mould them into masterpieces of men. And to this end, He would invest any amount of time and exert Himself to any length.

Singing to the Divine Lyrics

After the 'Radha Bhakthi' drama in 1985, Swami again wrote the entire script for another play on Markandeya (a mythological character) in 1987. In the 1998 drama, there were many *padhyams* (poems or hymns) to be sung by characters like Arjuna, Lord Krishna, Nakula, etc. (from the epic Mahabharata) and after listening to the tune of one *padyam*, Swami was so happy that He said to Dr. Shailesh, "I will Myself write and give you the *padhyams*. You can then tune them for all the Pandavas (characters from Mahabharata)". This was in Brindavan. Two days after Swami returned to Puttaparthi, when the boys were with Him in the interview room, Swami went inside and brought one old notebook in which were the *padhyams* in His own Handwriting. Whenever Dr. Shailesh relives that episode, he is thrilled. "He tore two pages from that book and gave it to me. I still have those papers with me!"

"Again, in the same drama, there was a *burrakatha* (stories rendered in a folklore style in Telugu, often in the praise of God)," Dr. Shailesh continues. "But none of us knew how the singers were supposed to dance in the *burrakatha* folk song. And so, can you believe (!), Swami got up from the *jhoola* (swing) in the Trayee Hall (where we were all seated), slightly lifted His robe, and then showed the dance movements! He taught the two singers the dance steps Himself. In a way, this was very interesting because we were all playing different instruments and the reverse was going on! Generally we dance to His tune but here was God dancing to our tune! He demonstrated for a whole minute and then said, 'I used to dance in My childhood; I know everything'."

To that extent is His love and sense of deep concern with the drama, as well as for the boys privileged to be part of it. He is always there to rescue them from every trouble and hurdle. In the same drama in 1999, when Swami observed that the student who was enacting as Lord Krishna had a few pimples on his forehead, He circled His Hand and then counted "...28, 29, 30", and when He finally opened His Hand, there was a small transparent plastic cover containing 30 tablets to be taken for 30 days. Looking at the boy, Swami jokingly remarked, "Now, even if you want, you will not get these pimples anymore."

Again, when the same boy submitted to Swami on the morning of the day of their actual performance that he had developed a cold and sore throat, Bhagavan instantly waved His Hands and out came a tablet. Needless to say, 'Krishna' was completely cured and did a splendid job that evening. Instances like this are galore, for, during every occasion the Lord, who was the Director of the Drama, was also the Protector, Comforter and Caretaker of His Dearest boys. But there is one interesting anecdote that Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy, Warden of the Brindavan Campus, narrates which is outstanding:

Using the Right Instrument to Write in Gold

"I remember it was the 2000 Convocation Drama. We had selected one particular episode from Mahabharata, wherein, the Pandavas are leading a life of exile in the forest, and undergoing a lot of hardships. And sometimes, because of the suffering, there is bickering among the five brothers. On one particular day, Dharmaraja, the eldest, is feeling really exasperated, and the rest of them are also down in their spirits. At this time, Lord Krishna appears on the scene, and then Dharmaraja and the other Pandava brothers plead with Him and seek His Grace to help them go through the trial with courage. Lord Krishna, then, takes a palm leaf from a tree nearby, writes a message on it, rolls it neatly, gives it to Dharmaraja, and then says, 'Open the leaf and see the message, only when you are in total despair, with nothing to hold on to.'

"Soon, Dharmaraja is in such a terrible predicament and he opens the leaf. The message inscribed on it is simple: 'This too shall pass.' So this was the scene and Swami had called the students who were playing the roles of the Pandavas and Lord Krishna into the interview room. This was almost the third week of November, and we were getting ready with all the sets and other accessories required for the drama. Suddenly, Swami asked Sudheendran, who was enacting as Krishna, "How are you going to write the message on the leaf?" He had not thought about it either. So, I tried to say, 'Swami, we can give him a needle.' Swami asked, 'What needle will you give him?' 'I can give him a thick steel needle,' I said. But He was not satisfied.

Next, He moved His palm in the thin air and we saw an unusual materialisation. Generally, when Swami creates anything, it fits inside His fist. But this time I found on one side of His closed palm, the end of a needle protruding, and on the other side of His hand was the *Trishula* (trident)! And it was pure gold! Swami then said: **'See, your warden is talking about steel things, it should be gold!' He gave it to Sudheendran with the instruction, 'Use this'. He even told him where to 'hide' it on the stage. 'When you come to the stage to meet the Pandavas,' Swami explained, 'You can't be holding it in your hand. But since you are Krishna, you will have a wig; so, just stick it in your hair, and when the time comes, pull it out deftly and write with it.'**

There are many such fascinating facets of the interactions that Bhagavan rewards the participants of the Convocation dramas, year after year; because, His interest and active participation in the drama is phenomenal. In fact, His involvement with the enactment, at times, surpasses even the actors! During the 1998 Convocation drama, the practice began as early as September 22 and Swami had seen the rehearsal umpteen times since that time. But on the penultimate day, while He was watching the final dress rehearsal in the Poornachandra Auditorium, Swami suddenly looked at the wardens when the character Ramakrishna Paramahansa says to Swami Vivekananda 'good boy..' Swami had heard that dialogue any number of times earlier, but that evening with a child-like innocence enveloping His face, He said, "Ramakrishna Paramahansa.... he did not know English!"

The wardens were in a quandary. It was too late to change anything as the dialogues were already recorded. One of them tried to explain, 'Swami, this is only a drama; for the sake of the public, we are speaking in English'. Then Swami said, "Oh, drama....." So that is how engrossed the Lord is when He is watching the scenes and hearing the dialogues. Dr. Shailesh Srivastava recalls, "It was as if we had to get Swami out of the scene. Every time Swami sees a Drama, it is as if He is watching it for the first time. That kind of freshness and enthusiasm, only God can have. Most of us, all the time, are out of the scene, but Swami is one Person who gets into the Drama from the start – the moment the first word is spoken. And I have seen this happen very often."

It was the same in the recent Drama too. When Swami returned to the Mandir after watching the first rehearsal in the Institute auditorium, Mr. Divij recalls, "He went inside the interview room and silently like a whisper in my ear, said, 'You made Me cry'. He was conveying to me that the way I enacted Sudhir's pain, and his prayer to the Lord to make him a doctor, no matter what, so that he can serve Him, touched His Heart. It was one of those moments when Swami got really involved and was telling me, 'That was good!' It is this moving comment from Swami which inspired and helped me through out the enactment."

"And at the end of this rehearsal in the Institute Auditorium," Mr. Amey recollects, "Swami said, '*Chala Bagundi* (very good)... Short Drama...' This comment was important for all of us because the drama duration was actually one hour, and in spite of that Swami felt it was short; it was heartening. But this had an interesting background anecdote too."

'Will You Shout at Me?' - Baba

"The previous evening, Swami had asked the boy playing the role of Bhadrachala Ramdas, who was a singer, to render the songs in front of Him in the Bhajan Hall. At that time, with three songs and an equal number of sub-scenes, the whole episode of Ramdas was adding up to 14 minutes, but we were allotted only 11 minutes. Try how much ever we may, there was no way we could shorten it. And in that episode, there was a song in which Ramdas, unbearable to bear the pain of the lashes, cries out to the Lord, 'O Rama! The king asks me to give him an account of the money spent for You. I have built this temple for You, and it is You who must give an account to him.' And then the saint begins to accost Rama saying, 'Lord, the crown which You wear costs 20000 varahas (currency of those days), the pearl necklace that adorns Lakshmana's neck is 15000 varahas.' And next, in intense pain because of the torture, he shouts out, 'Whose father's property do You think You are wearing, Rama? I have spent it for You.'"

Swami heard this song and then called the actor into the interview room. He asked him to sing again and then asked the boy, 'Will you shout at Me like this?... Tell me.....' The singer replied, 'Never Swami...it is not me, it is Ramdas.' Still, Swami said, 'Please don't shout at Me like this...' and that gave us the message. We promptly removed that song! And in

the next practice session, when we timed the scene, it was just about 11 minutes.”

Now, through this episode, Swami not only helped them sort out the issue of the scene duration, but also conveyed a profound message. God always does only good, one should never be agitated with Him even if the goings sometimes are painful. For, that is His way of introducing something stunning and miraculous in our lives. And the other salient message for the seniors was that they should be careful of what is being portrayed and how it is conveyed. In fact, Dr. Sailesh Srivastava narrates a revealing incident which happened in 2000, through which Swami showed how diligent and vigilant, the boys should be while selecting and enacting the scenes.

The Drama’s Mission – The Message

“This eye-opener of an incident happened in 2000, when there was a scene on Markandeya. According to the legend, when Yama, the God of Death, throws a noose around Markandeya saying his time is up, the sixteen year old devotee of Lord Shiva clings to the Shiva Lingam. And as a result, the noose falls around the lingam too. And immediately Lord Shiva appears in all fury and opens His Third Eye which finishes Yama. So, this was the ancient tale and Swami asked the boys to enact this scene inside the interview room itself.

“When the boys began to depict this scene, Swami suddenly asked them to stop and said, ‘What is this that you are all doing? Lord Shiva and Lord Yama are both Gods. How can they fight?’ Now, it was a difficult situation. Most often Indian mythology is full of stories which are figurative, and we don’t understand their significance. And people, over the years, have distorted them according to their limited understanding. So, in our drama, when Lord Yama entered into the room and shouted at Markandeya angrily saying, ‘Your time has come’, Swami said, ‘Stop! Markandeya is a very good boy. How can Yama scold him?’ The boys then softly explained, ‘Swami, it is a drama’. Still, He persisted. ‘Yama is God. And Markandeya is such a good boy. Therefore, Yama should say, ‘Markandeya, my dear boy, your time has come, please come with me.’

“For us, this was difficult to digest because as far as the dramatic element was concerned, we did not have that excitement now. But when we ponder on it, we realize how man has, over years, convoluted reality because we are by nature, a little more *rajasic* (full of different passions). We do not enjoy unless there is lot of ‘spice’ in it. And that is why modern dramas/movies portray all the feelings which excite our nature. But as far as Swami is concerned, that is not the reality. Even Lord Yama had to practice that ‘we cannot always oblige but we can always speak obligingly’.

“He asked us to change the scene. So, we changed Lord Yama’s dialogues, and then Lord Shiva appears and He is going to open His Third Eye and finish Lord Yama, **Swami again stopped us. ‘What is this?’ He asked. ‘You are teaching wrong culture to the public; they will think Indian Gods fight among themselves. You should not do this. Yama here is doing his duty**

and Lord Shiva too is doing His duty. Therefore, Lord Shiva should come and say, 'Lord Yama, I know you are doing your duty in taking Markandeya away, but he is now praying to Me, so I am extending his life; you can leave.'

“Though we had planned for Shiva appearing furious with the smoke rising with ballistic beats, Swami gave it a totally new flavour. What may sometimes appear nice to us, may not be so for Swami. What is very important for Him is the message and the impact the drama has on the society. On no occasion, should we pollute our pious culture.”

One of the most important reasons why Swami is particular about every dialogue and song in the Convocation drama is that it is being performed by His boys, whom He calls His Property, and therefore, for the devotees, whatever is communicated through the performance, is a message straight from Swami. While this is a pertinent point, another significant secret is that His involvement is not just with the drama; more importantly, His concern is with the persons participating. The whole exercise is a crucible through which the Master Sculptor cuts and tests, trains and shakes till He has made models which reflect His Purity and Sublimity – instruments who could be a conduit of His Love and Message. And He does this subtly; most of the time the student is unaware how the Supreme Teacher is skillfully shaping him. Dr. Shailesh Srivastava, again narrates an insightful episode.

How the Supreme Teacher Trains

“I remember this happened in 1998. Swami wanted a song for Tansen (a classical singer of yore in the court of Akbar) and He would ask me, 'Have you made the song for Tansen?' I spent one full night on it and was happy I had finished it. The song started with an *alaap* (a precursory normally given by a singer in Hindustani Vocal). Next day, Swami asked me to sing and I started the *alaap* which was rather long, for almost two minutes. And before I could start the actual song, He said, 'By now, everybody would have slept off. It is not good to spend so much time on the *alaap* itself.'

“Then, I had to clearly decide what exactly He meant. So I dropped the *alaap*. Fortunately, I had not started the song. Every word and gesture of Swami has got a deep meaning. If He had stopped me after one line of the song, then I would have rejected the song too. But since He did not like the tune of the *alaap* too, I inferred I must change the *raga* (tune) of the song. Swami had also said that it should be 'sad but bright'; it was a difficult assignment. So, I prayed a lot, sat the whole night, and by morning I actually wanted to give up.

“It has been my experience that in life, God gives you the maximum, when you give up. Many a time, I have made a small tune and have got deeply attached to it. However, I make up my mind and dump it if that had not appealed to Swami. And when you give up the small thing, and think afresh, He works through you, and at the end, you find that in the final tune, this small composition you discarded, also becomes a part, and even beautifies it!

“This is exactly what happened that year too. After I finished composing the beginning of the song, I added the discarded piece and it fitted well. Next day, when I showed the whole composition to Swami, He was so pleased with it that I cannot describe it! In that drama, it was not supposed to be an important song, but Swami was so happy that He made me sing it outside, in the Bhajan Hall too. And when He came to the Institute auditorium with some VIPs, as soon as He sat down, He said, ‘There is a very important song in this drama - the Tansen song’. Actually that song was only a speck in the whole drama – an insignificant song for a side character. But Swami was very pleased with that, though, I had given up on it fully, after having composed it. I had thrown it aside, thinking ‘I don’t want it’. But He picked it up, and made it look grand!”

Melting His Heart Through Prayer

It is through such instances and interactions during the Convocation dramas that Bhagavan taught profound lessons of life, and in a manner that would remain embedded in their hearts for the rest of their lives. For instance, the songs in the dramas until 1993, were never recorded as Swami would want them live. And for this reason, earlier, only lead singers would be main actors. But it was an impossible task managing the wires during the days of live singing. So, for the first time in 1993, the students recorded two songs of the drama, while the rest were to be sung live. And those were the only two songs which were heard clearly.

The next year, they recorded all the songs, but had never taken physical permission of Swami; they were unsure what His reaction would be. “But by 1995,” Dr. Sailesh Srivastava, the music director, says, “I was feeling quite uneasy with guilt. I prayed ‘Swami, somehow You have to give permission. Please don’t say ‘No’. One day, that year, Swami had called me, the wardens, and a few others to discuss about the drama; but nobody dared to open this topic! I was sitting right under Swami’s Feet and I started praying: ‘Swami! I am going to ask You permission for recording, please don’t refuse. You know the difficulties. Let us not keep doing this without telling You; Swami, please agree.’

“So, I kept building up my prayer. In fact, earlier once or twice someone had broached this topic and Swami’s immediate reaction always was: ‘Recording! It will be like puppets moving there! The singers should be singing there with feelings’. [For the Lord, everything should be ‘heartificial’, not artificial]. Therefore, internally I was praying very intensely, and after a while I mustered up courage, and asked, ‘Swami, can we record the songs for this drama?’ And look at His spontaneous response! ‘Yes! Record it! If you don’t record, the mike and the wires will go here or there! Recording should be done; otherwise it will be very difficult to have songs.’ You can imagine my joy. I was in seventeenth heaven. It was a big milestone in the history of the Convocation dramas.”

Yes, it was a great leap in the sound quality of the drama which eventually led to all the dialogues too being recorded. But the greater outcome was what it did to Dr. Shailesh himself. Permanently it got engraved in his heart that with prayer, he can achieve the seemingly impossible. And Swami granted the boon of such realisations to students, every time there was an opportunity.

The Drama of Lord Krishna and Mother Kali

There is a remarkable Divine game that Swami enacted, just to demonstrate this aspect, in 1998, which Dr. Shailesh Srivastava, vividly recalls.

“In that drama, there was a scene where Swami Vivekananda had to pray to Mother Goddess Kali. During one of the early practice sessions, Swami went backstage and asked, ‘Where is the Mother Kali statue?’ We could not get it on to the stage on time, and there was Lord Krishna’s idol there. Swami said, ‘Make use of that.’ But the warden submitted: ‘Swami, he is praying to Mother Kali.’ ‘It is the same thing. He is praying to Krishna only,’ Swami responded. The warden again tried to explain. ‘Swami, Vivekananda is a devotee of Mother.’ ‘That was earlier!’ Swami instantly said, and continued, ‘Later he became a Krishna devotee!’ So, we had no choice but to put the Krishna statue there.

“And during every practice session, Swami would watch the boy, acting the role of Vivekananda, go near the Krishna idol and say, ‘Oh Mother! Please give me devotion’. We were perplexed thinking how we can ever explain this to the public! But we had to surrender; Swami wanted it that way. And until the very last day, it was the same Lord Krishna statue. Swami used to watch the practice sessions almost everyday for few weeks, but never had anything to say. But, can you believe this? During the last rehearsal, He suddenly looked at Lord Krishna’s idol and said, ‘What is this! Lord Krishna there! He is praying to Mother Kali!’ We did not want to give Him any explanation. I ran to the School Hostel immediately and brought the Kali statue which we had always kept ready. I placed it in front of Swami, and then He said, ‘Yes, this is nice. Now it is fine, you were putting Kali statue, when it should have been Krishna!’

“When that experience was finally over, we were all happy and heaved a sigh of relief. It was a big test! But look at the beauty of the experience! The boy, who was acting as Vivekananda, told us later that he was very averse to the idol of Mother Kali. And he was acting in a drama for the first time as Vivekananda. On the very first day of practice, when he was directed to go and pray in front of Mother Kali, he says, ‘The thought itself was difficult because I was not getting any emotion, I was feeling very scared in front of the Kali statue!’

“And so, he was praying intensely to Swami: ‘I don’t want to do this in front of Kali!’ But Swami never revealed that to us, and neither did the boy. In His own inimitable way, Swami had Lord Krishna placed there, with whom the boy was very comfortable. That was a drama for which we had a month and a half of practice, and by the end of it, when he had gained all the confidence and lost all stage fear, at the opportune moment Swami brought in Mother Kali! So, it was one prayer from that boy, and a test of our faith and surrender.”

Every interaction and instruction with Swami, for the boys, is an occasion for reflection. An interesting observation that Dr. Shailesh Srivastava makes is that the whole exercise of the drama is a “Five ‘R’s Process”. First, is Reflection; this happens when Bhagavan reflects your follies once you are blessed with His physical proximity. This inside ‘Reflection’ leads to ‘Revelation’; and this Revelation, if you are not on the right path, brings you to

'Repentance'. From repentance comes 'Rectification', which finally takes you to 'Reward'. The story is complete when the 'Rectification' process is over. And the Greatest Guru that Sai is, He has, in fact, completed this whole process in the lives of many students who have come in the ambit of His close proximity. The warden of the Prasanthi Nilayam campus, Dr. Shiv Shankar Sai, narrates one notable story.

Creating a Dramatic Change

"I remember there was a student from Uttar Pradesh, who was very mischievous and playful. Naturally, he used to fall short of the discipline that Bhagavan expects; but at the same time, he had great acting talent. And Swami picked him for a role in the Convocation drama. During the drama interaction sessions, along with the other students, Swami used to give him a lot of His time and shower much Love. I was a student then, and though I was not in the drama, I could see him go inside the interview room along with others everyday. And by the time the drama was over, he was a completely changed person. It was remarkable; his keen adherence to the discipline was surprising. Being a pampered child, initially he was not even willing to listen, and therefore, never cared for the hostel routine.

"I learnt later that Swami used to often stress the importance of good manners, and say, 'When you interact with others, what they see is your external behaviour; they may not know your heart; that only God will know.' And He took a lot of pains teaching him how to behave in front of elders and teachers, listen with patience to advice from seniors, be obedient, reply in a manner that is pleasant, and so on. He happened to be my roommate and I could see that profound and perceptible change in his personality and outlook."

Every Role Loaded With Lessons

Therefore, what the drama does to each actor's personality, who is often chosen by Bhagavan, is often not known; but every story has the ability to startle us and show how the Divine works at various levels to brighten that divine spark that is often dim within every individual. The main actor of 'Hrudayavani', Mr. Divij Desai, reveals,

"To be frank, I am a very *rajasic* kind of person and this role of Sudhir needed a balance of *satwic* qualities. So I had to set aside myself. There were these sessions with senior brothers who used to tell me, 'Divij, though physically you are depicting yourself as a heart patient with cough, slow movement, etc. at the time of dialogue delivery, you are going back to being "Divij"'. So I did a lot of homework to become 'Sudhir'. I talked to school boys (as Sudhir was supposed to be a XII class boy), and also heart patients – I, in fact, met and spoke to a patient who, just like Sudhir, was not informed about his cardiac ailment by his parents till he was 21. And all these interactions, made me mild and humble. Initially, it was a challenge, but at the end, it was a great learning experience."

And it was no different for other actors too. Mr. Ranjan Sharma, who played the role of Dr. Ashutosh, the NRI doctor who starts missing his parents, says, "The scene where Ashutosh's friend comes in and reveals that he is returning home to serve his parents was very emotional for me. Ashutosh laments that for so many years he never spared a thought for his parents....and at the end he tries to call his father, but to no avail. I really felt connected with this role because who knows, in future this could happen with me too! And I got so involved with the character of Ashutosh that, believe me, I, once, rang my father up and said, 'Papa, I love you'. My father was, understandably, astounded. Then, of course, I explained to him the whole episode. And there is one more aspect to this. Two years ago, I had prepared myself for GRE, TOEFL and all the exams that one needs to take to go abroad; I wanted to pursue my Ph D there. But every time I held a letter or tried to speak to Swami about this, all I got was a cold response. Now, I think, maybe it is this lesson of staying back for your mother and motherland is what Swami wanted to teach me through this drama."

Every presentation that the boys stage in front of Swami does much more to them than the audience. Recalling what a boy had told him recently after he was involved in a drama based on the Ramayana, Dr. Shiv Shankar Sai, says,

Character Study Leads to Character Formation

"One day this particular boy came up to me and said, 'Sir, I had not read Ramayana in such depth earlier; it was only when we were going to put up a drama on a particular character of Ramayana, that I started going into the details. And now I have read Valmiki Ramayana, and the Ranganatha Ramayana too! It has provided me so much insight that I am ever grateful to Swami for making me realise there is such rich treasure in these great epics, which I never had the chance or inclination to read before! Later on in my life, I will definitely read these again to see how nicely the character of Lord Rama was portrayed, and what a righteous personality He was!'

"This has been the experience of many students! Therefore, apart from Swami's physical proximity, there are a lot of other benefits! When you enact a role, you really have to understand what message that character is actually trying to convey. And then, unknowingly a little bit of that gets into you. So, the spin-offs of being part of the Convocation drama are multi dimensional."

Practicum in Team Work

The Convocation drama, truly, brings together the creative minds of several individuals, right from script writing, direction, acting, costumes, makeup, sets, screenplay, music, dance, recording, dubbing, videography and photography to arranging the logistics. It covers the entire gamut of dramatics and to the viewers, it is a wholesome experience. Sharing the behind the scenes activity that went on for the recent drama, Mr. Amey says, "What the audience saw was only 20 actors performing on the stage; but there were at least 150

students and 20 teachers who had gone through four grueling weeks before the curtain rose in the evening of November 22.

“And the unsung heroes are many - notable among them being the Recording Department. In fact, this time, for the most part, we were behind schedule, and by any stretch of imagination it looked impossible to finish it on time. It was sheer hard work and dedication that the master CD for practice was ready by November 17, which gave us at least five days of practice to ensure there was absolute sync in dialogues and screenplay. Another similar group that never is in the limelight is the ‘maintenance boys’, who are actually the backbone of the hostel. This drama had 43 boys working hard to see that it had those wonderful backdrops, smooth and quick scene changes, and all the little things from the trophy that was to be handed to Sudhir in the first scene, to the letter that Purushottam gives Ashutosh in the last scene.

“The scene transitions and the backdrops required a lot of imagination and creativity. How to make the stage look like Tanesha’s court and convert it to a prison the very next scene, and then to an office in America and back to the village, Anandgram for the final scene? It required a lot of thought and imaginative organization,” says Dr. A.S.K. Prabhakar, who was the arts director.

“And there was, of course, the most important Costumes Group. Not many are aware that all the costumes are actually handmade by the boys to minimize costs. For example, they would buy the cloth for the regal attire of King Tanesha and stitch it themselves. Similarly, be it Rama’s jewellery, Laskhmana’s bow or the King’s crown, everything is hand crafted by these boys. ‘Bhagavan is particular about appropriate costumes, especially when it comes to Gods and mythological characters. In this drama, Swami was keen to know about the attire of Tanesha and He was very happy when He saw the dress finally,’ recounts Mr. Gowri Shankar, who is in-charge of the Costumes Department. ‘The only real challenge this year was to change regal Rama to rural Rama in three minutes, without affecting his makeup, and we did it comfortably,’ he adds. A student working in this department says, ‘This is our offering to Swami. We get to show Him the dress and other costumes when He comes for practice sessions. For this opportunity, we are ready to put in any amount of hard work. Ultimately, He should be happy.’

“Another novel idea this time was the video choreography of the Hospital scene, which though was only 5 minutes, the preparation and actual shooting took close to 12 hours spread over two days. And one of the greatest off shoots of this whole exercise was what it did to the main actor.”

“I saw a couple of patients who were on the bed with the same problem as Sudhir, and the pain was so very evident on their faces. And when you looked at the patients after the operation in CCU, you could see the relief written all over their being. And finally, when they are shifted from CCU, their smiles were beaming. I saw this whole process and it is these emotions that I had to get it perfectly in the video. And I really looked forward to this experience because it taught me a lot,” says Divij, who acted as Sudhir.

“But the best learning from this whole endeavour is that we are a part of the success story; but at the same time, it’s not we who have done it,” adds Divij, and continues, “It is He alone that is Directing everything that is being done. Personally, I really used to feel that I am not doing anything; whatever came out of me on the stage was all because of Bhagavan who was sitting there. This is what used to make me believe and impose a faith that was so firm which said, ‘Yes, we are definitely only the actors, and He is the Director, the Source, and the Force’.”

Surrender and Faith - Integral to the Convocation Experience

This sense of surrender and complete faith in Him is a precious gift of the Convocation Drama on the participants. And this happens when the Lord touches the individual with His Love and Concern. To facilitate this process of transformation, the Convocation drama is a medium created by Bhagavan. He uses this as an effective tool to convey suitable lessons for varied people – actors, musicians, spot boys, costume designers or the audience -in the manner only He can.

Apart from conveying to the world the essence of the Message of Sai through His chosen instruments, the Drama offers a unique chance for every student participant to make over his life. While the Lord puts forward His message that this is what His boys are; He also makes them realize how He expects them to be. And this is because His Love for them is deep; a depth we can never fathom, but will always derive ecstasy from. For the boys, it is an unparalleled experience that will equip them to enact the roles entrusted to them in their lives in a manner that He will be proud of.

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 13

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. This is instalment 13; do you realise we have been together for about a year now in our quest for Infinity? How much longer? Well, it all depends! You know this Infinity we are after is a pretty subtle affair and I really do not know how much longer we have to be in quest. But this much I can say for sure: No matter how long it takes, it would be exciting every inch of the way!

Just to refresh your memory, last time I was beginning to tell you how, at last, String Theory, a daring approach to the physics of elementary particles with hardly any practical predictions, is now being tried out by two enterprising and adventurous physicists, Paul Steinhardt of Princeton and Neil Turok of Cambridge to deal with problems of Cosmology. I hope you remember what the String Theory is all about. I have explained it all in QFI 10 and 11. You might remember that in String Theory particles are replaced by tiny, tiny strings, which can be open or closed loops. These strings vibrate and the different modes of vibrations are supposed to represent different particles. I also drew attention to the fact that the concept has undergone substantial extensions, with strings becoming membranes, not just two-dimensional membranes but three, four and higher dimensional membranes, all called branes for short.

Thus it is we had all kinds of brane theories, with one of these, the M Theory as it has come to be called becoming a great favourite. I also pointed out that one reason why people are pushing the String Theories even though they have hardly made any prediction verified by experiments is the crucial fact that in String Theory, gravity finds a natural place instead of being pushed in and scotch-taped; and that indeed in a great plus.

So much for a general recall. Towards the end of the last instalment, I mentioned that Paul and Neil came together after a long spell of sort of drifting towards each other, drawn by the idea of understanding how String Theory and the Big Bang could be brought together. They were inspired by the fact that people were trying to use the brane theory to explain inflation. Yes, it did seem possible to explain inflation using brane theories – there were actually many versions of them as I told you earlier – but soon it seemed that brane theories only flattered to deceive; their apparent utility was more an illusion; when actually applied to explain inflation, the results were not encouraging; the solution was elusive, to put it simply. At this point, I shall quote what Paul and Neil have to say their feelings were around 1999.

“It is not clear why it is proving so difficult to merge M theory and the inflationary model. Perhaps there is a clever idea to be discovered that will

suddenly turn the current morass into a beautiful resolution. Maybe this calls for a radical alternative that fits more naturally with the revised laws of physics.

These thoughts were on the backs of our minds in the summer of 1999, when the two of us, together with our Russian colleague Valery Rubakov of the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Moscow, decided to organise an international workshop at the Issac Newton Institute in Cambridge. This was the fateful meeting that started us down the road to the cyclic model.”

I am sure you do not quite follow the last remark about the “cyclic model” but don’t worry I shall take you through all of it. But just by way of a headline, I might mention that Paul and Neil were to revive a long-abandoned model of the Universe, namely the cyclic model first examined by Freidman way back in the twenties [see QFI –02]. Only, their cyclic model would be a new ‘Avatar’ placed within the context of brane theory! Sounds exciting, does it not? Let us now cover that territory slowly so that you are able to savour the full flavour of human ingenuity.

Remember Paul and Neil along with the Russian physicist Rubakov were the organisers of the Cambridge meeting. It was trying to bring together many cosmologists from all over, particularly many from Eastern Europe, many of whom had remained cut off from the West for years, thanks to the Cold War. The Cold War was now over but there then was a bit of that old feeling still persisting and creating problems, as in the Balkans. Nevertheless, it was far easier for scientists in the former Soviet block to travel and they came in large numbers to Cambridge to catch up and be refreshed.

The general idea was to create some kind of a meeting ground between particle physicists and cosmologists. Today it might seem a pretty natural thing for the two groups to hang together, but often scientists tend to prefer their own select company; maybe they feel secure that way, but it often is the case that birds of a feather do flock together, at least where science is concerned. The organisers of the 1999 workshop in Cambridge definitely wanted to break such artificial walls and made a deliberate attempt to bring together two groups with different backgrounds and expertise so that they could address a major problem that bridged both their areas; the hope was that by bringing together complimentary skills, the problem could be cracked – at least an attempt could be made; fair enough.

So, keeping all this in mind, the first thing the organisers did was to find a person who would be able to neatly summarise all the recent developments in brane physics to a bunch of cosmologists who had hardly heard about String Theory – yes, believe it or not, people do live in water-tight compartments and could often be totally ignorant of what is happening across the corridor in their own university or lab; that is how focussed many experts tend to be; no time at all for anything except their own work. Is it any wonder that broken marriages are very common amongst scientists?! That is an entirely different problem, and we shall not get into that!

OK, to get on with the story, the man selected to introduce the world of branes to the cosmologists was Bert Ovrut. Let us hear Paul and Neil tell us about what happened and how it happened.

“We asked Burt Ovrut, a highly respected string theorist and long-standing colleague of Paul from his years at the University of Pennsylvania, to deliver a set of lectures on M Theory that would be accessible to cosmologists. Ovrut is a leading expert in some of the most mathematically formidable aspects of string and M theory. On this occasion, he stepped back from the technicalities and presented an inspiring overview of the theory’s essential elements. He began by reminding the audience that M theory unifies the five versions of string theory by showing they are all just different limits of a single master theory.

Furthermore, the master theory includes a sixth regime involving branes and no strings. Then, for the remainder of his talk, he concentrated on this sixth regime, the remarkable new geometrical picture discovered by Horava and Witten. He asserted that this version deserves special attention because it offers new insights into fundamental physics and may provide the most direct way to relate M theory to laboratory experiments.

Ovrut is one of those physicists with artistic talent, so he was able to draw evocative pictures to illustrate Horava and Witten’s theory. He began with a drawing of two closely parallel sheets. Although the sheets appeared two-dimensional, Ovrut asked the audience to imagine that sheets were really nine-dimensional. (Time is an additional dimension, but, for simplicity, we will restrict ourselves to counting only the dimensions of space here.) The gap between the two sheets lies along the tenth dimension, the extra dimension that distinguishes the Horava-Witten theory from the other five string theories.”

I do hope you recall some of the stuff I presented earlier about the presence of extra dimensions in string theories [of various kinds], and how most of these space-like dimensions simply curl up and get out of view and day to day experience, a process that physicists describe via the word compactification [see QFI 10 & 11].

I am sure all this is driving you dizzy! But that is what happens when we have to use words in place of mathematics! In the language of mathematics [pretty fancy mathematics I should mention!] all this is perfectly precise; but when we try to use words, they fail to measure up to the demands of mathematics and one has to do a lot of hand-waving I am afraid. I mean it is like trying to describe Beethoven’s sublime music entirely in words! Sorry about that. Anyway, if you permit some hand-waving [there is no choice really!] then I can put it this way.

- The sheets introduced by Ovrut are branes but not the usual kind of ones.

- The usual kind of branes have space on either side of them. The branes that Ovrut drew are the boundaries of extra dimension so that space only exists **between** the branes and **not** outside the gap.
- One can visualise the Ovrut model by thinking of a car window say, made of two glass sheets with a small air gap in between.

So what is the big deal? How does all this highly concocted picture help in anyway? Paul and Neil have the following response. They say the observable universe lies on **one** of the two branes; this is called "**our braneworld**". The other brane is called the "**hidden braneworld**". The gap separating the two braneworlds is separated by a tiny gap perhaps 10^{-30} centimetres across. Over now to Paul and Neil:

"According to the M theory, Ovrut explained, all the particles and forces we are familiar with, and even light itself, are confined to our braneworld. We are stuck like flies on flypaper, and can never reach across the gap to the "hidden" world, which contains a second set of particles and forces with different properties from those in our world.

*Although we cannot touch or see anything on the hidden braneworld, its effect can be felt because gravity exists throughout space and **can** cross the gap between the braneworlds."*

So that is the picture that Ovrut painted at the Cambridge meeting of 1999, while introducing the strange world of branes to cosmology. The important point was that he was actually using the concept of branes not merely to explain features of elementary particles, which is what is usually done, but sketched how branes could be used by cosmologists. That certainly was an important step forward, as I shall soon describe. But before I get on to that story, let me make sure that I have not lost you at this point. So let me repeat what I said above in different set of words.

You will notice that nothing has been said in the above about either the Big Bang or inflation. What has been done is to set the stage for all such discussion. The important thing is that 1) the Universe is described in terms of a brane, 2) that there is another universe, a companion of sorts, which, however, is hidden. 3) Nevertheless, this hidden universe, though invisible despite being very close, is capable of making itself felt via the gravitational force which can hop from one brane to another. That is the liberty gravitational force has because the loop describing the graviton is a closed loop. [See, QFI – 10; also Figure 2 above].

Let us go back to the double glass windows with an air gap in between. Suppose there is a soap bubble in the space between the two glass plates. Imagine the two plates are now progressively brought closer and closer. It is easy to see what would happen; that scenario is illustrated in the figure below:

FIGURE 3: This figure shows what happens when two glass plates, one of which has a soap bubble sticking to its surface, come closer and closer together. At first the bubble is touching only one plate; at that stage, it has the

form of a hemisphere. When the second plate comes close enough, the bubble makes contact, at which point the bubble now assumes the shape of a tube. As the plates come very close, the tube slowly goes over into a ring; basically a two-dimensional entity [namely a tube], now becomes an one-dimensional entity [namely a ring]. This is what happens when two branes come very, very close; there is a loss of dimensionality allowing branes to become strings in the region of contact; that in turn opens the door for string theory to go to work at the practical level! A lot of words and an equal amount of hand waving no doubt, but then if I can at least get through the idea, then I would have done my job!

The general idea that was being tried out was that some sort of physical connectivity gets established between the two branes when they come very close. Obviously, I have not indicated the details; they are complicated and I sure don't even know what they are; but that does not matter. What matters is the physical picture. What I have outlined above is just the beginning. Let us move forward and see what more can happen if parallel brane worlds close by are made the starting point of a new cosmological approach; this is the approach taken by Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok.

I make a special mention of their work because they have revived one particular scenario for the evolution of the Universe that goes back a long time, received attention for a while and then got dumped because scientific evidence seemed to rule it out. You might ask, "If scientific evidence ruled out a particular possibility, how come it got revived?" Well, that is the interesting part and let me unravel the story bit by bit so that your curiosity is not satisfied till we reach the last reel!

What happened was something like this. While Ovrut unveiled a totally new picture of the Universe "living" in a brane rather close to a "hidden Universe" on another brane etc., Paul and Neil were wondering: "What if the two branes moved such that they actually collided? Could that generate a Big Bang?" In other words, these people now asked a new type of question: "How on earth did the Big Bang occur in the first place?" Lost in this question, which appears to have occurred to both Paul and Neil at the same time, they hardly paid any attention to what Ovrut was saying. They were just waiting for the talk to end, and when that happened, they rushed towards the speaker like many others did. While the others sought all sorts of clarifications concerning what Ovrut said during his talk, these two aired their view and simply asked: "Do you think the Big Bang could have been the result of a brane-brane collision?" Ovrut was surprised by the idea but did not at all think it was either crazy or outrageous. In fact, Ovrut wanted to discuss the idea further but a social engagement came in the way.

As often happens during such meetings when the agenda tends to be heavy, the organisers slip in some cultural items, parties and the like to lighten the atmosphere a bit. On this occasion, arrangements had been for the participants to travel to London to see a popular play there. So the three had to leave immediately; however, they managed to travel together and during

the train ride [from Cambridge to London], they argued excitedly about “how a brane big bang might work.” Over to Paul and Neil:

*“We could see right away that brane collisions are unavoidable in M theory—nothing prevents two brane worlds from running into each other. Also, a brane collision would fill the branes with a nearly uniform density of matter and radiation. The details would be hard to calculate, but the physical picture was compelling. If M theory was right, the big bang just **had** to be a brane collision, we sensed. But if this was true, there would be huge implications.”*

It is one thing to have an exciting discussion during a train ride and toss ideas back and forth and quite another to produce a model with calculations, numbers and so forth, which is what the scientific community would ultimately look at before accepting or rejecting the idea. As the two say summarising their feelings even as the train reached into London, “*Still, as exhilarated as we were by these ideas during the train ride to London, a great deal of work lay ahead before they could be turned into a viable model. Horava and Witten had assumed a static, unchanging arrangement of branes, because this vastly simplified their analysis. The dynamic situation of colliding braneworlds was much harder to describe, and most of the theoretical tools and tricks that had been developed would be useless in this context. Nevertheless, we now had a tantalizing vision of a new cosmological scenario that went well beyond the inflationary model and employed the full power of M theory and branes to describe the big bang.*”

So there it was at that point. A new idea, an interesting idea, and a bold idea too. So far, so good, but at the end of the day, physicists want calculations, and numbers that can be tested against experiments. That said, it is not always easy to follow up an idea with detailed calculations. Over a century, physics has become difficult on two fronts; firstly, on the ideas side, radical ideas began to make an entry, and people had to learn to assimilate bold new ideas. Secondly, physicists also had to equip themselves with new mathematical tools they were totally unfamiliar with. For example, when Einstein came up with General Relativity in 1915, he had to seek the help of mathematician Grossman to help him out with solving the equations he had proposed! So it was many times. Often, getting hold of the right equation and the mathematical strategy was a hard struggle; it had to wait for decades till a lot of facts to fall into place. Paul and Neil put this matter into perspective with respective their own ideas.

“We agreed not to discuss these initial ideas with others yet; rather, we would develop them in private and propose new cosmological model only if it showed signs of success. Otherwise, the negative response of other theorists to a sketchy idea could be so strong that the model might be buried before it had a chance to breathe. The criticisms could be anticipated. String theorists would say the work was premature and M theory was still too poorly understood to be applied to cosmology. And most of the cosmologists had already nailed their colours to inflation’s mast: many would be sure to resist considering an alternative. To be accepted as a serious rival, the model would have to match inflation’s successes. In particular, it would have to provide an

alternative explanation for the nearly scale-invariant fluctuations that seed the formation of galaxies.”

I am giving the inside picture instead of merely the finished product so that you get the feel for the initial excitement, the subsequent hesitation, the long grind thereafter, sweat, tears, persistence etc., that invariably goes in before there is success. When the newspapers headline a great discovery, we are hardly aware of the tension that lies behind. Basically, Paul and Neil were trying to marry the brane picture to early cosmology and come up with a model which would make inflation unnecessary, but deliver nevertheless all that inflation does and much more perhaps! Sounds like an election promise? Well, let us see. But first we must get equipped some background, and the rest of this instalment would be devoted to that.

I would first like to say something about what is often quoted as the age of the Universe. I have myself have done this and even presented a number that is supposed to be fairly accurate, precise and all that. But then, what **exactly** does this term age of the Universe mean? Any fine print or catches there? That is the first topic I would like to discuss below. Next I would like to introduce you to the concept of what is called the **cyclic model** of the Universe, because that is what is going to occupy us for a while in the immediate future. Over now to the age business.

By the age of the Universe, we normally mean the time elapsed between the Big Bang and the present. This definition therefore implicitly assumes that there was a Big Bang! This is something many do not notice; the point is, however, important because what if someone does not believe in the Big Bang?

Let us start with the basic question: “Is there any meaningful way of talking about the age of the Universe **without** bringing the Big Bang into the picture?” There sure is, and it is an operational method. We simply say, “The Universe must be at least as old as the oldest object in it.” This is not as silly an idea as it might sound. There are many old entities in this Universe whose age we can determine in an independent manner, without **any** reference to Big Bang etc. Use of these suggestive indicators gives us a meaningful way of putting a limit on the age of the Universe; we can say, “The Universe must be **at least** so many years old.” Got the idea?

OK, now there are three ways in which this idea can be implemented:

- Finding the age of the chemical elements.
- Finding the age of the oldest star clusters.
- Finding the age of the oldest white dwarf stars.

Let me explain. As you might be aware, chemists tell us that there are 92 elements that are found in Nature, many of which are radioactive. Now what does one mean by saying uranium is radioactive? It simply means this: If you have a bunch of uranium atoms, as say in a piece of uranium metal, the you

would find that radiations come from this piece of uranium metal and the emission is random. Let me be more specific.

Thanks to the atom bomb, nuclear proliferation and all that, I am sure you have heard of uranium 235 and uranium 238. These refer to two different types of nuclei [called isotopes of uranium], both of which are uranium as far as the chemists are concerned; however, where nuclear physicists are concerned, the two nuclei are quite different indeed, as different as war and peace if I may put it that way! If there was no uranium 235 in Nature, the bomb that wiped out Hiroshima could not have been made!

OK, but what has all that got to do with the age of the Universe? I am coming to that! Now when I say that uranium 235 is radioactive, it means that if there are a bunch of uranium 235 nuclei then once in a while, one of these nuclei would emit what is called an alpha particle, which is nothing but the nucleus of a helium atom. Now out the big bunch of 235 nuclei, which is the one which emits? No one can say; that is what random emission is all about; not only that.

Let us say, that uranium 235 nucleus A emits an alpha particle now; let us call this time $t = 0$. Five seconds later, another uranium 235 nucleus that we shall call B emits an alpha particle. We check our clock; it shows 5 seconds have passed. Question: Can we say that the next emission would occur at time 10 seconds? No! The next emission could occur at time $t = 6$ seconds, time $t = 14$ seconds, $t = 7.7$ seconds, something we cannot predict! Have the uranium nuclei become crazy? Do they have no discipline? Not that way!

Figure 4. This figure is meant to illustrate the basics of the randomness associated with radioactive disintegration. (a) shows what happens when a single nucleus of Uranium 235 disintegrates. It basically emits an alpha particle and a [gamma ray] photon; what is left over as the daughter nucleus is a nucleus of Thorium 231. The alpha particle, by the way, is itself the nucleus of the element helium. (b) illustrates via a timeline, the randomness associated with the decay process. Basically it illustrates [as explained in the text] that one cannot say when a particular disintegration would take place. The time line shows via arrows, that one cannot say which particular nucleus would decay when. Anything can decay at any time! All that one can say is that on the average, roughly half the original number would have decayed over a time called half-life.

You see, certain things **are** random in Nature; that is the way it is; however, that does **not** mean that nothing is predictable about random processes. In the case of radioactive decay of uranium nuclei [the 235 species] for example, we can say that if we start with N such nuclei now, then after 704 million years, we can expect to find only about $[N/2]$ uranium 235 nuclei left; the rest would have emitted alpha particles and decayed to what is called a daughter nuclei. To make it a bit more meaningful, let us say we have a trillion $[10^{12}]$ such nuclei now, then after 704 million years, only about 0.5 trillion would be left; not exactly half a trillion but more or less. If we start with just 1000, we

can similarly say only about 500 would be left although the % error in this estimate would be much higher.

All this digression was meant to introduce you to the term *half-life*, which, for U 235, is about 704 million years. OK, all this is fine but what does all this mean as regards the age of the Universe? That is what I am coming to. The basic game is the following. Scientists know quite a lot about a thousand or so radioactive nuclei and their half-lives. From a study of stars etc, they also know that in many very old stars in which these nuclei were first produced, some of which were produced with equal abundance. However, because of their very different half-lives, more of one species survived rather than the other. So this is what scientists do. They say: "Let us consider two candidate nuclei, X and Y. Long, long ago when they first were produced in the Universe, they appeared with equal abundance; but on account of their very different half-lives they decayed at different rates. Therefore, one species has more survivors today on our solar-system/earth [which is relatively young compared to the Universe], than there were at start. Knowing the ratio of survivors and the half-lives, it is not a big deal to work out how many years must have passed since the original co-production of the two species X and Y. The actual difficulty lies in making accurate measurements but today's fancy tools allow that. Proceeding this way, they finally say, "Well, we reckon the Universe must be about 15 billion years old, give or take about 2 billion years!" Mind you, this is only a way of putting what is called a bound on the age; yet it is very useful.

I will not go into the other two methods I listed them above because they are sort of in the same spirit, but instead shall turn to another method which relies on observations of the Cosmic Microwave Background [CMB], concerning which I have said a lot in earlier issues of H2H. Basically this method proceeds as follows: "Today, the Universe is filled more or less uniformly [barring of course some vital and critical fluctuations], with radiation. We measure the temperature of this radiation very accurately and all sorts of related data. Next we go back to Hubble's old discovery that the Universe is expanding. Today, we can measure this expansion rate fairly accurately. So we combine all this and argue: 'Well, if this is the current temperature now and this is the expansion rate now, then how long ago must this expansion have started for the temperature to have the value it now has?'" That, roughly is the way this game is played.

Using such an approach, the NASA Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe [WMAP] Project team estimates the age of the Universe to be

$$(13.7 \pm 0.2) \times 10^9 \text{ years.}$$

That is, the Universe is about 13.7 billion years old with an uncertainty of about 200 million years. This is the number most often quoted these days, and it is a pretty good estimate I would say; however, one must be careful about what exactly this means.

1. It means that 13.7 billion years have passed after the Big Bang is presumed to have occurred.
2. If we believe that an inflation occurred after the Big Bang [as I described earlier], then it could well be that the Universe is much larger than we see it to be! And that part that is “invisible” to us could have a much longer history than the number quoted above would indicate. In other words, 13.7 billion years denotes the age of just that part of the Universe that is “visible/accessible” to us!
3. If we come up with another perfectly plausible model for the Universe that does **NOT** involve birth in a Big Bang [but explains all facts that must be – and this could well happen!], then in that case, 13.7 billion years is an experimental number that must certainly be accepted but cannot necessarily be pressed forward as the AGE of the Universe!

So you see, there are all kinds of ifs and buts, if one wants to be very careful, and scientists often are that way! Why did I bring in all this? Because they all are relevant to us. In much of what I have said thus far, including about the history of the Universe and the fate it might face, I have said hardly anything about a model of existence called the **Cyclic Model**. Basically, in this model, the Universe is born, dies, is born again, dies again, and so on; I suppose you get the idea! Rather like humans, is it not? Well interestingly this is how ancients in many lands thought about it all, and Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok say something very interesting about these ancients concepts. This is what they say:

“Ancient Hindu cosmology presents a remarkably detailed and quantitative version of cyclic evolution. The full picture has cycles within cycles within cycles, where each level of cycle has a different duration. The levels correspond to various timescales in the lifespan of Brahma, the god of creation. For example, one kind of a cycle corresponds to a day and night in Brahma’s life, another to a year, yet another to one hundred years, and so on. Converted to Earth years, some of these levels have surprisingly similar timescales of interest to contemporary cosmology. A day and night in the life of Brahma lasts a kalpa, a period of 8.64 billion years, roughly the duration of the matter-dominated epoch in modern cosmology, during the period in which galaxies formed. The Vishnu Puranas say that each of these cycles is followed by a drought that lasts until all the waters dry up. In modern cosmology, matter domination is followed by dark energy domination during which no new galaxies form. The next level of cycle, corresponding to a year of Brahma or 360 kalpas, last 3.11 trillion years. The duration is roughly that of a single cycle in the [current versions of] the cyclic model. The lifetime of Brahma is a factor of one hundred longer, after which the Universe takes a respite. Exactly what happens after that is less clear. There have been numerous Brahmans before and there will be numerous ones to follow. The Hindu texts do not say how the interval between Brahmans is. The evolution may be cyclic or sporadic.

In the West, cyclical cosmology was a dominant idea for nearly six centuries, beginning around 500 B.C. The concept can be traced back to a disagreement between two of the earliest known Greek philosophers,

Parmenides of Elea and Heraclitus of Ephesus. Parmenides' view, which Plato greatly admired, was that ideas are real and sensations are illusory. If thought is reality, then anything one can conceive must exist. Parmenides reasoned that since you cannot conceive something "not existing" without first thinking of the thing itself, (which means it already exists, then it is logically impossible for existence to have a beginning or an end. Hence, he concluded, everything endures and nothing changes.

Heraclitus held the opposite view. "All is flux" was the dictum, meaning that everything changes and nothing endures. The goal of philosophers, he argued, should be to understand how things change. Today, the Heraclitean point of view is recognised as underlying modern science, economics, politics and history.

*Following Heraclitus, the Stoics introduced the concept of **ekpyrosis**, from the word meaning "out of fire"..... The Greek notion was that the Universe begins and ends in a gigantic conflagration, with a period of normal evolution in between. The concept had many variants. There could be one conflagration, or an infinite number of them. They could be regular and sporadic or regular and periodic. The cycles could be exact repeats of history or only statistically similar.*

*In the periodic version, Cicero called the cycles **annus magnus**, or "great year," and it was calculated to have the duration of ten to twenty thousand years. In his treatise ON the Nature of Gods, Cicero explained, "There will ultimately occur conflagration of the whole world.....nothing will remain but fire, by which, as a living being and a god, once again a new world may be created and the ordered universe restored as before."*

The cyclic view became less popular in Europe as Christianity took hold, due in large part to the interpretation of the Book of Genesis by early Christian theologians. Many today read translations of the opening lines and interpret them to be as describing a universe that is created from nothing in a singular event. In the original Hebrew, though, the meaning is ambiguous at best. Rabbinic scholars are not sure whether "heaven and earth" refers to the entire universe of just the Earth. And a common interpretation is that this creation was from pre-existing material, meaning space, time, matter and energy existed before the moment of creation. Some rabbinic interpretations even envisage that worlds have been created repeatedly, with earlier versions having been destroyed because their Maker found them unsatisfactory. In truth, though, these cosmological issues have never been considered central to Jewish religious thinking.

In Christianity, scholars have tended to link the origin of the universe more closely to the foundations of the religion, which is perhaps why there has been greater tension between science and this faith, compared to other religions. For example, Saint Augustine argued strongly for a created universe, ascribing it an age of five thousand years. And he rejected any interpretations of biblical passages that suggest a more enduring existence. In his Confessions (Book XI, chapter 12), he wrote of the first lines of Genesis. "For

the man who says, 'What did God do before He made heaven and earth?' I do not give the answer that someone is said to have given in jest: 'He was preparing hell, just for those who pry too deeply.' It is one thing to see the answer; it is another to laugh at the questioner—and another for myself I do not answer these things thus. More willingly would I have answered, 'I do not know what I do not know' than cause one who asked a deep question to be ridiculed—and by such tactics gain praise for a worthless answer. Rather, I say that thou, our God, art the Creator of every creature. And if in the term 'heaven and earth' every creature is included, I make bold to say further: 'Before God made heaven and earth, he did not make anything at all.'"

Although many Christian theologians adopted Saint Augustine's view, the concept of a cyclic universe retained some popularity. But the nineteenth century, the idea began to appear more frequently, even among popular writers. Edgar Allan Poe wrote an essay entitled "Heureka" in which he proposed a specific "model" of the universe that is remarkably like the ancient explosion of some simple, uniform state of matter in "one instantaneous flash." These initial atoms are blown apart by expansion but then are drawn together by an attractive force that causes them to collapse into a uniform initial state again, from which a new explosion arises.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche also advocated a repeating universe, but his arguments in support of the idea were different from those of the early Greek philosophers. He thought that since there is no end to time, and presumably only a finite number of possible events and things, everything now existing must recur. Nietzsche's model of "eternal recurrence" was popular in the late nineteenth century and perhaps even stimulated the thinking of mathematical physicists like Ludwig Boltzmann and Henri Poincaré in their studies of heat and dynamical systems. Boltzmann's and Poincaré's ideas continue to influence modern cosmology.

As a final comment on all this, I recall way back in the eighties when I was in the US, there was a popular TV series called the COSMOS narrated by the famous Carl Sagan. In one of the episodes, Carl Sagan discusses the Cyclic Model and this scene is shot in Mahabalipuram, the famous tourist spot south of Madras, where many Pallava architectural relics can be found. And Sagan refers in detail to the Cosmic Dance of Shiva in relation to the oscillatory rhythm of the Universe. I was very struck by the analogy he made but then, this is what the ancients of India said too. Subsequently, I learnt many other Western physicists also referred to the beautiful analogy and as if to bring this to the constant attention of the leading physicists of the world, the Government of India donated a beautiful bronze statue of Dancing Shiva to CERN, the world's biggest nuclear lab in Geneva, spanning actually two countries, Switzerland and France.

Be with you again next month. In the meantime, all the best. Jai Sai Ram.

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 3

...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 to the values of Right Conduct, Truth, Love, Peace and Non-violence, even if the choice appeared the tougher one to follow.

In the previous issues, we brought you the experience of Mrs. Priya Davis, a former student of Bhagavan's University, who did not give in to the unjust demands of her boss, followed her Heart and at the end found herself vindicated in every respect. Then there was the gripping story of Mr. Dev Taneja, a Sai devotee from Canada who was faced with the dilemma of furthering his goal of professional and financial growth or foregoing his personal ambition in favour of his family responsibilities as the oldest male member of his family.

In this issue, another alumnus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Mr. CBS Mani shares how the final benediction he received during the Convocation from his Divine Alma Mater influenced his choices as a conscientious manager in corporate India, in an environment where moral and ethical codes can be flexed for convenience and temptations abound in various forms, and also how he made his best career move ever by adhering to the tried, tested and true teachings of Bhagavan Baba: Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara, meaning "I shall speak the Truth and tread upon the path of Righteousness".

GO WITH THE FLOW OR STAND YOUR GROUND?

Mr. CBS Mani

An alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, Mr. Mani joined the Brindavan campus of Bhagavan's University in 1990. After completing his Bachelors of Commerce there, he moved on to the Prasanthi Nilayam campus to pursue his Masters in Financial Management during the years 1993-95. Currently, he works as Associate Business Consultant with CGI Information Systems and Management Consultants, a leading IT and business process services provider and is based in Mumbai. A passionate learner of Vedic hymns, Mani deems the five years spent at His University as the best thing to have happened in his life.

I clearly recall my convocation from this Noble Institute. On that blessed day, I had the opportunity to chant the Vedic Hymn of *Sishya anusasanam* stating

the code of discipline for students right at the start of the Convocation. I was fortunate to get this opportunity twice – once when I completed my B.Com and the second time when I completed my Masters in Financial Management. It goes like this: *Vedamanuchyaachaaryo antevaasinamanusaasti, Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara.....* This is what is chanted by the Preceptor, the learned teacher worthy of the same reverence as God, to his students as a final tip when they have completed their education, graduated from their discipleship and are ready to embark on to the next stage of their life's journey. The first sacred directive is *Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara*, meaning 'Thou shalt speak the truth and tread upon the path of Right conduct' - which is indeed the motto of our Institute as well.

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As years have rolled on, with each life experience the inner and true significance of this profound Vedic injunction is slowly unfolding within my understanding. This realization is more an outcome of my translating it and applying it in my daily life than what I learned by rote for chanting at the Convocation.

It is not that I have always been truthful and that all my actions are righteous but there have been many instances where I can say, 'Yes, I have done the right action and I have spoken what I should have spoken'. This self-confidence I attribute entirely to Bhagavan's education and am forever grateful to Him for it.

I recall when I was being interviewed for a job by the head of an organization based in Western India; I was asked a question, "You seem to have come from a very noble place – where the ambience is very good, do you think you can adjust to the vagaries of the world?" I said, "I have to..." The next question was, "But will you be able to live up to your principles." I said, "I have no doubt that I shall be able to do so."

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Falsehood = Fear; The Truth Shall Set You Free

As days rolled on, I realized it is going to be a tough job and I bumped into a friend of mine who said, "Look, why are you worried? You just need to tell the truth once, and after that, the other person is going to be scared, not you. But if you make a false statement, you will be scared for the rest of your life". That sounded definitely brilliant and simple - a fair enough translation of the same significant and sensible translation of the *Sathya Vada* motto of my alma mater.

A few months after joining an organization in Western India, I found myself working as part of a team appraising the financing of a project. We were to make an investment – a big amount - in a foreign country, for which we were to take necessary clearances from the statutory authorities, which meant the Reserve Bank of India and the Ministry of Finance of the Central Government. It was my job to do the arithmetic and the calculations. I was the junior most member of the team, with barely 3 to 4 months of work experience. The Reporting Officer (RO) had said: "You would be working on it" and I, obviously, felt happy. But at the back of my mind, I could really feel there are

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many others who are going to be unhappy with this. They had many years of experience backing them with more exposure than I had. I was the new kid on the block, so to say. Being included in a project of such significance invariably raised a few eyebrows among my colleagues.

It was the time when we used Lotus 1-2-3 (a computer spreadsheet application) to generate all kinds of statements on reams of papers which were filled up with a hundreds of calculations. The most important indicator for appraising a project is the Return on Investment (ROI), which is measured in terms of percentage. Every calculation was driven by this significant factor. A Project Appraisal Document (PAD) detailing the feasibility had to be prepared and submitted to different statutory bodies to obtain their approval. We had done a proper job in forecasting the ROI and then preparing the PAD. It had, in fact, gone through all kinds of reviews and our Board had approved it. Finally, we had submitted the PAD to the Reserve Bank of India, the country's premier regulatory body, for seeking their clearance.

The following day, after submitting the PAD to RBI, we checked the calculations once again and I was in for a shock. I had made a big blunder in calculating the ROI, I realized. It had got inflated by around 20%. Originally, if it should have been 10% then it was presented as 12%. These are not actual figures as they cannot be revealed, but this was a big mistake I had made and I noticed this just before lunch time.

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I went home for lunch but not even a single morsel of food went into my mouth. My mind was flooded with questions. What should I be doing? Should I confess? Or, should I just let it be as most likely nobody might even notice it?

Blow the Whistle or Let It Pass?

After a short time, I decided what I should do: I was ready to face the consequences of speaking the truth. What made me strong in my resolve was an instance from my university days. Once Mr. Bhargava, who had been Chairman of Maruti Udyog Ltd., on his visit to our college, had told us that he had once asked all his managers "How many of you have made mistakes, please raise your hands". And no hands went up. Then he had said, "I am firing all of you, because if you have not made mistakes, then you have not taken any decisions".

Comment: When Bhargava had visited our Institute that point of time he was not Chairman of MUL. That is why I had not mentioned then Chairman of MUL. I have now added the words "who had been" to convey this.

Also, just before I walked in, I recalled what Swami used to tell us, 'Tell the Truth'. Yes, this is when I realized, I needed to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

So, I went to the RO and confessed: "Sir, this is where I have made a mistake". I explained how I had gone wrong, but he wanted me to recheck, which I did, and convinced him about my mistake. He then went up to a top executive - who was at a very senior level in the Organisation hierarchy - to inform him that we had fumbled. The top executive then asked us to submit the revised PAD to the RBI and we went ahead with it. To be honest, I had a

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better sleep that night than I have had any other day. Actually, there was a bleak chance that anyone could have noticed the error, but for me that was not important; what was more significant is the act of owning up to what you have done - be it right or wrong. And once I had done that, I was confident, for I knew that I had done the right thing.

Righteousness Protects Those Who Abide By It.

Later, I was given a higher responsibility. After about 2 and a half years, the same RO called me and said, 'Look, we are in need of someone to handle our investments and I have not been able to get someone who is reliable. Let me know if you can commit to be with the organization for a longer period. If you can, then you would be moved to handle our investments. Otherwise, I will look for someone else. But be very honest; I give you half a day's time to think'. I said, "I am ready, I am happy to do this job". But later I asked him, "What made you feel that you can rely upon me?" He said, "The Institute where you were educated, and your forthrightness to admit a crucial oversight you had made."

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That episode was from 2 ½ years ago and I had felt people had lost confidence in me, but this unexpected vote of confidence was such a pleasant bolt from the blue! It was a true affirmation from Bhagavan Himself for my simple act of living the dictum *Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara* – for my humble attempt to speak the truth and tread the path of righteousness, primarily for my own clear conscience and peace of mind.

Soon I found myself handling huge investments worth thousands of crores of rupees for my employer. It is a given that when big bucks are involved, it's very easy to get tempted to serve one's individual interest. There are instances when you are investing and certain parties attempt to lure you with valuable and precious articles to solicit your business. That's the kind of background in which one has to work, and my guiding principle as I waded my way through this swamp of temptations, was to tread only on the path of right conduct and uphold truth.

Coveting What Is Not Ours Is Unethical, No Matter What

One particular instance comes to mind readily. We used to receive interest on investments we made and we had big amounts of investments in one of the major Mutual Funds of our country. They had made an excess payment - a small amount - an excess dividend of Rs. 25,000/-, which is a paltry and insignificant amount, barely 0.0001% of our investment; but it certainly did not belong to us.

When I noticed that we had received more than what we should have, I went up to my immediate boss and said, 'Sir, there is an excess amount we have received of Rs. 25,000/-. We have already deposited the cheque in the bank and it is credited. We need to return the excess amount to the fund house.'

“Are you sure?” was his first question. I presented the calculations to him and he said to me, “Check it once again”. I said, “They have made an excess payment”. He said, “But how I can carry this message higher up the hierarchy.” “The way I came and told you; and if you are not going to, I am going to tell them.” He said, “Let me think over.” I said, “You keep thinking, I am going in to see them...’.

I immediately walked in to the Head of our Department and explained to him what had happened. He too wanted me to recheck. When I convinced him on the facts of the case, grimaces on his face were evident. But I was firm that we should not be coveting what we do not own. Otherwise, I felt, there was no point in having listened to so many stories of the Ramayana, Mahabharata and of course, Swami’s discourses. Greed should not overpower us, be it at the corporate level or at the individual level, I said to myself. And eventually, the amount was refunded.

After two months, our organization received a letter from the Fund house, thanking us for having returned the amount. My boss called me and said: “This is for you; you are the true holder of this letter.” I preserved that letter for long, and cherished it way more than any other accolade. But my stories of triumphs with truth do not end here.

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Vigilance Against Bribes Wrapped As Corporate Gifts

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, is celebrated with much gaiety in India, but forgetting its spiritual significance, it has now become a season for offering bribes for favours in the form of ‘corporate gifts’ – a fine term that is used to make it sound all fair and acceptable.

On one occasion, someone tried to outsmart me. They sent me a corporate gift as a parcel that arrived at our company’s despatch department. The moment I saw it, I realized that it is not something meant for me, it’s a ‘corporate gift’. I told the staff to rush and return it to the sender.

Unfortunately the courier delivery personnel had left. I called up their office and told them they need to return the parcel. After long parleys of discussions, the courier office told me, “Sir, tomorrow when our person comes, please give it to him and he will carry it back.” Next day, the same delivery man came. He was smart enough, he said he will take it, but neatly ran out of the office without accepting it. I, then, sent it back but it returned! The drama went on for a week.

By now it was Friday. The person from our dispatch section called me and said, “Look, I am going to escalate the matter.” His tone suggested that it was a threat and he was irritated with my stand to return the corporate gift to the sender. I stood my ground and I said, “Please... by all means”.

That’s where I could keep my head high because I knew I had done nothing wrong. We went up to the Admin manager and I explained the situation. “Look Sir, this is a corporate gift that has come over,” I said.

Before that there was another conversation that I had with my immediate boss who said, "What's wrong in accepting it?" "I just care that it is not right and that's it. I have told you. I have not come here for your permission; it's for your information. You need to know what's happening and I am not accepting it," I told him and walked out of his room. He was perplexed.

Returning to the Admin Manager, when I explained the whole story, he asked, "What are its contents". I said, "I have not looked at it. I have not touched it and I don't care what the contents are." He looked up to the dispatch person and said, "We may accept this as a gift to the organization."

But, it was in my personal name. "What do you feel about it?" he asked. I said, "I just know one thing: I am not going to accept it or even touch it." And then pleasantries were exchanged to close the discussion. I got up from my chair and was walking out of his chamber. Just when I was opening the latch of the door, the Admin Manager, who had been in the organisation for over 23 years and had just 2-3 months to retire, started saying something. I looked back and he said: "I thought people who live up to their principles had drastically reduced in this organization. But this particular deed of yours, proved me wrong. I am feeling happy that those who stick to their values and do the right thing are still around. I am really feeling happy about it."

Was it a Coincidence or Absolutely His Work?

I nodded my head and as I turned my head to leave, my eyes caught the date on the calendar. It was November 23! Ah, the joy of having done the right thing on such a holy day!

My attempt to practice the motto of my university, namely, *Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara* may have been minor and simple. Yet they mean the world to me in my personal growth, just as every nut and bolt is crucial for the success of a rocket launch.

Certainly, these few incidents have shown me that when we are on the right path, we will be endowed with the self control needed to keep us from derailing from the right path. Maybe I should be asking Bhagavan for *bhakti* or devotion as once He had told us, "Ask for *bhakti*, I will give you *shakti* and *mukti*, and maybe *yukti* as well'. For, in devotion lie the virtues of strength, freedom and wisdom. Today, I realize, one definitely needs that gift of inner strength from Bhagavan to pursue the path of truth and righteousness - of *Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara* - the benediction from the Supreme Teacher as His parting advice to each of us, His students, at the time of our Convocation from the Sri Sathya Sai University.

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THE SAI MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

Germany - The Land of Many Gems

Think of the greatest physicist of our times, one who baffled great minds for decades and is even today almost worshipped for opening altogether new dimensions in the realm of modern science (Einstein);

Dwell on the most influential thinker, philosopher, political economist and revolutionary of the 19th century who established a new political and social order for not one or two but a whole group of nations (Karl Marx);

Think of one of the greatest masters of music who, even though aurally completely challenged, created such magic with the piano that nearly two hundred years later, his personality and music remains a mystery (Beethoven);

Dwell on one of the most influential monks, theologians and Protestant Reformers whose ideas created a whole new doctrine of Christian faith and changed the course of Western civilisation forever (Martin Luther);

Think of one of the most revered world leaders of the present time who when he speaks one-sixth of the world population listens (the Pope)...

The list can run into several volumes, for such is the greatness of this glorious land of Germany.

Indeed there must be something about the people of this land that makes them truly outstanding. Call it the gene of the collective consciousness. It is the genius of the Germans sheer mental and intuitive ability. And we can see this trait running in their history; be it in the field of science, or in the arena of art and music, in the area of philosophy, or in the level of their mystical awareness, Germany has stood out as a giant of amazing creative ability.

Germany – Blossoms of Beauty

The country has vibrant cities, varied landscapes of mountains, forests, lakes and beautiful, historic towns and villages. In Cologne's mighty Cathedral Towers – the pinnacle of Gothic architecture, in King Ludwig's world famous castles which stand proudly against the spectacular backdrop of the Alps, in Berlin's signature attraction (the collapse of the Berlin wall) – the symbol of the reunification of Germany - in the Bavarian plains and forests, and in the coasts of the North and Baltic Seas, Germany's rich natural beauty and majesty are unforgettable.

The Impressive Cultural Diversity

This dynamic nation located in the centre of Europe is truly the heart of the European Union, not only because it is the largest population in EU, but also because of its scientific and technological prowess. Surrounded by Denmark in the North, Poland and Czech Republic in the East, Austria and Switzerland in the South, France and Luxembourg in the South-West, and Belgium and the Netherlands in the northwest, it is spread over 357000 km² and is the world's third largest economy by nominal GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

The diversity and mixture of different races - thanks to the Indo-European tribes, the Romans and Franks, different regional principedoms, earldoms, monarchies and states, - provide Germany with a variety of cultural wealth that is unparalleled. It is also home to world's third-highest number of international migrants with a standard of living that is enviable even by many developed nations.

The most important religious festivals are Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide. Their national holiday is German Unification Day on 3rd of October to commemorate the unification of the East and West which took place about 20 years ago. In 1945 after the end of the Second World War, Germany was divided into two parts: the Eastern part being put under Soviet government and the Western part under American, English and French Government. The communist East and the democratic (capitalist) West developed independent constitutions and economic systems. After forty years of at times hostile competition of two ideological systems, separation finally ended with the "Fall of the Wall" that marked the collapse of the communist system in Europe. Since then Germany has been reunited.

Precious Gifts to Humanity

Over time, 98 German Laureates have received the most coveted Nobel Prize. This could only be a token of appreciation for so many of this land's priceless gems who have given humanity a quantum leap in consciousness.

Germany's most famous scientist, Albert Einstein (1879-1955), is best known for his theory of relativity and mass-energy equivalence, $E = mc^2$, and was named Time magazine's "Person of the Century".

This land of creativity has also gifted humanity with luminaries from all disciplines - poets, philosophers, artists and so on. Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven are shining examples. Similarly, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's contributions span the fields of poetry, drama, literature, theology, humanism, science and painting. Karl Marx's work on Political Science, Immanuel Kant's idealism, Arthur Schopenhauer's composition of metaphysical pessimism, Fredrich Nietzsche's development of perspectivism, and Martin Heidegger's works on Being are testimonies to the supreme ability of the exalted German mind.

In the area of religion, Germany has gifted the world with famous religious reformers like Martin Luther who initiated the great Christian Reformation of the sixteenth century. The current Pope, Benedict XVI was born in Bavaria, Germany. Meister Eckhart stands out as one of the leaders of popular mystical movement in the modern world and Elisatbeth von Thuringen, who lived for only 24 years, is a symbol of Christian Charity, venerated as a great National Saint of the mediaeval era, who always cared for the sick, the young, and those who lived in poverty. She is often remembered for her saying: "I always told you that we have to make people happy."

So how did Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Prashanthi Nilayam, India, without ever visiting Germany in person, sweep this great land of thinkers, inventors, revolutionaries, poets and philosophers with His love? How did the Sai seed germinate in the hearts of these enquiring seekers who put everything under

the crucible of critical dissection? How did the Sai Movement spread all across this land of over-achievers within a 40 year span?

A Sai Seed Germinates in Germany

How blessed are those whom the Lord draws from the far ends of the world! And when they meet Him, they know, beyond the logic of reason, they have reached home. The true knower within, experiences the truth that is Sri Sathya Sai Baba, just as a child instinctively understands and enjoys the love of a nurturing mother.

It was in the year 1970, that the Lord made the call and Beuno Wesener could not resist the pull. He was by then, a young German spiritual seeker, travelling all over India in search of the Fountain of Life. Going down the memory lane, Beuno recalls how he was attracted to the Divine Magnet that is Sai.

“Even if you do not plan to come to Swami, He will reach out for you. I was walking across the market in Bangalore, when all of a sudden an Indian man came up to me and said, ‘You have to go and see Sai Baba’. I was not really interested to go to another ashram as I had already visited a few during my travels throughout India. Somehow I changed my plans and instead of going to Madras (Chennai), I thought of hitchhiking to Hyderabad and up to Calcutta. On my way to Hyderabad, an American couple with a VW-bus stopped on the road, they opened the door and there was this huge picture of Swami. They told me, that they are going to see Sathya Sai Baba in Puttaparthi for the festival of Shivaratri. Since I had no other plans I took that ride. When we reached Puttaparthi, there was already a huge crowd. At that time, there was no accommodation for many pilgrims, so everybody stayed outside under trees, in tents, in cars, etc. After the Shivaratri festival was over, Swami called all the young westerners, who had been drawn to Him, for an interview. After this first interaction, I knew somehow that there was nowhere to travel anymore, I had found my destination and so I stayed on for two more years.”

The Small Seed Grows into a Sapling...

It is indeed a marvel that today the phenomenal German Sathya Sai movement began with a handful of people gathering in an obscure place in Nuremberg, a town in Southern Germany, to sing Bhajans and to share experiences regarding Sai Baba. And who can understand the Lord's ways or tell the mysteries of His mighty operations? This was the story of how the tiny seed grew into the proverbial tree of God's Kingdom.

Later in 1976, Beuno Wesner, who was among this handful of people, set up the first German Sathya Sai Centre in Nuremberg, after he returned from the Second World Conference of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation in 1975, held at Puttaparthi. Beuno was one of the very few European participants.

And this was the beginning of the multiplication of Sai centres in Germany. Soon after setting up the Nuremberg Sathya Sai Centre in 1976, the Berlin, Bonn, and Munich centres followed in 1978. In the North of Germany, Hamburg was the first city to hold regular meetings for singing and dissemination of information about Sathya Sai Baba. In the early 1980s, Bremen and Kiel followed.

The Second World Conference and especially the Third World Conference in 1980, gave strong impetus to the small Sai movement in Germany. These conferences provided guidelines for setting up international co-operation between Germany, Italy, Holland and Belgium. In 1980, these countries became allied to the "*European Coordinating Committee*" and two European Meetings were held in 1980 and 1981.

Germany... Graciously United by Sai

It is the Lord Himself who ignites a prayer in the hearts of His devotees just to rush to the needs of many, who are under the burden of the yoke. Through a connection of coincidences, what we now know as "Saincidences", He plays His game of Love. Beuno was one of the three German delegates from Nuremberg, Bonn and Berlin, attending the Third World Conference in 1980. Beuno recalls how the Lord answered the unspoken prayers of many Germans through a 'game of garlands'.

"During this conference, on Swami's 55th birthday, I was allowed to offer Swami a garland on behalf of Germany. This was a strange thing for me because I had to find one outside the market. After searching and buying one, I went back to my room where I took the chance to have a closer look at it. I then found it was rather too small to be put around Swami's neck. So I went again to get a second one and made one big one of the two.

"Then, when the holy moment of offering the garland to the Divine Teacher arrived, a strong thought took over my mind: 'Practically these are two garlands, so let this be a symbol of the two German States.' But when I put the united garland around Swami's neck, it opened at the down end! I felt very awkward about it, but Swami in His Grace took it and made it whole again. I was overwhelmed and thought: 'He is uniting the two States.' This gave me the feeling that everything is in order in His Hands."

And so it was! After nine years, the walls of division came tumbling-down with the unification of Germany in the following years. What is it that the Lord cannot do? We pray to Him to break the walls of ego that separates us from our true Self and make us enemies of one another. This is the real wall that builds the fences of division and hate, and when this wall collapses, humanity will live under one roof, in the harmony of one family of God.

The Rome Sathya Sai Conference

The German devotees knew that the real walls that separate us are inside. They are the walls of ego, jealousy, anger, lust, greed and attachment. The Sai Movement in Germany therefore directed its efforts towards breaking these inner obstacles. In 1983, many German devotees attended the first conference of the European Sathya Sai Organisation with the theme: "Unity is Divinity, Purity is Enlightenment" which took place in Rome. The multi-national participants worked on the different aspects of finding unity both in oneself and in the community. Participating in the conferences and establishing international ties had a deep impact on Germany. Groups and centres were set up, and regional and national weekend seminars and retreats were organised in all parts of the country.

In 1982, the German Sathya Sai Association was founded as a legal body to co-ordinate the development and to publish all audio, visual and text materials on Sathya Sai Baba and His teachings; distribution of books, films and cassettes became much easier. In the same year the Munich Centre started publishing "Sathya Sai Letters", a quarterly journal forming the basic information platform for the German speaking countries of Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

From the very beginning of the German Sathya Sai Association, the late Gen. Bernhard Gruber served to spread Swami's teachings and supported Sai groups and centres within Germany and Northern Europe as Central Coordinator.

Waltraut Gruber relates how Swami drew her and her husband Bernhard Gruber to His Divine Lotus Feet more than 25 years ago.

"In the spring of 1981, Bernhard and I were travelling by car through the west of the USA. At the end of this travel, in Arizona, we planned to drive from Phoenix to Tucson through the blossoming desert, and if time permitting, to see a German-American lady to deliver greetings from a friend in Germany. We finally visited this woman and it happened that she was a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba. This was the first time we were in the home of a devotee. Wherever our eyes turned, we saw pictures of Him in all sizes and postures hanging on the walls. The waves of energy we experienced, when she was telling us stories about Him from her heart, touched us more than what we felt when we had partially read a book about Him the previous year. The joy in my heart made me exclaim: 'Ah, I would very much love to go there, I must experience this!' I looked at Bernhard questioningly and he said: 'If Baba is this Omni-present, All-Knowing Power then it is superfluous to travel to India, because He would be present everywhere'. Hardly had he spoken these words when he quickly and excitedly lifted his two palms to his face and exclaimed: 'What is this? What is this? What smell is this?' We at once felt the smell and confirmed it was the smell of vibhuti. So Sai Baba reassured His Omni-Presence and Power, and that this Power has incarnated in a Human Form in South India.

"Our final destination on this trip was Washington D.C. It was in front of a small book store that we thought of buying something to read during the flight. Upon entering the shop, we found Baba looking at us from many of His photos. There, on the shelves were many books on Him as well as bhajan-cassettes and copies of His discourses. I had no time to browse and select judiciously, so I just hurriedly grabbed a copy of 'Summer Showers in Brindavan -1973'.

"During the flight, I read this compilation of Baba's Divine Discourses to His students during a four weeks' study course on the wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita, the timeless divine song that Lord Krishna sang to Arjuna 5000 years ago. These teachings filled a vacuum in me. I was touched by the possibility of a dialogue between God and Man. By the time the flight landed and we arrived at our destination, I felt a new peace had also dawned in me. The

chronology of events seemed to have been divinely orchestrated. They made my decision clear and I wanted to travel to this Teacher who held the prospect of bringing me into contact with esoteric knowledge. Four months later, in November 1981, we travelled to Baba for the first time.”

This was how the Lord chose and beckoned to Himself many devotees, one after the other, from this great Land. Each devotee's experience of being drawn to the Divine net of Sai is as unique and thrilling as any other. By sharing one another's experiences, through public meetings and through book fairs and other spiritual activities, they were able to spread His Message of Love.

Public Meetings and the International Book fair

The German Sai Movement spread like wild fire with the fire of Love lit in the hearts of devotees. Since 1985, there have been three Public Meetings presenting Sai Baba's teachings and work to a public audience.

The first one was held in Munich in the year 1985 entitled “My Life is My Message” and received considerable attention. Twenty years later, the second Public Meeting was held in Wiesbaden in 2005 under the theme “Sathya Sai Baba – His Life is His Message.” About 160 people attended the programme. The third Public Meeting in Berlin was held in 2007 with the spotlight on “Sathya Sai Baba – Teachings and Work.” 250 people attended the programme.

Since 1982, more than 120 books have been released on the works and teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The latest book released is based on the “Unity of Religions” which is the motto of the forthcoming national festival of the German Sathya Sai Organisation in the year 2009.

The International Book Fair is the world's largest fair in the field of publishing. In 2007, more than 285,000 visitors and 7,500 publishers attended the five-day event. For several years now, the Sathya Sai Organisation of Germany has been participating in the International Book Fair in Frankfurt / Main with its own exhibition booth. A huge banner on one side of the booth and a Power Point presentation on the other side attracted visitors from all works of life. Devotees who manned the booth handled queries and distributed information material on Sathya Sai Baba and His humanitarian projects as well as the German Sathya Sai Organisation. Many of the visitors to the fair interestingly were young adults who were new to Sathya Sai Baba's teachings.

The Blossoming of SSEHV in Germany

If our present day society is sick, the only elixir is Education in Human Values. If there is Divinity latent in the core of every human being, the only mine is Education in Human Values. If our world is to be born into the age of Divine Consciousness, the only midwife is this imbibing of the eternal Human Values. The German Sai movement saw this secret of the panacea to the world problem and took the bull by the horns. After its introduction in the year 1986

the Education in Human Values Programme became a major activity of the German Sathya Sai Movement. In the beginning, two seminars on the five Human Values were conducted in order to make the devotees acquainted with this aspect of Swami's teachings. More than 100 devotees attended both meetings.

A year later, in 1987, the first training for teachers of the Educare in Human Values took place, which was organised in those days by the Sathya Sai Organisation Europe Region 1. Later, Teacher Training Seminars were held regularly with an average of five seminars a year. So far nearly 250 teachers have received training on how to teach Human Values to Sai Devotees and their children as well as to adults and young minds outside the Organisation. Moreover, a strong team of teacher trainers in various parts of the country has been carrying out trainings and seminars.

Human Values Programme – The Powerful Panacea

The overwhelming impact of the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values on teachers at all levels cannot be quantified in any known terms. It was the missing essence in the whole system of western education which created a vacuum that made it like a body without a soul. The psychotherapist and SSEHV Teacher Trainer, Elisabeth Pongraz, from North Germany, describes how she found this missing essence when she discovered SSEHV. Recounting her story, she says:

“Since the time I went to school, I was always searching for an inner sense of purpose and the deeper truths about life. I therefore studied psychology and medicine to find answers. Like Dr. Sandweiss, I kept searching, learning different types of therapies without getting answers to my torturing questions. I often felt dissatisfied with my work as a psychotherapist.

“On Nov. 23rd 1986, mysterious circumstances led me to Swami and in 1987 I found myself at the Lotus Feet of the Lord.

“My private and professional situation changed immediately when I took part in an SSEHV weekend seminar for the first time in 1988 in the South of Germany.

“I listened to the inspiring lectures about the Five Human Values: Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-Violence, and was deeply touched. After the lectures, we were working in small workshop groups on the subjects of the lecture, in order to apply them to concrete life situations. The main difference of this group, compared to the groups I knew before, was that nobody demonstrated his or her feelings like I experienced in psychotherapy groups, something which had always left me emotionally agitated. Whatever anyone of the group said was important and valued as a precious contribution to the whole process.

“I was fascinated by the subjects and the atmosphere of love and compassion of the SSEHV meetings, and although twenty years have passed since this first weekend, I still remember a lot of things about this seminar, above all the non-judgemental love that each participant displayed. I could open my heart and it was filled with peace and joy. The knowledge that was shared there and the way the proceedings were conducted struck a deep cord in my heart different from anything I had experienced before. At the end of the meeting,

when all the small groups and especially these wonderful children of all age-groups presented their experiences in the plenum, I felt an overwhelming energy of uniting love. This feeling was so strong that I could not stop the tears rolling down my face. I knew at that very moment that I had found what my soul had always been searching for.

SSEHV – Destroying the Root of All Addictions

“My work in the hospital for drug addicts has also changed because of the experiences I had in the SSEHV meetings and by introducing the Human Values into the therapeutic sessions.

“There was one patient I will never forget. He was suffering from severe depression and had been treated several times in a psychiatric hospital. He blamed his wife for the death of his little dog that he had loved like his own child. As a result, he had a lot of repressions and hatred against her, and had not spoken to her for three years. In addition, he had become an alcoholic.

“This man was in my therapy sessions and I taught him about the values of love and forgiveness. I asked him to talk to his wife during Christmas. He was convinced he could not do that because of the block inside himself. After Christmas, he told me that he had tried several times to speak to her, but he did not succeed. On Christmas Eve, he remembered the song of one of the values I had often sung with the group. It was: “I Have Joy in My Heart...” First he was singing this song in his heart, and then with a low voice, he began to sing it to his wife. That broke the spell of anger and silence, and suddenly he was able to ask his wife for forgiveness for the long years he had been hard and unkind to her.

“After this experience, I was fully convinced that now I could sow these seeds of values into young human hearts - seeds which are so immeasurably valuable and which have changed my life, which was earlier full of conflicts, fear, negative feelings and insecurity.

“I could communicate that there is a spiritual world behind the visible world which has special rules that govern our human existence; it is beyond science. If we are aware of them they give us a sense in life - they give truth, and joy, and inner peace; but if we disregard them, disease and pain follow. I could tell my patients many examples of problems and confusion in my own life which I had dissolved completely, after I followed the spiritual rules. The example of my own transformation made them more eager to imbibe the Human Values that I taught them.

“Truly, I think the five Human Values and the combined methods to teach them - which Swami has given us anew - are absorbed so easily because every soul, like my own, recognizes that it is this which everyone has been looking for ages in the outside world, utterly in vain - often consuming alcohol and drugs out of ignorance.

The Scintillating Story of Sathya

The children are the main focus of the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values programme in the German Sai Organisation. And so, various classes for youth and children are offered. Classes for children started in 1989 and have

been offered by well-trained teachers at various centres and groups all over the country.

Gisela Sebastian is one of the experienced Bal Vikas teachers from the Munich Centre. In 1995 she was involved in preparing the children for a drama presentation in the Divine presence of Swami. She shares with us her exhilarating experiences in this subtle process of heart transformation which took her through planes of joy and agony, struggles and perseverance, patience and determination.

"There are many examples of how the children went through the change, but I remember one story in particular in which the child's transformation went hand in hand with my own, so to speak.

*"It happened 12 years ago while we were preparing to stage another play with our Bal Vikas group for Prashanti Nilayam. The play was entitled: **"We Shall Overcome."** That, however, was not only the theme of our drama but also, as it soon turned out, the play of our transformation process - the drama within the drama, as it were.*

"We needed a total of 60 children. At the first rehearsal we had a few new children. Two young boys immediately attracted my attention when they walked in: Sathya, 6 years of age, and Dominique, his older brother, age 11. Both came from the countryside and had a very healthy appearance, just like two pranksters with blue eyes, red chubby cheeks, short, blond, shaggy hair and very lively eyes. Both of them had an especially loveable air about them.

"Everything went quite well at the casting. In the end, however, two boys wanted to play the leading role of 'Victory', the hero, one of them being Dominique. I could not decide whom I should cast for this role, so I sat down in front of the altar and prayed to Swami, so that He may show me whom He would want to have in that role. The answer was obvious: Dominique. I saw him clearly in my mind's eye surrounded in beautiful light. It was good that at that point in time, I had no idea what was in store for me.

"When all roles were satisfactorily cast, I suddenly realized that one role was left: the part of Baba! That was the main role in the piece. But not one child was left without a role. In addition, none of them really dared to play Baba. I had to sleep over it. During meditation I thought that the little 6-year old named Sathya would be perfect. After all, he already bore the name 'Sathya'. And he was charming. However, I did not want to take away from him the role he had chosen for himself. So I gave him a call to explain my predicament. I requested him to please ask Swami to come to him in a dream and let him know which role he should play.

"The next day Sathya called me early in the morning and told me earnestly that Baba actually did appear to him in a dream, just as we had discussed,

and clearly told him that he should play Baba! I was deeply touched and speechless! That gave me the secure feeling that Swami would be guiding us.

Until the Child Gives in to the Values...

"Now the work and the processes began. Dominique turned out to be a real acid test for me. He was supposed to play Victory, the hero, but behaved quite to the contrary. Dominique literally refused to cooperate and didn't learn his lines. Most of the time, he would just be standing aloof - motionless and smirking. He made me livid and distressed during the rehearsals. His parents also were desperate and often complained that he refused to cooperate at home as well. We were always having emergency meetings, either with his parents or with him alone. Whenever I was alone with him, he would listen patiently and make promises to change. But no sooner did he get back on the stage, than he became the difficult boy again.

"Time passed and nothing changed. I was truly in despair - at my wit's end. I then got to the point where I could no longer take responsibility for what was happening, so I decided to give the role to a different boy. Time was running out and we soon would be leaving for Prashanti. A different boy was willing to play the role and had already learned the part. Everything was set. I only had to let Dominique know.

"Dominique felt what was coming, and as I took him aside, I saw two big, sad eyes looking at me. I could not bring myself to tell him to his face what I had decided. There was an unspoken plead in his eyes which went: 'Please don't do it, believe in me, please don't give up on me, I want to do it but I need your help, I need you to trust in me'.

"I explained the difficult situation we were in and asked him what he thought we should do. He said he wanted to play the role! Okay, I decided to give him a last chance.

"By the next rehearsal he knew his role by heart! That was the first breakthrough. He also started getting deeper into the role and was becoming, as you could already now guess, a beaming, powerful Dominique and a wonderful Victory. However, the unruly, stubborn Dominique had not completely disappeared and continued to disturb the rehearsals. Never in my 20 years of Bal Vikas teaching had I encountered a child as challenging as him, always testing me to the limit.

SSEHV – Building the Foundation of Self-Confidence

"Now let's turn to Sathya. While I was being put to the acid test with Victory, there was Sathya who was developing more and more into the real Swami, and who was there to back me up in every situation. Whenever he felt that I was having a hard time, or feeling distraught, he would come to me, give me a big hug and say: 'I love you so much'. And that happened quite often. I often had the feeling that Swami was giving me a hug and comforting me, and assuring me of His Presence.

“Sathya was truly a positively charming child. He was always full of love, no matter what the situation was. Through the many demands of the rehearsals, he never complained. Instead he was always inspiring and true to the role he was playing. As such, I did not have to teach him much. He moved so authentically in the role of Swami that we all had tears in our eyes whenever it was his turn to perform during rehearsals. You could have heard a pin drop in the room. Swami’s Presence and love poured forth through him. The rehearsals were an emotional roller coaster ride, from the sweetest love to stubborn disobedience, the carrot and the stick.”

Sai - The Author, Actor and Motivator of EHV

“The trip to India and nine unforgettable days of rehearsal followed in Prashanti Nilayam in the Poomachandra hall. Swami came to every rehearsal. He was interested in everything and attended to all matters in the greatest details, going as far as to select the colour for the children's lipstick. He corrected us and gave us important pointers at the rehearsals.

“During this period the children were being tested beyond their endurance levels on the one hand. On the other hand, they were being showered with Swami's love and affection. Many of them were in India for the first time and were being challenged by the high heat, getting up early and different food. Everywhere, whether at mealtime or anywhere else, there was some inconvenience involved. Before and during Darshan they were required to sit still for long periods of time. Three rehearsals per day were especially exhausting... then one by one all the children got sick. There was not one single moment of rest. Nevertheless they all hung in there, letting themselves in for adventure.

“However, during rehearsals, Swami paid a lot of attention to the children, and He had a great time with them, especially with Sathya. He spoke with him often and it was a pleasure to witness little Swami and big Swami talking to each other. Whenever Swami came to watch us practice we took a break so that we could talk to Him. Sathya, however, whenever it was his turn, continued to practice his role until he was done with his part. He would allow no interruptions, not even when Swami came. Swami then stood smilingly beside him, or observantly behind him, and waited until Sathya finished. Sometimes He would motion the same way with His hand as little Sathya did. It was simply unbelievable how this little boy could play Swami!

“Swami put Sathya to the test as well. Once, for example, Swami gave us all Prasad, but did not give any to Sathya. I felt bad because actually if anyone truly deserved it, it was him. Later I went over to Sathya and offered him my Prasad to console him, but he didn't take it and simply smiled lovingly. He was overjoyed and said Swami loved him so much and that was more than enough. I don't know if I would have been so overjoyed.

“On another occasion I did not receive Prasad. Sathya took notice thereof and immediately came over to me and insisted I take his. But I did not want to do that because I had learned from him after all, how one should deal with such situations. However, Sathya insisted and in the end we decided to share his Prasad.

“Swami often joked around with us, with Sathya too. One time He placed a handcrafted cow's head on him and put us all in a really embarrassing situation because he asked us to tell him what kind of cow it was. Swami laughed after we had named all the types of cows we could think of. Then He humorously informed us that it was a New Zealand cow which we never would have thought of. It was great the way Sathya interacted with Swami. He always knew how to behave, in a dignified and composed manner.

“Working with Dominique was still not always easy, but one could feel that he was now more ready to fight, to give his all and fit in. By preparing for and rehearsing this play, we had profound encounters with Swami which strengthened the children's positive character traits. One could not help but notice that the character of Victory was slowly maturing in Dominique due to the presence of the Supreme.

“At the morning rehearsal, on the day of the performance, everything escalated. Half of the children were sick and nothing was going right. Everyone was tense, nervous, and afraid that we would not make the grade, and would flop in front of Swami and the audience.

“Then Swami came to attend the rehearsal. I was so distraught that I fell before Him on my knees and pleaded with Him to help. Swami stood majestically before me and said in a loud voice: “Don't worry, I will help”. In that declaration lay my salvation. Instantly, all my worries were gone and I realized that it was Swami who is in charge. He had everything under control and it was His “drama”. Swami then asked me how the sick children were doing and materialized Vibhuti. Now I was sure that all would go well. We are only His instruments. He is the Motivator, the Director, and the true Actor. Soon, all the children were healthy again in time for the performance.

SSEHV, the Victory of Divinity

“The programme was a heavenly delight. Everyone performed well and Victory was simply fantastic; he had made his breakthrough. Not only did he act wonderfully, it was as if he really had turned into Victory. He did so well and was convincing as never before. I could feel he had penetrated the wall known as the ego; he was the winner. All his might and strength of soul came through, I could have cried in gratitude and joy - my Victory had made it.

“Sathya became so one with Swami, and completely infused by His energy that one forgot that it was a play. The audience in Poornachandra was deeply moved to absolute silence whenever Sathya appeared on stage. It seemed everyone had tears in their eyes because we all sensed that Swami was sharing His own childhood with us through Sathya - adorable little Sathya - a child himself who fascinated and enchanted us with his incredibly wonderful divine love.

“At the end of the presentation, when Swami came on stage to take a picture with the children, He went straight over to Sathya and materialized a golden medallion for him. He took His time hanging it around Sathya's neck. Then Sathya knelt down and humbly touched Swami's feet in a dignified manner. Swami put His arm around him and had their picture taken. The Lord shone like a thousand Suns, and so did Sathya. It was a sight for the Gods to behold.

"The applause by the audience was indescribable and seemed to go on forever. Everyone felt that this encounter between the two Babas was extraordinary. While the saris and scarves were being handed out to all the children, Swami leaned on Victory who was down on his knees and praised him lovingly: "Very happy". Victory also shone with joy as never before in his life.

"We had passed the acid test; everyone was happy. Backstage Swami talked to us for quite a while, and highly lauded us. What a joy it was to make God Happy!

Living the Human Values... the Acid Tests

"The next day we were invited to Swami's Primary School. The Principal showed us around all the classes, introducing Victory and Sathya to everyone. The Principal spent a lot of time with us and talked quite a bit with Victory, in particular. She asked him a lot of questions. At the end of our visit, her mood became serious as she looked Dominique directly in the eye and challenged him to promise with a handshake that he would live Victory during his lifetime. She extended her hand and waited for him to take the pledge. It took a while, then suddenly everything got very quiet in the room. In a resolute voice Dominique said aloud as he put forth his hand: "Yes, I promise!". That was a holy promise. We all felt it!

"Dominique's acid test was not only for him to be convincing in his role as Victory, but also to become the real Victory during his lifetime and free himself of his inhibitions, recalcitrance and mental blocks in order to be able to tap his true inner power and strength, and to accept his task in life with all its challenges.

"My acid test as a Bal Vikas teacher was to learn to believe unconditionally in the values hidden deep within the child, and not to be fooled or distracted by the overlying layers of the ego. This means, never to give up on a child, but rather, simply to continue on the path and under all circumstances believe in the good of the child. This means to be willing to go with the child through fire and water.

"And Sathya? What was his task? He was the perfect instrument for Swami's wonderful love. Swami showed us through Sathya that love is the greatest victory, for love is stronger than anything else, and only through love, can we triumph.

Whatever became of these two wonderful spirits, you may wonder?

Dominique is now a splendid, strong young man who has taken on and accepted the challenges of life. Nothing is left of the inhibited, smirking, self-conscious, recalcitrant Dominique. He left these traits by the wayside. He will be getting married soon and has a successful company in the field of media design. And now, he is a helpful, loving, open, competent, dedicated and positive person.

"Sathya still has a wonderful, loving way about him, although he is more calm and introverted. He is of a pure character and very dutiful. He is planning to

become a doctor and will begin his studies soon. What other profession would have suited him better!

"Whenever I meet up with these two young men, I am simply so proud of my Sai boys, just as a mother would be proud of her two well-mannered sons. I am deeply grateful to Swami for this unforgettable, divine journey of transformation."

Sathya, now a youth of 18, looks back and shares the overwhelming impact that the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values has had in his life. He recalls:

"When I close my eyes today, 12 years later, and look back, I am constantly reminded of the great gift I was given. The play "We Shall Overcome," an experience which resulted in transformation, together with my parental upbringing, formed the spiritual foundation for my life. The numerous rehearsals and meetings we had during the preparatory phase taught me many important values which have been of great help to me along the path of life.

"Somehow at that moment when I went on stage before thousands of people, my mind became empty of thought. My actions simply flowed as a result of my total surrender and trust in Swami. This is also how I view life. Life flows like a river as it paves its way. It overcomes every single obstacle and does not stop flowing. Even the largest dam is too small at some point to restrain the river's happy flow. If one lives continuously trusting in God and is always aware of the fact that there is always a solution, then there is nothing which can cloud the joy of living, for inner and true joy cannot be found in material things or having set ideas. True joy comes solely from the bliss of being alive. I personally developed this perspective from "We Shall Overcome" and my upbringing. And most people who have characterized me up to now have always begun by mentioning my cheerfulness."

Sai Summer Showers in Germany

Students of Bhagavan Baba joyfully recall the bliss of their spiritual adventures with their Beloved Lord at His Home in Brindavan every summer. That is when Swami showers upon them the attention of a thousand Fathers, the Love of a million Mothers, and the guidance of the Eternal Teacher during the annual "Summer Course on Indian Culture and Spirituality" at the start of His University's academic calendar. The German Sai movement took the signal from the Divine Master knowing fully well that all students are Swami's property. Hence, since 1989 the educational highlight of the German Sai movement every year has been the Annual National Sai Children's Camp similarly called "Summer Course", which takes place regularly during July/August. Usually there are more than 80 participants - mainly children of age seven to twelve years - hailing from all over the country. These camps take place at beautifully situated youth hostels in the countryside.

Besides the daily sessions of prayers, meditation and group singing, various group activities are offered to different age-groups. These include modelling with clay, painting, sports, picnics, and plays in the middle of nature. Storytelling and dramatics are also part of the programme.

The educational activities not only apply to the numerous Sathya Sai devotees in the country but also to those public and private school teachers

who are interested in the unique Sathya Sai Teachings in education and spirituality. Once a year, a meeting is held to exchange views and find ways to utilize the contents and techniques of Sathya Sai Educare at public schools. For German speaking countries, yet another yearly meeting provides a platform for professional teachers of all fields to learn from each other and develop ways to implement human values in different curricula.

The Boundless Expanse of Spirituality

Who can prescribe a limit to the ocean of Love in the human heart or can the wing of the wind tell the movement of the spirit? For our souls, says St. Augustine, are restless until they rest in God. This is the sole goal of life: the realisation of our Divinity. The spiritual wing of the German Sai Organisation has put in place spiritual programmes aimed at harnessing the ocean of Love within the human heart and channelling the direction of the spirit towards the Supreme Soul.

In the summer of 2000, during the occasion of Swami's 75th birthday, a unique, first All-German Convention entitled "Unity is Divinity" was held for four days in Potsdam, near Berlin, the German Capital. On the occasion of His special Birthday, the German Sathya Sai Organisation took the opportunity to publicly thank Lord Sathya Sai Baba for the historic and harmonious unification of the two German States in 1990.

The goal of this meeting was to get a deeper understanding of how the five Human Values were realised and expressed in the six major religions. The conference had been prepared for nearly one year in advance. Each region had to work on one religion and to clarify how the values were implemented in that specific religion. Members of centres and groups formed organisational teams who were responsible for collecting and providing materials as well as planning and conducting the workshops. More than 450 people attended the conference.

The results of the regional preparatory workshops were presented in interactive and artistic performances. During the two and half days of the convention, the praise of the Lord was bountiful: Swami's Love and Spirit radiated through His devotees and charged the rather sceptic environment of Potsdam into an aura of bliss and beatitude. Some of the highlights of this creative programme included:

- Gautama Buddha's life journey
- The manifold walks of the Jewish people into slavery
- Singing and praying
- Breaking the Sabbath bread amongst 450 devotees with Rabbi Arie Hirschfeld from New York, USA
- A fire ceremony for Ahura Mazda (name of God in Zoroastrianism)

- A heart-warming Bal Vikas performance of St. Francis' taming the wolf by love
- The famous dialogue of the so called "Ring-Parabel" between Nathan, the Wise Jew and his Muslim king, written by the German classic-writer G. E. Lessing, centered on the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam
- A classroom scene of a Muslim teacher and his students

In the workshop on Christianity, some devotees shared their experiences of living with their faith in Christ during the time of communist suppression in Eastern Germany. The soul praises of 450 voices filled the atmosphere. Swami blessed all with sunshine, an abundance of garden flowers and organic food.

Spirituality in Art and Culture

Who is the One who painted the many colours of the rainbow hewn in the beauty of the evening setting sun? Who is the One who adorned the lilies of the field with brushes of unspoken splendour in the language of fragrance? Who is the One who taught the birds of heaven how to sing the chorus of the angelic host? Indeed the Glory of the Lord has been carved in His Creation. The human heart is truly the Art of God. And Spirituality is the Art of seeing God painted in His Creation. And to make this "Art" a way of life is what we call "Culture". To bring out the integral truth between Spirituality, Art and Culture, the Spiritual Wing of the German Sathya Sai movement has organised a number of cultural Art festivals.

In 2004 one such festival was conducted in Cologne with the theme: "Sai Art Festival". More than 550 German devotees came to participate in this cultural festival which took place from August 5 till 8. This Art Festival has been motivated by Sathya Sai Baba's recommendation given to the audience at the inauguration discourse of the Sathya Sai Music Academy during the 7th World Conference in 2000 that "Sai Seva by Art and Culture should be the new dimension in Sai Centres."

The motto of the festival "Divinity in the Arts" attracted devotee artists from all over the country to hold numerous workshops and give performances in Fine Arts, Music, Drama, Literature, and more.

During the festival, an exhibition of paintings was displayed in every corner of the beautifully decorated venue. The prominent colours resembled the colours of Prasanthi Nilayam. The cultural programme included a guided tour to the world famous Gothic Cathedral of Cologne.

Among the many presentations of the festival, there was a play entitled "My Life is My Message", performed by Bal Vikas Children. The play depicted scenes from Bhagavan's life as a child.

The evening programme featured two musical highlights. One was a multi-media show on "All Religions" with songs of devotion in different languages from all over the world. The second was an inspiring concert by the Bhajan

Group “Danish Divine Light” from Denmark. This was very well appreciated by a large audience.

Finally, the youth launched a musical drama which was composed and written by them. The play dealt with the everyday-situation of young people in big cities in western countries and how they, by Swami’s teachings, are enabled to tackle difficult situations and stick to human values.

This Sai Art Festival was not only meant for the members of the German Sai Family. The afternoon and evening programmes were open for the public. Due to the wide range of programmes, the participants had to choose between several simultaneous sessions. The public was cordially welcomed and had the opportunity to get information on Sai Baba and His work reflecting His love for humanity.

The four-days-long festival came to an end with a marvellous memento of Sai’s Divine Art. This was a postcard of a gazelle, woven personally by Swami from a palm leaf in the early 1950’s. The original of Swami’s gazelle was a special loan from the grandson of the late Professor N. Kasturi.

In her valedictory speech, the then National Coordinator, Mrs. Gabriele Goebel, said that the cultural event would be an inspiring example for all German centres to adopt Art and Culture as a means to foster Sai Seva at all levels in the country.

The Healing Power of Selfless Service

“I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found a way to serve,” said Albert Schweitzer, a German born philosopher who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953 for his philosophy of “Reverence for Life.”

It might be asked: what is it that makes someone literally jump out of their skin to give up comfort and time, wealth and energy, to bring peace and succour to another who may be totally unrelated by the human ties of country, caste, colour, creed and culture? This secret is the joy of Pure Love. With this Power, Sai Baba transforms His devotees and makes them instruments of Selfless Service for the multiplication of His Love throughout the world. It is this fire of pure, selfless and unconditional Love that has led devotees of the Sathya Sai Organisation to engage in heart-thrilling service, be it in the war torn Yugoslavia, or in the neighbouring countries of Russia, Bosnia and Poland, or on the streets of Germany - or in any place a call for help is heard.

In the initial years of the Sathya Sai Organisation in Germany, **seva** or service activities were organised by individual devotees and small groups that gathered to provide ad-hoc seva to people in need.

The First European Seva Project

The first major seva project was organised during the years 1991 till 1995. Led by the Austrian Sathya Sai Organisation, its main purpose was to help alleviate the suffering of the people in former Yugoslavia, an area struck by civil war.

A big service network was set up in close contact with the Sathya Sai Organisation in Croatia and later Bosnia. Under the motto: **“From Heart to Heart – from Hand to Hand”** nine European countries, including Germany, participated intensively in this effort. Materials were collected and then despatched by train, truck and private transport to the bigger cities of Zagreb and Osjek. From there, they were further distributed by local devotees to refugees and the suffering population. In Germany, the bigger centres organised “Train Wagon Projects” for Easter and Christmas. Devotees contributed food, clothes, medicines, hygiene products, household articles, school materials, toys, bicycles, seeds, furniture, construction materials, seeds, etc. The final day of loading the wagons always turned out to be like a family festival. Lovingly and colourfully packed parcels were added and everything was stowed carefully and systematically into the enormous train wagons. This was done with joyous hearts and lots of singing. Everyone was happy to be given this opportunity to help brothers and sisters in need.

“Through this project we were able to help in alleviating the suffering of war-torn areas and at the same time, experience the joy of service ourselves,” remarked one of the participants.

Setting up Weekend Training Seminars

Germans continued to send the lorries even after the project was officially stopped in 1995. Necessity had forced the German Sathya Sai Organisation to intensify co-operation among centres for the massive Croatian Project. At the same time, the organisation was able to reach out to devotees who experienced the joy and self-satisfaction through serving these communities. This joy gave rise to the desire to know more about the teachings of Sai Baba.

Consequently, since 1995, weekend seminars were held exclusively for Seva Coordinators twice a year. They facilitated an extensive exchange of ideas on common tasks and challenges that the various groups and centres faced. Such seminars led to a deeper understanding of the goals and subjects of seva or service, and last but not the least, they helped in developing a common vision for future projects in the Service Wing.

National Weekend Seminars were also organised for special topics like selfless service with handicapped, old or homeless people.

This training functioned as the impetus to start a lot of projects in which groups of members spread out into the cities to help needy people, and to provide them with all they could not get from the state: respect and care, time and appreciation, understanding and love.

The development of the 1990s gave a stronger relevance to the German Seva Wing on national and regional level. Around the year 2000, there were twenty-two Group Seva Projects being carried out by thirteen centres and eleven groups.

For Swami's 75th birthday the groups and centres edited a book on German service projects and personal transformation. One centre summarized its transformation in these words:

"We get more and more united by this group service experience. Overcoming difficulties in community strengthens every one of us and the group as a whole; our trust in Swami steadily grows; everyone experiences a growth of self-confidence; the children learn - together with their parents and the Sai group. Through unity of thought, word and deed, they strengthen their character. The practising of Sadhana in the group transforms every single individual; our patience, our compassion, our love-capacity is enlarged; we learn to see God in everyone and serve selflessly."

National Group Seva in Prashanti Nilayam

In the year 2003, after a full year's preparation in study circles, 130 devotees from Germany made a two weeks' group pilgrimage entitled "Unity in Seva" to Prashanti Nilayam. The majority of the participants took up work in the kitchen of the Western Canteen. The rest of the group served in the Chaitanya Jyoti Museum. On August 8th, Swami blessed the group with the divine opportunity to sing in His presence. One devotee sums up their experiences in these words:

"We experienced how singing and serving go together, one supporting the other to lead us into unity. Singing while working in the kitchen taught us to dedicate all activity to God and surrender to Him."

Sai Medical Camps

Since 2005, small groups of German devotees have taken part in Medical Camps in the neighbouring countries east of the German borders. These countries include Russia, Bosnia and Poland. The divine opportunities of serving gave these devotees a practical experience in spirituality. First, there was this inner process of letting go the barriers of altruism. Will I be able to serve under circumstances of increased hardships? Will my physical and emotional strength carry me through? What will happen to my loved ones if I face the risk of death? This inner churning of doubts and insecurity finally lead the devotees to a state of trust and surrender to the Lord's assurance: "Why fear when I am here?"

The devotees were welcomed with extreme joy by the local devotee groups once they arrived at their respective countries. In the case of Russia, a group of devotees travelled, about one year in advance, to make preparations before the real camp. This pre-visit made the Medical camp very smooth and efficient.

In spite of the primary aim of a Medical Camp being to provide efficient medical care to those in need, there was also a place for people who wanted to serve in other ways like renovation, cleaning, kitchen work, lessons and games for the children or through musical contributions and sharing joy. In

this way, those who did not have a medical background too joined in the "Sai Family Service".

Also, the coming together of the Germans with the Russian people was clearly experienced as a contribution to a deep personal and national reconciliation-process of two peoples that had suffered immensely in the terrible Second World War with all its consequences for coming generations. It was everyone's experience that the past can only be healed by Swami's Love in Action - being together under Swami's loving guidance, working in harmony, singing in unison, serving the most needy and sharing resources, and at times confessing what had happened during the time of war. This realisation was the greatest blessing of the group which was beyond expression.

A few of the touching experiences of some devotees who participated in these medical camps might help to bring out the depths of love that is shared in selfless service.

Healing the Past

"The Russian patients were very loving to us Germans. Sometimes the older people talked about incidents of the Second World War. Then everyone would become very quiet and we would have tears in our eyes." Oliver and I were given the task of giving oil massages to so many small children and elderly people. In this way we could allow our love to flow through our hands. Some came twice or three times. And each time they came, the smile on their face was broader.

"Very often understanding was only by heart to heart or loving eye to eye contact. I believe we were given the grace to become messengers of the healing of old wounds between Germany and Russia. While serving, I was often having the feeling of being in a cathedral, so quiet and sublime was the elevating service to the patients. Deep in my heart I knew very well that this service was a great gift of Swami to me. This filled me with gratefulness. Several times I heard the sentence: 'Prashanti Nilayam is here'. And so it really was. Swami is always present wherever we share His love through Selfless Service.

"Elisabeth had to massage the eighty year old mother of the volunteer car driver. During one of the trips he told us that up to now his mother had not been able to forgive 'the Germans' because they had killed her father when she was six years old. Now he was very happy because his mother had found peace and that we were friends. We were rendered speechless. Afterwards, Gregory told us that he had an interview with Swami and inside the room there was a German and a Russian group. Baba told them during their interaction that it was very important that the Russians and Germans come together."

National Service Project to Honour Mother Earth

It was German-born Albert Einstein who said, "When I read the Bhagavad-Gita and reflect about how God created this universe everything else seems so superfluous."

In the year 2005, a national project themed “Our Service on Earth, for the Earth and with the Earth” was set up to find the relationship between the five elements and the five values. Each of the five German regions focussed on one of the five elements and its respective value. Many study circles worked on the elements developing various creative seva or service ideas. Regional and local projects were put into practise and activities were manifold: clearing away garbage; praying and singing outdoors for the elements and the earth; light meditation for the elements; cleaning of specially contaminated places in nature and in cities through the prayer and mantra recitation; service in animal shelters, and so on.

One young adult participant, who served in a protected nature resort, says, *“During these three days, we cleaned the slopes covered with trees and bushes along the canoe trail. There is much water here and nature is mainly untouched, in spite of some trails being carelessly used as rubbish dumps. In the approximately 500 meters’ long area, we found broken pieces of pottery, toilet bowls, rubber tyres, piles of glass, motors, iron scrap, batteries, asbestos pads, dishes, bricks and a lot of rubbish. We found it very invigorating when we had our accompanying study circles on the topic of service, silent sessions for connecting with Swami, and also communion through songs and prayers. Throughout the service we experienced the spirit of oneness and joy. Some of the participants reported that collecting garbage proved to be a physical expression of their internal cleansing.”*

Inspiring Upright German Youth

Long ago, the Holy Book of the Jewish and Christian religions posed the moral problem of all ages: “How can the young adhere to a life of moral uprightness?” (Psalm 119:9) This moral issue of the preservation of the pristine purity of youth has become even more critical in our modern world today which has put in place all that it takes to steal away the purity of the young; thanks to the misuse of the electronic media communications and the world wide net.

But after attending the third World Youth Conference under the motto “Ideal Sai Youth – Messengers of Sai Love” which took place in Prashanti Nilayam from July 26 to 28, 2007, in Baba’s Presence, the 55 German youth who attended the conference were infused with new vision and strength. They believed that it is indeed possible for the Youth to live an upright life.

In spring of 2007, a European pre-conference had been held in Berlin for the Youth of Zone 7 to prepare them with a comprehensive practical *Sadhana* programme.

In the German Youth Magazine “Blütezeit” No. 30 (“Blossom Time”) an organizational member of the Exhibition Team described what had happened to all and how initial resistance against the multi-point *Sadhana* Programme gave way to acceptance, prayer, renunciation and then a positive step by step improvement under Swami’s loving guidance:

“When I heard about the Sadhana Program, my first reaction was: ‘I won’t practice it! This is too difficult for me. I can never do it!’ Then, during the European Pre-Conference in Berlin we had a ceremony in which every one of us wrote his / her special form of Sadhana on a flower petal which later were put together at Swami’s Feet. With these petals we promised Swami to practice this chosen point of Sadhana up to the beginning of the Conference. This was a very special moment for me. If I promised something to Swami I really would have to do it. Now there was no way out for me! I could not run away any longer. He would be watching me all the time. Oh, I prayed to Swami, please help me do it! And He did come to my aid.”

“I realized the truth of the statement: When you go a step towards Swami He comes a hundred steps towards you. With Swami’s help everything is possible. He is the One who thinks, inspires and acts. It is a blessing to become His instrument.”

Today, the unified German nation looks forward to its future seeking its confidence in its great civilization. German children, youth and adults are charged in the Sai spirit of selfless love and service. Within the short span of just four decades, the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba have indeed made their way into the hearts of the Germans seeking a higher purpose in life.

Just as a tiny acorn holds the mighty oak tree within, a few chosen instruments of the Divine Mission let out the clarion call forty years ago that soon led other instruments to join the chorus, and today, the symphony of Sai rings in the land of Beethoven and Bach striking the chords of Love, Peace, Truth, Right Conduct and Non-violence. Now, the hearts of Germans resonate with the words of a fellow German, Immanuel Kant, who recognized much earlier that: “The human heart refuses to believe in a universe without purpose”. And the purpose is living up to this timeless injunction: “Love All Serve All – Help Ever Hurt Never,” unconditionally, spontaneously and perpetually.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part - 38

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT XII - SCENE 6

Head Master's room.

HEAD MASTER: [*pointing to his chair*] Sathyam, sit in that chair.

SATHYA: Sir, that is the teacher's chair. It is yours. A student must sit at the feet of the *Guru*!

HEAD MASTER: My boy, that is why I asked You to sit there! Though You are young in age, You are the *Guru* of all *Gurus*! We are *Gurus* only in this School whereas You are the *Guru* of the whole world!

The Head Master prostrates before Sathya and touches His Feet.

SATHYA: Master! What is this!

HEAD MASTER: If I touch Your Feet, my life will be sanctified!

SATHYA: What is this Master? Please get up.... Get up. What's all this?.....Listen, you are much older than Me. You shouldn't do such a thing.

HEAD MASTER: Devotion has nothing to do with age. There is Divinity in You – that is my firm faith and belief. That is why I have received this great and good fortune to worship You in this manner!

Sathya materialises Vibhuti and gives it to the Head Master.

HEAD MASTER: God's *Prasadam* (gift)!

SCENE 7

In the Shirdi Avatar, a man comes looking for his lost horse and Baba helps him. A very similar thing is about to happen now. A Muslim trader named Salim has lost his horse named Chandini. He is desperately looking for it along with two persons named Kadir and Kasim.

SALIM: Chandini, O my life Chandini!Chandini!.....Chandini!....

KADIR: I don't see it anywhere.

KASIM: I wonder where the horse has gone.

KADIR: Brother Salim, let's search there.

They go some distance and search there.

SALIM: Chandini, Chandini my horse!

KADIR: Chandini,..... where have you gone?

The search continues but it is futile.

SALIM: Three days have gone by and Chandini is not to be seen anywhere.

KADIR: Don't worry brother, don't worry. There is a Young Swami. When His master lost his pen, this Swami told the teacher where to find it. Let's go and ask Him.

SALIM: Young Swami?

KADIR: Yes. He can be found up there. [points in a direction]Come with me.

KASIM: He is usually up there, singing. ...Brother Kadir, look there, look! That is the boy, that is the Young Swami! Come, come, come. Kadirbhai, this is that boy, the Son of God, Bhagavan, this is that boy! Young Swami!This is the boy.....the Son of God!

The three come to Sathya and ask Him concerning the whereabouts of the lost horse Chandini.

SATHYA: Two hundred yards away to the north, there is a mango orchard. Your horse is grazing in that orchard. Go and look.

SALIM: Is that so Baba?

KADIR: Yes Baba. Thanks.

KASIM: Hurry, let's go and search there.

The three leave and go as directed by Sathya.

KADIR: Brother Salim, we will get back our horse, exactly like the boy said.

KASIM: This boy is no ordinary one; He is Divine, an Incarnation of Allah. The word of this Young Swami is not just an ordinary word, it is like the Vedas, and our Quran. Whatever this Young Swami says is true.

SALIM: If we get back our horse, I will offer my salutations to this Young Swami.

KADIR: Everything is Allah's Grace.

The three go some distance.

SALIM: Hey, which direction is north?

KADIR: The Sun rises this side; so that must be north. That's where the mango orchard must be!

KASIM: Come on, come, come.

The three enter the orchard.

SALIM: Chandini, Chandini,my Chandini,Chandini!

KASIM: Like the Young Swami said, Chandini must be somewhere here.

KADIR: I'll search there and you search here.Chandini!.....Hey brother Salim! I have found Chandini! ...O my life Chandini! Where did you disappear leaving me?

SALIM: You have found Chandini, exactly as the Young Swami said. That boy is truly a child of God!

Three Muslims pick up the horse

SALIM: Brother Kadir, we got back our horse Chandini. We must now go to the Young Swami and convey our gratitude. It is all due to the Grace of the Young Swami. He is no ordinary boy but a Divine one, an *Avatar* of Allah! ...The Young Swami is over there!

The three come again to Sathya

SALIM: Baba, Baba! I found my horse! I got back my horse Chandini!

KADIR: Baba, You are God!For us Baba, You are Allah! Baba, we got back Chandini exactly as You said..... That horse is our means of livelihood..... Our grateful thanks, Baba!

KASIM: Yes Baba, we got back our horse exactly as You said. Baba, You are really God! We can never forget Your good deed, Baba.

SALIM: Baba, You are really God! We got back the horse exactly as You said. You are the saviour of our family, Baba! We will never forget this great help. You really are God!

Sathya creates Vibhuti

KADIR: Baba has given *Prasaad*! Brother Salim, come and receive this *Prasaad* from Baba.....Baba! You really are God Baba, You really are!

ACT XIII - SCENE 1

Increasingly, people begin to feel that there is an extra-ordinary Divine power in Sathya. Some are ready to go even further and accept Him as the very Incarnation of the Lord. This scene shows some villagers seated under a tree and discussing Sathya.

AN OLD MAN: In temples and in holy places, I have personally heard fools and the learned alike say that Sathyam is a Divine child, and that there is Divinity in Him. The son of Pedda Venkapa Raju is not an ordinary boy.

ANOTHER MAN: God assumes human form in every age. For this age, Sathyam is that Form.

A SCHOLAR: As you have all seen, Sathyam is beyond caste and religions. He is the embodiment of equipoise, and the One who shows the Right Path. At a very young age, Sathyam has mastered the entire scriptures and is also the greatest exponent on God. Sathyam's very appearance is Divine, His words are Divine, and His actions are Divine miracles! I am not just uttering some words. I have actually seen and experienced all this.

A LADY: What that elderly person is saying is quite true. Sathyam is not an ordinary boy. It seems that he is the very embodiment of God.

ANOTHER LADY: Yes it is true.

SCENE 2

Shortly after the horse incident, Sathya is out one day, admiring Nature. Ramesh and Mahesh come there at that time.

RAMESH: Raju, we have come to be with You. What are You thinking about, instead of talking to us?

SATHYA: I'm thinking about Nature – the flowers, the trees, the hill, the cool breeze, the sky and the earth! I am experiencing the Bliss of all these.

MAHESH: Raju, boys feel happy playing and singing but You experience happiness in contemplation. You are so different, Raju!

SATHYA: That's the way it is, and you will not understand.O,...O my!

At that moment, as a part of the Divine Drama, a big scorpion comes and stings Sathya.

BOYS: Raju, what happened? Raju,Oh, a scorpion!.....Raju, Raju!
The boys scream, on hearing the sound, Seshama and his wife Suseela come out and rush to the spot.

SESHAMA: What happened?

MAHESH: Raju has been stung by a scorpion.

SUSEELA: Oh my God! And such a big scorpion too!

SESHAMA: Looks like a black scorpion.

SUSEELA: Yes.

SESHAMA: Suseela, get the medicine box. Hurry. Ramesh, you go and fetch a doctor.

RAMESH: I shall.

Sathya is carried in, and a tourniquet is applied. Meanwhile, Ramesh and Mahesh rush to the house of the local [native]

DOCTOR: Who is that?

RAMESH: Raju has been stung by a scorpion, and Mr. Seshama Raju wants you to come at once to his house.

DOCTOR: Is that so? I shall come.

Seshama's house

SESHAMA: Come sir, come. Please examine.

DOCTOR: Where did the scorpion sting?

SESHAMA [pointing to the toe]: Here, on the toe.

DOCTOR: On the toe?Please get some water.

SUSEELA: Yes, I will.

SESHAMA: Get it quick!

Doctor treats

DOCTOR: He will be unconscious for a while.

SESHAMA: I see.

DOCTOR: Don't get worried; He will be OK soon.

SESHAMA: Thank you sir!

**GITA FOR CHILDREN
PART 40**

(Continued from the previous issue)

46. After a long spell of silence, Arjuna now speaks. He says, 'Krishna, all that You say is theoretically very nice. But I really can't see how many of the mundane things we do in day-to-day life can be sanctified. Take breathing for instance. Everyone breathes all the time. You say sanctify Time. Well, how do I sanctify the act of breathing, which I do non-stop?'

47. Krishna smiles and says, 'I am glad you have asked this question. Let us examine this breathing process. There are two steps, inhalation and exhalation, agree? Now examine a bit further and focus on the sounds generated during these two steps. During inhalation, the sound that is generated is: Soooo...and likewise, during exhalation the sound generated is: HUUUUmmm. Thus the two sounds are "So" and "Hum". What do they mean? "So" means "That", and what exactly is "That"? It is God! "Hum" means "This", meaning "I". Putting these two together, you get the message, "I Am That" or "I am God!"

48. 'Just think about it; your body, through Divine dispensation, is giving you this message that you are God, 21,600 times a day! Does anyone ever take even a minute off to focus on this message and its significance? No! You asked Me how to sanctify the breathing process. Well, just slowly breathe in, and then slowly breathe out. Concentrate on the sounds generated, and on their inner meanings. If you did this, then you would be sanctifying the breathing process!'

49. 'Arjuna, it is all a matter of thinking and trying. If you really wanted to, and if you really felt that God is everything, you would automatically start associating Me with every act you do. You might do it consciously or even unconsciously; that does not matter. The fact that you are associating every work with God and doing it for His pleasure is all that matters.'

50. 'In short, the simplest way of sanctifying Time is to think always of God, believe that everything you do is for God, and finally offer everything to God. Now tell Me, what is the difficulty in doing all this? I don't see any difficulty at all; just that people don't want to be bothered about this, and would instead like to entertain themselves in every possible stupid way. I am not responsible for such irresponsible behaviour!'

51. Arjuna is lost in thought hearing all this. Dimly he hears the voice of Krishna and snaps to attention. He hears Krishna saying, 'Arjuna, time is getting along. Everyone is waiting and I had better wrap up. In life, everyone without exception must do his or her duty properly, consciously and with dedication, to the station one is born.'

52. 'One should not quit saying, "No Sir, this is not for me," and things like that. The rule is: "You must like what you are doing, rather than trying to do what you like." If say, everyone in a kingdom wanted to be the king, what would happen to that kingdom?'

53. 'Society needs all kinds of people and that is why God in His Infinite Wisdom has created diversity. Diversity serves a purpose. However, the individual, while always being in harmony with this external diversity, must also act in harmony with the underlying unity, that is the Divine Principle.'

54. 'You are born a soldier, and you must do your duty as a soldier. You can't suddenly quit, talking like a *Sannyasi* (ascetic). Rather, you must have the detachment of *Sannyasi* and do your duty like a soldier. Understand?'

55. 'In other words, no matter in what situation life places a person – as a farmer, teacher, housewife or whatever - the person must do the duty appropriate to the situation but in conformity with the dictates of the *Atma* (spirit within). That is what *Atma Dharma* is all about it. And that is the essence of what I have been telling you all along.'

56. 'By the way, do you know something? You protested that you would not fight. Let us say you do go on strike, and the war has started without you. You know what would happen? In five minutes, you would pick up your bow and arrows and enter the battle! You know why? Because of your *Gunas*! Being a soldier is in your blood! That is why you have been born a soldier! I know about your *Gunas*, and that is why I have given you this part in My Cosmic Drama!'

57. 'So, My dear Arjuna, understanding that this is all a Drama, a Cosmic Drama to be more precise, and realising that you are merely a puppet in the hands of God in this unfathomable Drama, go out there and do your duty as you ought to. This is what every single person ought to do every single moment. Duty, duty, duty. It is to teach you how to do your duty, that I have come down as man, and am performing duties all the time even though I really have no duty to perform!'

58. 'Arjuna, I think have said all that is necessary. It is now up to you. The ball is in your court. Just remember, most blessed you are for I have revealed to you the greatest of Truths, and explained the greatest of mysteries.'

59. 'Once more, fix your thought on Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me, and offer everything you do to Me. By so doing, you shall come to Me without fail. This is My solemn promise to you for you are truly dear to Me!'

60. 'I have said many things, and you might even be confused. So I shall make it absolutely simple. Don't bother if you do not understand spiritual philosophy. Just take total refuge in Me. Surrender fully to Me. And just keep doing what you have to. I shall take care of all the rest – this I assure you!'

61. 'Arjuna, what I have said to you is most profound. It is not merely meant for you but indeed for the whole of mankind, and for Eternity! It is My Message to man! He who listens to this and follows it is dear to Me. He who spreads this Message is also dear to Me.'

62. 'All those who follow My Message would be liberated from evil and rise to the world of the virtuous. O Partha, have you listened to all that I have been saying with an attentive mind? What do you intend to do now?'

63. Arjuna replies with great humility, 'Lord, by Your Grace, my ignorance has been destroyed. My doubts have got dispelled, and I now understand what precisely my duty is. I vow that I shall do precisely as You command.'

64. As Krishna's immortal exhortation comes to a close, Sanjaya tells the blind King Dhritarashtra, "This is the wonderful conversation between God and man that I have been privileged to see, hear and report to you. I am filled with ecstasy and blessed indeed I am to have seen and heard it all."

65. "O King! Know this to be true. Where there is Krishna and where there is Arjuna, there, be rest assured, would one find Victory, Prosperity, Glory and Justice. Indeed, this would be so in all places and at all times, when the end is good and so are the means for achieving that end. For, a good end means God, while good practices mean the observance of Dharma.'

66. "God is Dharma, and it is by adhering to *Dharma* alone that one can reach God! One who strays from *Dharma* will ultimately perish, though he may appear to succeed in the interim. This, O King, is the essence of God's Message to man."

END OF THE BOOK

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

JOURNEY TO CHACO

- A Sweet Tale of a Selfless Adventure to Share His love

Imagine travelling 1,500 kilometres carrying 7200 kilograms of relief material on mostly bumpy roads into the woods, and that too in a pick-up truck with the Sun blazing at 40C into an area called "Green Hell", thanks to its frequent droughts, torrential rains and occasional floods. And this is into a region also often termed as "Impenetrable" where exotic wildlife - monkeys, tarantulas, wild boars, jaguars, giant armadillos, rattlesnakes, and a variety of other poisonous snakes – live along with human inhabitants. Whenever anyone suffers a snakebite, their usual fate is death, the nearest health centre being 60 kms away to be travelled on foot! Into such an area tucked deep inside dry bush lands of North Argentina, the Sai Youth launched a spiritual adventure to provide much needed essentials of food and clothes, and more importantly to extend their hand in the true spirit of brotherhood of man and embrace their fellow brothers and sisters. They shared His love, unconditionally and enthusiastically.

Touched by a Troubled People

After the first Sai Youth Conference in Argentina, held in Buenos Aires, the inspired young brigade were keen to practice what they had learnt and were looking for opportunities to be of help. It was at this time that a prominent Argentinean magazine, *Clarín*, published an article on the severe hardships being undergone by the native Toba population (also known as the Qom). Hunger, water shortages, poor healthcare and pathetic housing had robbed them of their self respect and dignity, and now were threatening their very existence. These people lived in the Chaco area of Argentina – 150,000 square kilometres of poor agricultural land which was home to mostly native peoples who had inhabited those parts much before the arrival of the Spanish.

The Youth intuitively felt that it is this community to whom they would reach out and share His love. More than offer them material help, they were keen first to understand their way of life and living conditions. There were a lot of questions to be answered. They were unsure how the project would pan out and had no idea in which area of the vast Chaco woods they would go. But the Youth, in their heart of hearts, felt that all would fall into place with time, guided by the unseen but all powerful Hand of the Lord.

The Project Sees the Light

As a first step, they began to meet once a week to discuss how the project could take shape. What kind of service should they render? What were the priorities of the Qom people? Who should be involved in this project? They did appropriate research and in subsequent weeks answered every question that came up. Though at times they reached an impasse and some sessions

made little progress, nothing dispirited them as they were confident Sai was watching them all through.

While small decisions were taken in the planning of the project, another valuable offshoot of these frequent interactions was the understanding and unity that blossomed among the youth. They learnt to listen, appreciate and be tolerant of diverse opinions. After this happened, came the crucial turning point in their service project. By Divine design, they met Clemente, a Qom Chief, who had left his native Chaco following the harvest roads with other families many years ago, and had been a resident of Buenos Aires for the past 13 years. He had first settled in Santa Fé, but later moved with his family to Fuerte Apache, a dangerous shantytown of Buenos Aires. Here his family suffered not only discrimination and poverty (that they were more or less used to), but also became victims of violence due to the delinquent behaviour rampant in that area.

The good-hearted Clemente, whose heart was always with his people, sent small truckloads of necessary goods into the woods whenever he could. And when the Sai youth enquired with him about the needs of Qom people, he readily shared all his experiences. He told them how water was scarce and each community was affected by isolation from each other, and also how, unfortunately, they were all deprived of any of the benefits of 'civilisation'. But the important aspect that Clemente emphasised from his experience was that the project should have a personal touch and should serve to build bridges of communication and friendship, as the Qom not only required physical things but also human touch, love and kindness.

That struck a note with the Sai group. In fact, they felt moved to place their love for these people at the forefront of their service. It was perfectly in line with what Swami had said: Service should be performed to the common Indweller in all. When they saw the Qom people, they wanted to remind themselves: "Swami, You are the Indweller and You manifest Yourself in everyone".

Learning About a Noble Community

With Clemente coming in, the project started taking concrete shape. The youth learnt that food and clothes were important requirements for the Qom. One night, the humble Clemente described to the youth a world very different from what is taught in school about the native peoples. He gave the group another vision of the 'Day of the Race' celebrations of 12 October (the day commemorating the famed expedition of Columbus to the West but opposed by many because an estimated 85 percent of the Native American population was wiped out within 150 years of Columbus' arrival in America). He explained to them why the Qom elders celebrated 11 October as their last day of freedom!

"Unity, the lamp of Love that Swami shines in our hearts, was bright that night, and several brothers felt touched by the privations of the Qom people," remarked a Sai youth. After this moving experience, the group's enthusiasm

soared, and they gathered the needed information, organised logistics, networked and encouraged each other in the noble service project. The love for their Qom brothers in need started to flow effortlessly and irrepressibly, and soon became an all pervading tide! Sai, in His inimitable way, had moved all their hearts, and the Divine drama was slowly and beautifully being unfolded.

The Thousand Faces of Love

The moment the project was finalised, donations started pouring in at the Sai Centre of Uriarte, which was the centre of operations. "We felt that truly 'Love is everywhere'," a Sai Youth recalls. First, the clothes arrived. Though supplies were coming in, the group were still worried if they would have enough supplies for the Qom people.

And then, they needed a lorry full of food. To go with less would be a let down for the group and for the Qom people. But where was it going to come from? It was at this time they received a message that in the nearby suburbs of Buenos Aires of Pilar and Derqui there were hundreds of kilograms of donated food awaiting collection from the Sai Organisation and their friends! They were overwhelmed by His Grace.

In fact, there was not enough room for the enormous quantities of 'Love-food' that continued to arrive. The Sai Centre was being refurbished as Swami's Birthday was approaching, so, they had to find room in people's homes - in every corner, on the floor, and sometimes up to the roof! This solidarity grew to mountainous sizes and the group could only watch in amazement as it all arrived - almost mysteriously. To watch the manifestation of love of thousands of brothers, united under one objective, was an overpowering experience. They were stunned in gratitude to the One who was ensuring that the Qom would receive adequately from His abundance.

Overflowing Donations and Overwhelmed Hearts

The next step was organising the donations and many willing hands joined in. "We should offer to others only what we would offer to our own family." Swami's words were ringing in their ears and they started selecting clothes that were in good condition and divided them to suit men, women, children, infants, and by season. Shoes were grouped in pairs, discarding all that were in bad condition. Even though they sorted several bags per hour, they always had more waiting as donations never stopped.

Arranging the food donations was a massive but joyful task. Clemente had remarked that most of the families numbered about ten in each, so accordingly they tried to calculate the right quantities of flour, balanced with appropriate measures of grain, protein and legumes. They apportioned all the food weighing it with care. Bags of rice, polenta, mate herb, flour, salt, and sugar were opened and sorted with enthusiasm! Finally they were transported to the Sai Centre and put in boxes, which itself was an elaborate affair.

There were boxes of several sizes that had to be filled equally. The boxes tagged "C" were large ones, while "A" and "B" were the smaller ones. These two together made a "C" which had all the items for a family and were to be given two per house. Mountains of polenta, rice, sugar and lentils 'grew' on the floor of the Sai Centre to be placed into these boxes. The Sai Centre transformed into a packaging centre and every evening after work the select group of volunteers responsible for packing gathered and worked till dawn! (Many of them had day jobs.) They were exhausted but so fired with enthusiasm too! They wanted to give their very best.

On one of the last nights there was still much to get done and they counted the "B" boxes to find only 50. It was 11.30 p.m. and there was another 100 to finish, plus another 100 of "A" boxes. Overwhelmed with the enormity of uncompleted work, they prayed, "Swami, please do it Yourself. It is impossible for us to do in a few hours what we could not accomplish in several days!" And the Lord did help. In four hours they had completed the "A" boxes, which though heavily laden, were fast growing in number. The line of "B" boxes registered 100 and the "A" ones were surpassing the 70 mark!

In a couple of hours purely by His Grace they had completed the mammoth task of assembling more than 200 boxes! It meant the promise of supplying 70 families of "Nueva Población" and another 70 living in what Clemente called the "impenetrable outback" – little hamlets lost in the woods of Chaco who rarely see outsiders let alone receive aid – could find fulfilment.

The Test and the Triumph

On the penultimate day when they had finished labelling the boxes and everyone was relaxed and happy, they received a shock. The lorry firm that was to take all the items to Castelli, a big town which was to be a stop-off point on the way, cancelled the trip! In rather a panic, they started searching for an alternative to leave the next day, else all their plans would go awry. With His Grace they found a transport company, but this one would only go to Resistencia, the capital of Chaco. From there their destination was another 300 kilometres to Castelli and from there a further 60 km through the woods. Hectic telephoning worked out the necessary connections and logistical adjustments.

Finally the alternate lorry arrived two hours late at Uriarte Sai Centre, on a Thursday morning. A group of Sai brothers made a line and loaded everything into the lorry at the end of which the truck looked overfilled. The Youth were happy they faced up to the challenge and reacted spontaneously to the best of their ability. They did not complain but loved the Lord's uncertainty. And thanks to Him, the work was completed smoothly.

Hands and Faces of His Love

There were many inspired people who wanted to take the long journey to meet and distribute the items to the Qom. But given the lack of information about exact conditions of the destination in the Chaco outback, the organizing

group evaluated who might make the arduous journey with utmost care. And they decided on ten volunteers who would make the journey. They were many who had helped at various stages of the operation and were keen to make the trip, but they accepted the decision recognising that all are His instruments, none more important than the other, and each one was playing his or her role in His work depending on their suitability and His Will.

In fact, assistance for the project came not only from Buenos Aires but also from the centres of Rosario, La Rioja, La Plata, and Cordoba. A devotee from the city of Lincoln, put his pick-up truck at the disposal of the group, and it was gratefully used for transportation of some group members all the way into the Chaco woods and back! The rest of the group, Clemente included, travelled by bus to Castelli.

Departure to Chaco

The first group departed from Retiro Station on a Thursday afternoon; the second on Friday morning from Uriarte Sai Centre for Resistencia town (1,300 km), where they would offload the donations from the truck that brought them and load them to a new one that was bound for Castelli. During the journey the devotee from Lincoln related an amazing incident. When he had decided to join and help the project, Swami had given him a most enigmatic and meaningful dream. The Lord had walked up to him, wearing His usual orange robe, but His face was that of a native, with green eyes. He had then changed back to his usual form that we know and love so well, and then vanished into the woods. Everyone was moved on hearing this account and was renewed in their conviction of the sacred nature of the service they had undertaken.

The first group arrived at Resistencia next day afternoon, in the midst of the Chaco siesta. There they were joined by a couple from Misiones who were parents of one of the girls involved in the Seva. They next went to a petrol station where there was enough space to unload the truck, and reloaded the materials into one that was continuing the trip to Castelli by itself. In an astonishing feat, five men made the transfer of 7,200 kilograms of clothes and food in two and a half hours! The other part of the group arrived at Castelli that night, and was lodged in a very modest hotel, waiting under the stars, for the next day's work.

The Charming Chaco

The following day, it was an early rise for all the fervent volunteers. They left Resistencia at 4 AM in the pick-up truck that came from Buenos Aires and in the car that had arrived from Misiones. In Castelli, the team met up with the heavily laden lorry and continued to the final destination.

Swami blessed the group with a very hot and sunny day (40C) allaying any fears of bad weather from a previous forecast. Rain would have made the work much more difficult, making the roads muddy and creating streams and rivulets along the way. Clemente had warned the group that if it rained it might

take a week for conditions to improve enough for them to be able to leave the woods.

By His Grace the group managed to convince the lorry driver to go beyond what was first arranged, which was to go only up to Villa Bermejito, and he went all the way into the bush land and stayed throughout the day. The group felt really touched by this gesture; for them, it was Swami who was pulling the strings. They wanted to express their gratitude to their Sai and at the entrance of Villa Bermejito, they stopped at the side of the road, held hands, thanked and prayed to the Lord to continue to guide and protect them.

The blue heavens above and the singing birds overwhelmed them in happiness as they started on the last stage to their journey to Nueva Población. As the vehicles left a cloud of dust on narrow and dusty roads, at the side of the road the volunteers could see trees, tall grass, spiny shrubs, beautiful birds, cows with their calves, pigs and unusual looking lizards that crossed the road in a great hurry. In the thick woods, one could see humble huts made of mud and straw that were lost in the green and brown of the landscape. All these sights were typical of life in the Chaco woods.

They Reach A Stricken Community

When they reached their first stop, the community of Nueva Población ('New People'), they were shocked to see the poverty and plight of the inhabitants. The 600 inhabitants that lived there were extremely poor. The nearest drinking water was at least a kilometre hike up the difficult terrain and though there were power lines, there were frequent cuts. Similarly, a doctor visited them once a month, it seems, but he never had any medicines with him. They had to travel 60 kms by walk to reach the nearest health centre whenever anybody was stung by a poisonous insect or snake, and more often than not, the patient died on the way. With no phones and no buses visiting the area, there was no way they could communicate with the world outside. These indigenous people had established themselves in that region before the arrival of the Spanish and had not moved ever since. They planted maize and made a little money making bags and baskets which they could sell for less than a dollar each.

Finding Joy in Nueva Población

On arrival Clemente saw a group of men gathered under the shadow of a tree, approached them and introduced the volunteers. And as each one mentioned his name and the volunteers took in their palms the hands of the Nueva Población men, which were leathered by the sun, physical hardship and wind, they could feel their struggle to survive and make a living. And then, from the back of the little hamlet and in a group, arrived the women of the village. Incredibly, it was they who began the giving first! They offered the volunteers baskets made by their own hands which must have taken days of work! It was a very poignant moment for the Youth. They were moved to see how those who have less were willing to give from what little they had.

Then some children approached and everyone was astonished at their love at play. The group played with them while the children took joy at their gifts of sweets. Their freshness was a balm to the volunteers' tiredness after the long journey. The tiny tots smiled with so little prompting – even making funny bodily movements was enough for them to laugh out loud! There were no barriers of age, colour, race or language – it was completely heart to heart.

Nearly everybody in the village spoke Qom and Spanish, especially the younger generation, which made communication easy. The people, who were generally reticent, were so gentle and respectful when they spoke. After this charming introduction, the volunteers unloaded half the truck, which would supply the 70 families. The hands of the natives lovingly united with the city folk for this job. A row of men was formed to pass things hand to hand from the truck to the tin roofed shed where part of the goods were to be kept.

The huts in the villages were built surrounding a church made of bricks which was the centre of the community. The packed boxes were put neatly at the entrance of this church and covered with tarpaulin awaiting distribution. And what happened next was a joy to see. The people of Nueva Población formed a circle and started to sing in praise to the Lord. With time, many had converted to Christianity, and so they soulfully sang some Church songs.

While this was happening a volunteer doctor attended to a few Qom people and gave medicines for their skin ailments. Also, one of the lady volunteers talked with Qom women and they shared their problems with respect to making of their handicrafts – requirements of hard needles, machetes, etc., – and also distribution and sale of their creations.

The Work Must Continue

The experience of meeting the kind hearted Qom was thrilling, to say the least, for the volunteers, but they had to deliver half of their boxes to people who were even more deprived. So they returned to the vehicles and with Clemente guiding them went further inside the woods. Then followed three hours of dusty and bumpy roads with broken bridges and several stops to keep together and ensure they did not get lost.

The next halt was a hamlet bigger in size than Nueva Población. The people there were neither so organized, nor as needy as the first destination. They had several brick buildings and a tractor, and since their need did not seem so great, the volunteers distributed only a few boxes.

On their return, the volunteers began their own form of Narayana Seva, stopping at every house and three more villages. The people would come out and gather around to receive food, clothes and toys. The children undoubtedly were always jubilant and playful; the elders seemed very grateful, but obviously marked by a life of deprivation and ill-health. When the last box came down from the truck and not even a grain of rice was left, the volunteers rejoiced as Swami had made everything last until the last needy person had

received something: nobody went home empty-handed or with an empty heart!

When they made it back to Nueva Población, surprisingly the people had not distributed anything from the boxes - they were waiting for the group! They were, in fact, singing a beautiful song "Thank God for Your Coming" for the volunteers. Then they formed a line and the volunteers called each one of them individually and placed the boxes lovingly in their hands.

At that point everyone said goodbye to the considerate driver of the lorry who had gone beyond his call of duty and had been immensely helpful. The group then said farewell to the people of the village. It was truly a moving time as the volunteers embraced the natives. Many of the natives broke down and said no one had ever made such a physical gesture full of love before! The children, in fact, wanted to go back with the volunteers as they had made such good friends! The villagers asked about all the people who cared about them and had donated items, and wished that they come to their village, so that they can offer their gratitude. When the group left the Qoms, their hearts, understandably, were overflowing with love for God of which they had seen so many beautiful manifestations. They returned to Castelli that night and had a lovely supper under the star-filled sky reminiscing all the sweet moments of their selfless endeavour.

Reinvigorated by His Love

Two weeks after the trip, all the Sai Youth met again and those who travelled, one by one, shared their experiences in Chaco. They gave the baskets, lovingly given by the Qom, to the Sai brothers and sisters who did not travel and then discussed ways in which the project could continue. They now wanted to go even further and do sustainable projects for the Qoms. They discussed how they could help tackling the disease 'el mal de chagas' spread by parasitic insects 'vinchuca' that can cause heart attacks. In fact, they are already starting on a water project to supply water to the village for drinking as well as for irrigation.

What started as a trickle of an idea has today become a river of love flowing spontaneously and joyously from the dedicated workers to the deprived and forlorn. It has once again demonstrated how any selfless service activity, however impossible it may seem, only needs a noble intention. Because once the motive is pure, the Lord automatically takes over and the result of the exercise can be nothing but bliss.

- **Heart2Heart Team.**

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PRASHANTI DIARY

1 January, 2008 – New Year Day Celebrations

The New Year 2008 began on a beautiful note in Prasanthi Nilayam. In the last few years, the New Year Day programme has been given by Bhagavan to the former students of His University. It is such a wonderful opportunity for all the students that the Lord wishes to begin His New Year with them. What more can be said of Swami's love for the students! As He Himself has said so many times, "Students are my only property." It is not that the Sai students are very special and therefore receive so much love from Swami. In fact, it is because they receive His Love in such abundance that they are a class apart. Like the thousands of zeroes that have no value if the "1" is removed, Swami gives all the value in their lives and they know that. So they take up the first day of the year to express their profound sense of gratitude to Him who means everything to them.

All the students were seated in the marble blocks in front of the stage. Swami came to Sai Kulwant Hall in His chair at 8.45 am in a procession led by the Students chanting Vedam, with traditional fans and an umbrella as paraphernalia to adorn and worship the Lord. There was a surge of joy throughout the hall and seeing Swami in His beautiful form on the first day of the year was such a blessing. Swami went around the hall in the chair granting his Darshan to the adoring thousands seated there. In the veranda were beautiful, multi-coloured cakes. Swami went first up to them and after lighting the candles on them, gently sliced each one to the delight of everyone around.

After Swami came onstage, the Vedam continued for a few minutes. Swami then signaled the University Brass Band to play a few pieces. The brass band began with a bang - a grand way to welcome the year. The synchronisation, harmony and power were so scintillating. Notable among the pieces played were "La Bamba" and the famous "Love Story" piece. After three pieces, Swami asked whether it was complete. The band leader then requested Swami if they could play one more and Swami consented with a smile. After that Swami beckoned Prof. G. Venkataraman to speak. He welcomed the alumni and described them as the hope for a troubled world. And then went on emphatically state that Swami's message was the only solution for all the worries that plague the modern world. Sri A. V. Gokak, the current Vice-Chancellor was the next to speak. His talk centered on the transformational work done by the Sai Students. After this, Swami threw up a most wonderful surprise! He called one of the students who had formerly been a band leader and said, "Ay, band leader. Will you speak?" The boy was delighted at the opportunity. He came up straight and began extempore. He said whenever Swami calls anyone to speak, one need not be nervous for two reasons:

- 1) It is like opening one's heart to Swami.
- 2) Though one has to face the entire world while doing so, Swami is always on one's side.

He then went on to recollect a few of his sweet experiences while he was a student and ended on a note oozing with gratitude for Swami. The loving Lord then materialized a gold chain for him. As Swami slowly put it around his neck, the boy got the great blessing of almost resting his head on his divine mother's lap. After the speeches concluded at 10.10, Bhagavan asked the students to commence their music programme. As the songs began, Swami beckoned the alumni holding up cakes right in front of Him. The cakes were all massive in size. Swami lovingly lit the candle atop each cake and then cut them too. In the process, a little icing got on to His palms and hands. The 'icing' must have been thrilled to stay on something that was sweeter than itself! Swami, again with a smile, took His kerchief and wiped away the icing.

After a few songs, the alumni presented a song taught to them by Swami for Ugadi in 1985. At that time Swami was browsing through a book that the alumni had released on the occasion. The song progressed and Swami looked up at the students singing. His eyes made a quick scan of everyone seated. One does not know whether the Lord too, like humans, feels nostalgic. But it sure seemed like Swami was remembering the time when He had actually taught the song to them. As that song concluded, it was already nearing eleven o'clock. Bhagavan said that He would see the other part of the programme in the evening and next blessed the prasadam to be distributed to all. He then accepted Arati and returned to His residence.

In the afternoon, Bhagavan arrived in His car at 4.45 pm. On coming to the stage after a round of the Hall, He noticed the bright coloured Bhangra dance group of the Sai Students. He called them and permitted them to start their programme. The dance group was actually not part of the original plan of New Year Day celebrations. But the alumni had picked up a few very basic steps in two days and put it up. This once again highlighted the motherly Love that Swami feels for His students. Truly, just like a mother who sits appreciating her child mumbling some nursery rhymes, Swami sat watching as the dancers tried to get some semblance of coordination! To top it all, at the end of their 'performance', Swami asked, "Is it over already?" There was loud laughter everywhere and Swami lovingly blessed the 'dancers' and even spoke to many of them. The Orchestra prepared by the alumni was the next item, performing from the centre of the Hall with loudspeakers facing Bhagavan who was seated onstage. The most memorable piece they played was the one from the famous album, "Vishwa Vinayaka".

After the band, the alumni seated began to speak. Short speeches followed, recollecting the golden years the students had spent with their Lord. There were recollections of the special things that Swami had done for each student and continues to do so daily in their lives. All of a sudden, Swami asked for the programme to be stopped. Swami then asked for the microphone and prepared to get up to speak. Immediately everyone realized the magnitude of His magnanimity in deciding to speak to them spontaneously of His own volition. Listening to the pleas of the students, He decided to remain seated and spoke for an hour.

“The sun appears serene and peaceful. The days have become shorter, and the cool wind is blowing. The fields are ripe with golden crops. Marigold flowers are blossoming like garlands of pearls on the banks of rivers. The farmers are rejoicing and singing. The sweet festival of Sankranti comes in the month of Pushya (a month in Indian calendar), filling our homes with the newly harvested grain. (Telugu Poem)

Man needs several objects in this world; yet, none of them is permanent. All are like passing clouds. What you think permanent in this world is, in fact, impermanent. Hence, one has to strive to achieve that which is permanent, real and eternal.

The Bhagavad Gita declares, "Mamaivamso Jivaloke Jivabhuta Sanathana" (the eternal *Atma* in all beings is a part of My Being). I am in you, with you, around you, above you, below you. There is no place in this Universe where God is not present. Similarly, there is no name or object that does not belong to Him. The Upanishads proclaim the same truth in the declarations, "Easwara Sarva Bhutanam" (God is the Indweller of all beings) and "Isavasyam Idam Sarvam" (the entire universe is permeated by God). Unable to realise this truth, a human being laments, "Wherever I see, I find only human beings; I am not able to find God". "Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavathi" (as the feelings, so are the results). Suppose you wear a particular dress and stand before a mirror, you will find the same reflection in the mirror. Similarly, your own thoughts and feelings reflect in the outside world. Everything is reaction, reflection, and resound. Your own life style is reflected in the outside world. Whatever you speak comes back to you as a reply. But people think that it is someone else who is speaking these words. This is the truth. However, different people explain this truth in different ways in keeping with the aphorism, "Ekam Sath Viprah Bahudha Vadanti" (truth is one, but the wise refer to it by various names). Every form you see in the outside world is in fact your own reflection.

Several thousand people are gathered in this hall. But there is only one heart in all of them — that is, the spiritual heart. I am not referring to the physical heart. Unfortunately, people are unable to repose their faith in this spiritual heart, in spite of their best education. You are all educated, well educated.

In spite of education and intelligence, a foolish person will not know their true Self and a mean-minded person will not give up their evil qualities. (Telugu Poem)

(Addressing the old students) when do you propose to leave for your places? Wherever you go, Swami's grace is with you in abundance. I will distribute prasadam to you all tomorrow. May you all return to your places with joyous memories of this divine congregation."

Swami then received Aarthi and retired for the day.

4 January, 2008 – Maharashtra and Goa Youth Present Music and Dance Programmes

The schedule of youth arrival in the new year began with youth from Mumbai - the "stomach" of India as Swami had once alluded to it and youth from Goa. The whole of Kulwant Hall seemed to wear orange scarves. Swami had consented for a three day programme schedule that they had come prepared with. These days, the way Swami smilingly consents to every devotee's requests for programmes, one is reminded of Swami's statement, "*Saiki sarvam yes, yes, yes.*(For Swami everything is yes, yes, yes.)" No Avatar in the history of this universe would have seen more programmes than the current Sathya Sai. So many times, the programmes depict such similar things that people staying in Puttaparthi for a few years say, "Hope these people put up something new." But Swami! My God! He seems to find new joy every moment, every programme. He knows not what is boredom. He knows only involvement and inclusion. Living every moment to its fullest or as some people call it, "realizing the power of Now" - one gets a feeling of what it is by just seeing Swami.

At about 4:30pm, Swami came out for darshan. He went all around and one could see the enthusiasm and joy that a mere glimpse of Him was conferring on all assembled. He alighted in the portico and went into the interview room. After a short while, He came and sat outside and asked for the programme to begin. Right in the beginning, as is the Puttaparthi "tradition", many members of the youth came up to Swami and offered Him roses and cards and booklets. There was first a procession that symbolically offered prostrations from the different districts of Maharashtra and Goa at His feet. Youth members holding up boards marched before Swami and bowed down to Him. After the procession, the choir struck up the right chords. It was an offering of songs in choir style! The background tunes and music had been pre-recorded but the singing was live and lively too. They sang about 5-6 songs and Swami kept beat for most of them. The songs were in varied tunes and had different beats and tempos.

The songs concluded and the next part of the programme was a small dance by tribals from one of the remotest corners of the state, where "even sunlight found it hard to reach" as the organisers claimed! With three drums providing both the rhythm and tune, the dancers began. They danced in circles and it was an energy filled 10 minute session. Swami blessed them as they lay prostrate at the end of their dance. The next was a special kind of "Aarthi" typical to temples in Goa. It began with a song in which all the participants got very energetically involved. Some played customary drums while others played custom-made drums. There were also cymbals and drums played with sticks.

Then as that concluded, the "choir" continued. That concluded and then Swami was requested whether "chain" bhajans could be sung. "Chain bhajans" is a style of singing wherein there is no gap between bhajans. The bhajans of similar tunes and beats are stiched almost seamlessly so that it appears like one long bhajan sung in glory of all the Gods. The transitions are

so smooth and nice that it almost appears like the shades of the sky in a painting or in real life itself! The whole audience joined in this novel singing style and all were very happy and clapping. Swami too sat enjoying the session. After that concluded, Swami asked for Aarthi. Then He retired for the day.

5 January, 2008 – USA and Mumbai Youth Programme

Swami had permitted multiple programs on January 5. One was a group from USA, another was by the Ladies Wing of the youth group from Maharashtra and Goa and the third was by singers from Mumbai. He arrived at about 4:30 pm, completed a full darshan round and then sat on stage. The devotees from USA were the first to get the chance to perform. Their musical presentation on Unity of Faiths got underway in five minutes. They went through the songs representing all the major religions of the world.

After listening to them for twenty minutes, Bhagavan asked for the next programme to commence. The Ladies wing of the youth began a presentation on the life of Meerabai. The great saint's story was narrated in dialogue form without any with no enacting involved. But all throughout, there was a screen that was put up next to Swami to depict the various stages and incidents in the life of Meerabai. Swami sat for about half an hour and then told them to just sing the songs without the commentary in between as there were some more people wanting to put up a programme.

Swami never disappoints anyone. He is the most practical and yet whenever He tells someone to stop or cut short a part of their programme, the sweet manner in which He says itself brings a smile on the faces of everyone. And then, the lovable and sensitive Sai did something that thrilled all the girls. He first blessed Sri Raviraj Nasery who was to perform next. As He went back and taking position on the stage, He told the girls to quickly sing another song! How overjoyed were they! They sang one more and the volume now had gone up a few decibels. Sri Raviraj Nasery and party then presented a couple of devotional songs, which were very lively. Everyone was clapping in rhythm as Bhagavan accepted Arati at ten minutes past six and retired for the day.

11 January, 2008 – Annual Sports Meet of the Sri Sathya Sai Educational Institutions

Even the sun seemed to rise early with all vigour on January 11! Before 7 am, a beautiful golden hue enveloped Puttaparthi. The Vidyagiri stadium wore a festive look. People began filing into the venue for the 2008 Sports and Cultural Meet in thousands. The Sports Meet is a wonderful conglomeration of feelings, actions and thoughts. For the students, it is an opportunity to please their dear Swami and dedicate the day specially for Him. For the parents, it's a time when their chests swell with pride watching their children's capabilities on display. For thousands of devotees, it's an opportunity to witness another facet of the unique love-story between the Lord and students. For the

thousands of villagers, living in and around Puttaparthi, it is the same as the Olympics are for the so-called "developed" world - a venue to make them gape in awe and wonder.

The stadium seemed painted in millions of colours as the galleries filled up much before Swami's arrival at 8:10 am. Swami too resembled the golden sun in His Golden Yellow Robe! A thrill of joy seemed to pulsate through the entire audience even with the mere sight of their "Bangaru" Swami in the convertible car. The welcome song went on the air and the brass bands from the Anantapur and Prashanti Nilayam campuses struck the right chords. The zoom bikes thundered down the road powerfully heralding Bhagavan's arrival. The motorcycle escorts going wheel to wheel in front of the majestic horse escorts was a sight to see. An arch of flags was formed through which Swami's car passed and reached the dais.

Swami alighted and went onto the lift; and now, any little difference that existed between the rising golden sun and Swami was gone, as Swami slowly rose up much to the gleeful delight of all the assembled devotees. As Swami came on stage, He lit the lamp and thereby opening the Sports and Cultural Meet. Then He went and took His position in the centre of the stage (similar to always being in the centre of our hearts!).

The introductory offerings were made to Swami as the band struck up a lively marching beat and the parade began. First it was the tiny tots from the Primary school right in the front. They were followed by the marching squads from the Higher Secondary School and the three campuses of the Institute at Anantapur, Brindavan and Prashanti Nilayam. The closing was by a special Athletic squad.

The Sports Meet gains significance for one very special reason. A few days after the Sports Meet, on the 14th or 15th (depending on the calendar) is Sankranthi when the sun begins the Uttarayanam (the northward movement). This is a very auspicious day and the sun moving northwards is symbolic of the mind and heart of man moving towards God. The legendary Bheeshma, the grandsire from the epic Mahabharata, who had the boon to live as long as he wanted and could give up his body at will, too waited for the northward movement of the sun on a bed of arrows before giving up his body. He was assured merger with the Lord. That is the powerful significance of the day. In ancient India, the period of a month or so before that day would be spent entirely in the contemplation of the Lord. However, in the current times, when it is so tough to keep the mind from wandering, Swami has, in all His Love and Wisdom, designed the Sports Meet. Every student of His participates in the Meet and for a month or so preceding the Sankranthi day thinks of only one thing - to make Him happy. Swami occupies the time, energies and thoughts of the students and everyone naturally benefits at the occurrence of the auspicious moment. It is little wonder that once one is at His lotus Feet, his/her spiritual welfare is completely taken care of.

After the march past was complete, if one allowed one's eyes to sweep across the ground, one would get swept off one's feet! It was such an awe inspiring

and lovely sight to see all the squads arrayed in the ground. It literally brought to mind the simile of His armies set to conquer the world. The oath was rendered where each child promised to his/her Beloved Lord that they would forever live with the spirit that He has taught. The flag was brought in the ceremonial march and Swami pressed the button that raised the University flag high on the flagpole. He, then, lit the torch with the flame which would adorn the stadium throughout the day. Releasing pigeons and balloons to mark the occasion, Swami participated in and added colour and festivity to the day. The flame was taken around the stadium and midway up the hill by the students who had distinguished themselves as sportsmen in their respective campuses. From there on, the torch vehicle, a flying unicorn this time, carried the flame to the top of the hill. There was applause as the flame burst forth on top of the hill. As a conclusion to the opening ceremonies, the brass bands from Anantapur and Prashanthi Nilayam played brisk marches as they moved in front of the dais saluting the Chancellor.

Then the campus presentations began. The first was by the Anantapur campus and representatives from that campus came up on stage to offer their salutations and gratitude to Swami. The Anantapur display began at 8.45 am with graceful group dancing followed by a Far-Eastern group item with parasols and hand-fans. A sports medley followed, presenting hockey, tennis and volleyball movements in formation. Motorbike stunts were the next item, including criss-crosses, various poses on bikes, a breath-taking ramp-jump over 20 girls and a human pyramid of 38 girls on 9 bikes. The ramp jump seemed to touch Swami a lot and He made some observations about it to the people sitting beside Him. The bikes kept zooming across the ground with the riders and others in various poses and each of these stunts received applause from the audience - both onstage and off it. The Anantapur students concluded their half-hour presentation forming the words "We Love U" in a group formation as their theme song was played. They joined in the singing and signed off in devotion with Swami blessing them with the *Abhayahasta*.

The Brindavan students then began with an equestrian show-jumping demonstration. A marching band presentation brought up a display of rolling in steel hoops and an aerobics exhibition. A sort of timber-drill was the next item, with planks of wood being used in imaginative ways to aid acrobatic feats. The Celestial Rhythms then began with the spelling out of "We Love You" in a grid of students suspended by a crane 82 feet above the ground. The students made a number of formations and looked scintillating with the blue sky as the background. As the Brindavan presentation concluded, Bhagavan accepted Arati onstage and returned to the Mandir at 10 o'clock, while an announcement was made about the afternoon presentations. Swami graciously granted group photographs to the Band groups of Anantapur and Prashanthi Nilayam and also the motorcycle escorts before He went into Yajur Mandir. He was full of sweet smiles and seemed eager to grant all the photos!

In the afternoon, Bhagavan arrived at 3.25 pm in a maroon robe riding in His Mercedes sports convertible. On the Sports day, seeing the "sporty" Swami, one was reminded of Swami's saying, "Among men, I am a man, among women a woman, a child among children - alone I am God." In the sportsfield,

He is the most sportive and a sportsman! As He reached the stage, tiny tots from the Primary School brought up bouquets to Him and began the afternoon's presentation. The hour-long Primary School presentation was a joyful riot of colour as usual, beginning with a group dance by the young girls from the primary school, in colourful costumes. Followed by this came the boys dressed as 'Bal Ganeshas' which were interspersed with bears and tiny birds too. A classical mass-dance, hand-fans and flowers formations, gymnastics, mass flower-dance, dance by small girls with white wings, and Mexican poncho dance followed in quick succession. Children dressed as deer, tigers, bunnies and monkeys performed various gymnastic feats on mats, ropes and poles. Their elder brothers and sisters may do motorbike stunts, but the bicycle stunts by the Primary School boys were just as eye-catching. Unicycle stunts were creative and even a basketball match was played on unicycles. It was really a fantastic feat as the children kept their balance and did not miss pouncing even a single basket! Then a rainbow dance brought a grander splash of colours on field and led to their final dance which had balancing items on their heads and paying tribute to Bhagavan, the Light of Lights.

The students of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School and the Prasanthi Nilayam campus of Sri Sathya Sai University began their hour-long performance at 4.30 pm with a striking mass item with classical dancers in the foreground and patterns made from colourful foldable discs forming a context for Krishna's beautiful Leelas - "Adharam Madhuram...". The item was aptly named, "The conscious dots" and resembled a giant screen where each pixel performed its role to perfection to present a beautiful picture on the whole. This concluded with a formation of a throbbing heart beating for their Lord. Gymnasts on moving trucks then presented balancing feats with giant flags on equally gigantic poles - fifty feet high. Some of them balanced the poles on their elbows while others did it in their mouths! Gymnastic feats including jumps over vehicles and acrobatics on moving trucks led to a breathtaking display on ropes. The rope-acrobats, depicted a creative "free-fall" of sorts with the rope wound around them and the highlight of that item was a spectacular spin by a student on a rope suspended more than 20 feet above the ground with absolutely no safety link around him. He later came up on stage and presented a rose to Swami. The rope structure was also used as a trapeze stage, as roller-bladers scintillated on the ground below, ending their dramatic show with a series of jumps over a van. A precision gun drill with amazing synchronization was followed by a karate display which featured breaking tiles and pots, and also mass nanchak and stick displays. As the Prasanthi Nilayam campus came together for their final song, Bhagavan expressed how pleased He was at His students' performance and profusely blessed them before leaving for His residence. He also got it announced that the next day, the students of Parthi campus would be putting up a drama on the devotion of Hanuman at 5 pm in the Sai Kulwant Hall.

12 January, 2008 – The Drama “Veer Aanjaneyam” by Students of the Prasanthi Nilayam Campus

January 12 was a day of frantic and intense activity for all in the Prasanthi Nilayam campus of the Institute as Swami had advanced the drama by three days and everything had to be readied for the drama in the evening. From 12:00 pm itself the Mandir had become a hub of activity and the stage was being set. This time, as Swami had asked for the previous year, the stage was set facing the audience so that all would be able to view the drama. Swami's position was towards the end of the first marble block.

Swami came out at about 4:50 pm after making enquiries as to whether everything was in readiness for the drama to be enacted. He came on the chair and all were happy at this close darshan. The crowds were swelling and since the stage orientation had changed, the people on the gents side were so seated that Swami had little place to navigate for the darshan rounds too. Swami came straight to the place designated for Him. He did not seem to like the idea of Him sitting in the centre, away from everyone. He got His chair moved to where the other chairs had been placed towards the gents side of Sai Kulwant Hall. The stage and sets were in their barest state of readiness. But when Swami wants a programme, everything seems to come in alignment perfectly.

There is such a beautiful message in this for all. However the programme may be, Swami decides to be happy and He is happy. That is the secret He says quite often in His discourses. Choose to be happy and that's what you will be. Instead we seem to be choosing to be unhappy and we blame everyone and everything around as the cause for it. It is no coincidence that we feel that once Swami decides to be happy with a programme, everything always goes on well. Swami says that this holds good with everyone of us too. If we sincerely decide that something is good and feel it that way, it turns out to be good.

Returning to the drama, the programme began formally as Hanuman, Rama, Lakshmana and Vibheeshana came forward and offered their salutations via roses to Swami. The opening scene was a meeting between the celestial sage Narada and the celebrated saint, Tulsidas. Tulsidas is wondering as to whom he should choose to depict as the ideal devotee of the Lord as an example for the youth. Narada hints at Hanuman and Tulsi is excited and pleased at the idea. The narrative begins at the court of the monkey king Sugriva. He is holding a meeting to discuss the entry of two strangers. Hanuman volunteers to go to do the "espionage" work. In the guise of a *brahmin*, he approaches the strangers and then begins the beautiful conversation full of subtle hints and puns. When he comes to know he is face to face with Rama, he falls at His feet in tears. This is the beginning of the immortal love and devotion of Hanuman to his Lord.

Rama entrusts the ring to be handed over to Sita to Hanuman. Hanuman lives up to the Lord's trust and also succeeds in sending a powerful warning to the demon Ravana of the impending doom. The verbal volleys between Ravana and Hanuman were beautifully captured in Telugu poems and they won Swami's and the crowd's appreciation. The drama moved into the most moving portion where Rama and Hanuman meet after the successful return of

Hanuman from Lanka. It concluded with the coronation of Rama where Hanuman is gifted a pearl necklace by Sita. He breaks it and bites each pearl to see if it has the Rama Naama in it. When people in the court ask him as to how he could accept a body that does not have Rama's name, he just closes his eyes and every fibre of his body resounds with Rama's name.

Swami was absorbed seeing the drama. Especially whenever there was a loving exchange between Hanuman and Rama, Swami appeared very touched. Whenever we see the Lord showering His love and giving Himself completely to His devotee, tears well up. The same happens to the Lord to when He sees the devotee showering his love and giving himself completely to God. It was really an uplifting experience to watch the beautiful drama in Swami's presence.

As the drama concluded with a beautiful final song and all the boys came into the final formation, Swami said that He would walk up to them and gift them with photos. Before that, He asked as to who had scripted the drama. The script writer came out of the background. Swami materialized a gold chain for Him and put it around his neck. He blessed him and then got up to go for the photo session. There were the "pearls" that Hanuman had scattered all over the place. They were cleared as Swami walked up to the waiting group. Knowing His boys' expectations very well, Swami began to call out the boys in small groups of 5-6 and gifted them photos. He spoke to many of them and all were in smiles. He gifted the boy who had acted as Lakshmana in the royal court with a beautiful ring. The entire photo session itself lasted almost 15 minutes where Swami thrilled every mind with His presence and filled every heart with His love.

As prasadam was being distributed, Swami received Aarthi and blessing everyone, left in the chair itself.

13 January, 2008 – “Kabirdas” Drama by Brindavan Campus

After the grand drama by the Prasanthi Nilayam students the previous day, it was the turn of the Brindavan students to fulfill their role in the "Cultural" part of the Sports and Cultural Meet. Swami had agreed for the drama, "Kabirdas" to be presented in the Kulwant Hall. The stage settings had again been reversed from the previous day as the Brindavan campus had come prepared with very elaborate sets. Swami completed His darshan rounds and immediately came out and sat on the stage to witness the drama. The introductory roses and cards were offered and then the drama began as Swami halted the Veda chanting.

A mention must be made here of the sets and back drops that the Brindavan boys had made. This fine art seems to be evolving at a very rapid pace each year. The entire story of Kabirdas was portrayed almost through the grandeur and glory of the sets. The narrative of the Brindavan Kabirdas drama will not even be 50% complete without the story of the sets. There were three magnificent settings. The first was the Hindu temple setting. Two *Gopurams*

adorned the stage and they had been intricately and beautifully carved. One housed the lingam. There were pictures of Ganesha and Krishna also that had been cut out from thermocole. The second major setting was a mosque setting. The same steps and buildings got transformed as a few lads came up and turned around a few sheets. The sets were not only aesthetic but had also been elegantly engineered. The third and the grandest one was a darbar setting of the badshah (king). The behind of the throne especially was fabulously painted in peacock blues and greens.

The saint Kabirdas, in his own lifetime during the 15th century AD, combined the best of Hindu, Islamic and Sufi wisdom and created for humanity a charming tapestry of spiritual gems in the form of the *dohas* (couplets). The drama began with the young Kabirdas desperately in search of a guru. He sings out that with time fleeting and death being the only certainty, who else but the Guru, could show the right path. Guru Ramaanand accepts him as a disciple in spite of protests from the other disciples that Kabir is a Muslim. Very soon, Kabir receives enlightenment and dedicates his life to the uplift of humanity. The *dohas* were all beautifully incorporated to bring out his message. "*Chalti Chakki*" in which he says, "Only the one who is centred on God will be saved from the twin stones of joy and sorrow which relentlessly crush all the grains except those that are in the centre". This was one powerful message.

Kabirdas underwent many trials and tribulations. Both the Hindus and Muslims wanted him alone to make a shawl for their respective Lords and attend the worship which happened to fall on the same day. Working overnight, Kabir falls asleep without his knowledge and then Lord Rama comes and completes the work for him! In this way the Lord ensured all were happy. Kabir goes and attends the Muslim festival. There was next a scene of the Islamic Zikr which had a vibrant song accompanied by vigorous and elevating dance. It conveyed the message that Allah is the only refuge for all as all problems are due to the improper identification of oneself as the ego and not the soul. The whole scene was so powerful that one could feel the spiritual vibes wherever one was seated. Next, Kabir also attends the Hindu festival in the Shiva temple. Once again, the scene matched the previous in the power and grandeur of the Lord. "*Om Maha Praana Deepam*" was sung as many Shivas sprang forth and did the Tandava dance.

Finally Kabir is tested when the Sultan summons him for spreading discord and gets him whipped. All the while Kabir prays to the Lord to forgive his oppressors. The lashes suddenly seem to fall on the Sultan and all his courtiers till they all fall at Kabirdas' feet and seek pardon, which they receive in no time. The drama ends with Kabir being seated on the royal throne and singing messages which were similar to the ones that Swami has always been emphasizing on. The drama had a final qawwali in which the theme was, "Who can comprehend the mystery, grandeur and greatness of His work." As the forceful and thrilling qawwali concluded, Swami called 'Kabirdas' onto the stage and created a gold chain and a ring for him. The boy who acted as Kabir, concerned about others just like the real Kabir, requested Swami to bless all the other actors too. Swami gave group photos in small groups of 5-6

and all were happy. Swami too was beaming and appeared so happy - and naturally so as He is happy when His children are happy.

All the boys vociferously prayed to Swami to visit Brindavan. Swami said, "I will come. I will come." He blessed prasadam to be distributed to all and then left after receiving Aarthi.

14 January, 2008 – Music Program by Students from Anantapur Campus

The students of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur Campus, presented a music concert on 14th January, 2008, in the immediate Divine Physical Presence of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The programme commenced with a popular Marathi Abhang, invoking the blessings of Lord Ganesha. The festive mood of Makara Sankranthi was generated with a Telugu folk song, "Raavamma." The audience was impressed on hearing three popular Karnatic pieces and a Tarana. However, there were also two melodious light songs, involving the participation of the whole Campus. The programme concluded with Bhagawan Baba graciously blessing all the students.

January 15 – Sankranthi Day Celebrations

The northward moving sun dawned on the glorious day of Sankranthi, January 15. The day is considered as the day when the sweet fruits of one's patience and perseverance are rewarded. The great Bheeshmacharya was rewarded with the highest heavens when he decided to give up his body on this day. For the students of the Sathya Sai Institutions too, Sankranthi is the day when they are rewarded by their dear Lord for all the efforts put in during the Sports and Cultural Meet.

Swami decided to grant Darshan on the chair itself and He was welcomed by the flag bearers from the Institute and the brass band. Towards the centre of the hall, the boys made a canopy of flag salutes and Swami slowly moved through that. After completing the Darshan rounds, Swami came and took His place in the centre of the stage. He lit the ceremonial lamp and went over to each of the sides where all the shields and trophies had been arranged. He let His gaze scan across the prizes and seemed to charge them with His love before they could be handed over to the winners.

The physical instructors from all the different campuses came forward and offered roses and their salutations to Swami. After that, the Vice Chancellor spoke briefly on the importance of sports in the upkeep of the body to reach its ultimate goal. After him, Swami blessed Mr. Dileep, a gold medalist and the script writer of the recently displayed Hanuman drama, to address the august assembly. The student began on a very confident note. He narrated as to how it is Swami who does everything including applauding and rewarding the students - His children - for the efforts He put in. His short and sweet speech was topped with a loving pat from Swami. Then a thrill of anticipation ran

through the entire hall as Swami sat with a playful smile on His lips. He rose to speak and all applauded. Given below is an exhaustive summary of the discourse:

The great king Harishchandra - where is he today? He had to depart inspite of his vows of truth. Similar was the fate of Nala, Maandhaatha and Rama. All the great kings had to depart from the earth - no matter what their greatness. So many others have also come and gone. But you foolishly think that property and bank balances are permanent. Man was born silent without shedding tears. (He was made to cry on birth) He should leave the earth also very joyfully. Do not struggle for the ephemeral objects. This is not the duty for which man was born. It is the Vyashti (individual) who determines the Samashti (society). This in turn decides the Srishti (creation) and all are part of Parameshti (God). But without the individual, creation loses meaning.

Do you ever cry for God? It is not good to keep crying for mere clouds. The dark and thick clouds may come but they will disappear. Sometimes they hide the sun and moon also. At such times, just be patient. In this land of Bharat, Kshama is our true wealth, the feeling of Love towards the mother is the sweetest feeling and the character is more important than life itself. Bharatiyas today are just aping other cultures and have become like elephants that do not know their own strength. Man is very powerful. That is why even God takes a Human form when He descends.

It is betrayal if you forget God. Every moment, think of God. The jobs that you do may differ, but keep the true identity and your true nature the same. That is divinity. We forget that today and therefore have a lot of suffering. It is our imagination that is the cause of all sorrow. God has nothing to do with that. God always confers happiness and joys.

See, today you are all wearing black coats over white shirts. Seeing that, Anil Kumar here thinks that I will also do the same as all are doing. So he came dressed the same way. The whole world is engaged in the copying game today. It is not correct. This will give only momentary happiness. None can carry back even a single coin that he has with him here. All the emperors too went empty handed. So as long as an object exists, experience and enjoy it. After that there is nothing. All the intimacy that you experience is all of your making. Enjoy it as long as it lasts. Life is full of Joy. And Joy is not just that ice cream! It is in the heart. Keep it there and keep relishing it always. We celebrate birth and mourn death. Never do that. Let any difficulty come, keep telling yourself, "I am a spark of the divine. I will not shed a tear." By practise, you will get that. Concentration and contemplation will give you the strength to sacrifice.

A person is single till marriage. Then he gets four legs. After the first child it becomes six legs. As the legs increase, the misery also increases. And all the sorrow is due to your own weaknesses and mad thoughts. To avoid misery, keep telling yourself, "Whatever I get is for my own good." Yesterday, today and tomorrow are all one. Today is the yesterday for tomorrow. Past is past.

Future is uncertain. The present is the omnipresent and it includes all the three in it.

Students, all that you experience is untruth. Don't worry. You have moved forward already and then why do you look back. Some people feel very sad - not only in matters of the studies but in life in general also. They worry that he / she was there before and is not there now. They are there for all time. Only the fashions keep changing. From today, think that the New Year has begun. The old becomes new every moment. Don't worry or be afraid of anything. Do not anticipate worries. It is only courage that can achieve anything. If you lose it, you lose everything else. Courage is the Pushti (strength) that is responsible for Srishti (creation).

Do not search outside for that which is within. Kama is desire and you run after it. Contain it. Do not feel sorry that you are losing Kama. Every quality is installed in you. All is a reflection from within. Treasure all that is within. It is a mistake to run after that which you don't have, leaving all that you have. Students, you have studied a lot but of what use? With all this you do not know your own nature. We all study and finally die. Therefore all education must lead to immortality. The education must benefit society. Teach all that you know to the less fortunate ones. Share your knowledge and then alone will you have the expansion of knowledge. Vyashti (individual) will then expand into Samashti (society). Samashti needs Pushti (strength) and that can be obtained from sense control alone. And today there is no trace of sense control. You lead a wayward life - not only in studies but in conduct also. It is to help you achieve the true purpose of life that Srishti (creation) has been made. Even ants have progeny, they feed and nurture. You need not take care of family etc. if it is only feeding. The creator will do that.

People go abroad for more money. Whether you get \$5000 there or Rs.500 here, it is the same. There are lot of expenses and troubles there. What is there abroad? 'Aa' (meaning 'that' in Telugu) broad is all within you. Remain here and serve your parents. Pass on the Bharatiya (Indian) culture to your children. Education is not mere scribbling on paper. Without Sujnana (wisdom and discrimination) all education is useless. What the teachers tell you is all in the books. The reality is in the Mastaka (head) and not in the Pustaka (book). Do not waste time studying. Some like bookworms read day and night. Read when you are supposed to. You read all that is not necessary. Even the junk fallen on the streets and the bazaar, you pick up and read. The heads are empty nowadays due to cinema and novels. You just open the newspaper and it is full of ads and cinema models. Your inner voice teaches you very well. Follow your conscience.

You do not become a human just because you have hands and legs. Lead an ideal life. This is our true culture. That is our caste. The culture is ingrained in the caste and the caste depends on tradition and lineage. The caste is that you are human. None can change that. Along with the caste and culture, discrimination is of paramount importance. It is like the light in the darkness. You must foster it.

Never make your parents feel sad. Mother and father are equivalent to God. Modern children do not want parents but their toy dolls - wife. Parents take the first place. The Vedas too declare that. Love your mother and follow her commands. If you make her happy, you will be happy. Make her shed a tear and you will feel sad throughout. Your joy is directly proportional to the mother's joy. Very few are able to understand the love of the mother. They say, "Keep quiet mother! Having grown so old, can I not decide this?" It is only from the parents that one can receive true education.

Keep singing the glory of God. You will be peaceful when you listen to a bhajan. Bhajan is a way to attain Samashti. Sing within yourself. Today the bhajan singing is also on the decline. Never forget God. Everything comes and goes. But the bhajans are permanent and will stay and remain.

After the discourse, Swami announced that He would be gifting away the huge cups to each and every campus. But this time, He announced, that the wardens and principals of each campus would be receiving it for the excellent performance during the Sports. Then, it was such a wonderful sight as the wardens and principals of the Prashanti Nilayam, Brindavan, Anantapur, Higher Secondary School, Mirpuri College of Music and Primary School came forward and received the cups and blessings from Swami. While everyone were whole heartedly applauding, one could not help but notice a tinge of disappointment on the faces of the captains and vice-captains who usually receive the cups. When it was evident to people, will not the Loving Lord notice it? He immediately got more cups and gave them away to the captains and vice captains as well!

As if that was not enough, He asked for all the certificates and medals to be brought to Him. He blessed each and every tray containing the certificates and picked up all the gold medals and silver medals in His hands, blessing them all. He also got the number of medals for each of the campus announced. Then He blessed prasadam to be distributed to all as the brass band struck up a lively and lovely tune - "Murali Krishna Mukunda Krishna". The band played two more pieces after that and Swami blessed them. He then retired for the morning.

23 January, 2008 – Swami Blesses XII Class Computer Projects

The evening of January 23 was one of those special ones in which Swami used His "uncertainty" card (if we may call it so) to everyone's delight. Swami had come for the Darshan rounds in the evening after the bhajans began. He completed His full round and went into the bhajan hall. At about 5:45pm, He accepted Aarthi and everyone waited for the final glimpse as Swami would sit in the car and leave. But well, it was to be a different story! Swami had decided to gift every heart throbbing in the Sai Kulwant Hall with a memory to be cherished in their inner most recesses.

Swami, instead of getting into the car, came out via the portico and through the teachers block. It seemed like He was on the lookout for the slightest

excuse to bless anyone! (Well, that's how God is always, though the human eyes may not be able to see that it all the time. It is on days like this that with supreme compassion, God decides to reveal that to mankind.) He called all the XII standard computer science students who had come with their projects. He sat patiently leafing through each and every project. And then enquired into the finer details, pointed out a few errors, made comments on the photographs that had been chosen for the dedication page and asked some of the boys about the way they had gone about doing their project. Well, people in the Planning Commission of India who have charted the five year projects for the nation would not have felt the sense of achievement that these boys felt and that showed on all their faces. And Swami too viewed the project with an intensity that He would have had say, while He was going through the plans of the Water Supply Project or the Super Specialty Hospital. And that is not because the projects are of great importance; it's because for Him, His children are the dearest! How many times has He not declared that they are His own property?

After going through all the projects, Swami then blessed all the birthday boys who had been waiting for days for His blessings. He sprinkled the holy *Akshata* grains on some and accepted letters from all. To one boy, He picked the chocolates in his tray and put it into his pocket. As this was completed, one of the boys went up to Swami and told Him that in all their computer projects, Mr. Venkateshvar Prusty, their computer science teacher, had assisted and guided them. Swami was so happy and He called out for Him. He created a beautiful gold chain with a pendant and put it around his neck and said, "Good in all respects." Everyone clapped in joy and it was such a thunderous ovation that one would have felt that even people receiving Bharat Ratna would not have been applauded for so loudly. Well, being Swami's Ratna (jewel) is a much greater blessing than being a Bharat Ratna!

Swami then looked at all the boys and asked, "*Bhojanam Aayinda*". (Did you finish food?). This question often leads to many results. If boys say yes, then Swami may ask, "Then what else are you waiting for? Leave!" If they answer no, then Swami may say in an almost apologetic tone, "Oh! Go then and have it now!" So when Swami asked that, the boys answered with a sheepish smile. Then Swami played another uncertainty card. He said, "Do bhajans then." This command brought about a forward surge as the boys sat up till His feet almost, climbing up the marble steps. It was as if the very thought of doing bhajans takes one closer to Swami! Then began the mass bhajans or shall we say the bhajans by the masses? Swami sat smiling at everyone as the bhajans went on. The second bhajan, "Sai Hamara" had vigorous clapping and the bhajan "Vahe guru" scaled such speeds that it became tough even to keep clapping! To cope with the speed, the clapping speed was halved to the lower rhythm! Swami in the meantime began to take letters from many boys. He was smiling so much and that was being reflected on all the faces around too.

After four bhajans, Swami asked for Aarthi and for the second time, Aarthi was done. At the end of it, someone in the crowd shouted aloud, "Jai Bolo Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Ki." And it was welcomed with a very

vociferous and love filled "Jai" from everyone. After that, Swami started to speak something and all the boys in the front went crowding on the railings to catch the melody of those words. Many boys took *padanamaskar* and gave letters. Then, with the huge smile still playing on His face, Swami retired for the day.

25 January, 2008 – Bhagavan Blesses the EWWP's New Project

The members of the Easwaramma Women's Welfare Trust had arrived at Yajur Mandir to seek Swami's blessings for a new project that had been taken up on the morning of January 25 for solar cookers. In Puttaparthi and the neighbouring villages, the only thing that comes close to the abundance of God's Grace is the Sun's rays! So it was a good idea to make available for the farmers solar cookers so that they could cook in the fields itself.

Everything was arranged. Some items had been placed for cooking too as a demonstration of the utility of the devices. A dish-antenna like device was also placed to direct the Sun's rays onto a completely black pressure cooker. Swami came out of Yajur Mandir at about 4:30 pm. He was all smiles as He saw all the apparatus placed around. As He went near the cookers, many dishes were presented to Him for His inspection. *Pulav* and *Upma* were the foremost among the dishes showed to Him. He seemed amazed at the fact that *Upma* (an Indian dish) could be made so simply. When He was told that the a farmer can go ahead with ploughing his field as his food cooked in the sun, He seemed impressed.

And next when He was told to taste some of the dishes, He agreed to pop in a few groundnuts that had been roasted by the Sun too! Then He blessed the ladies involved in the project and inquired into how the cookers were being made and designed. Before, going for Darshan, Swami also blessed a member of the Central Trust staff with Vibhuti for his ailing aunt.

SWAMI AND ME

MY ALL-KNOWING SAI

By Dr. Gayatri Raghavan

An alumnus of the Anantapur campus of Baba's college, where she did her 11 and 12th grade during the years 1982-84, Dr. Gayatri is now a practising dentist in USA. Coming from a devoted family which came to Bhagavan's lotus feet in the sixties, Gayatri is an active member of the Bethesda Sai Center, Maryland, USA, and also volunteers as a dentist in the Puttaparthi General Hospital every year, while her parents and grand mother (Supratham Kamalamma) are residents of Prashanthi Nilayam. She is also a trained Balavikas teacher and has taken classes at several centers in the Washington D.C. area.

I have had the greatest fortune to experience Swami as the God, *Antharyami* (the omniscient indweller) numerous times. We are all very fortunate to be interacting with God in this living form. But, sometimes, being human, we take Him for granted. We forget that He is the one who brought us into this world and He writes our destiny. We are often foolish to question His presence and His influence on our lives.

The Loving and Eternal Charioteer

My first interaction with Him, as my parents tell me, happened when I was two months old. We went to Bombay on a trip and my father bought a brand new car there. While we were returning to Chennai with the new car, my mother, an ardent devotee of Swami, developed the longing to see Swami on the way back. My father was reluctant to drive the new car to Parthi. He declined my mother's suggestion, saying that the new car would break down on the unpaved roads to Parthi.

Eventually, after a great deal of persuasion by my mother, he agreed to take the trip. Ironically, as we were driving on the national highways, where the roads were paved quite well, the car rattled quite a bit and stopped near Kadri, a small town in Andhra Pradesh. Even after persistent attempts to start the car, the engine would not start. My mother was getting anxious as dusk was approaching fast. She continually prayed to Swami to help, especially since I was a newborn baby then. A truck stopped by the car and the driver enquired if my father needed any assistance to start the car. My father was initially reluctant to give the keys to a complete stranger, but given the dire situation, he could not but hand him over the keys. The driver fixed the problem promptly and asked us where we were heading. My parents replied that we were going to Puttaparthi. To our joy the driver then willingly offered to drive us all the way to Puttaparthi as we were new to the area. It was a pleasant surprise and my father gladly asked him to take the driver's seat.

The truck driver seemed to be more than happy to help us: he abandoned his own truck on the roadway and drove all of us to Parthi! Interestingly enough, the car drove so smoothly even on the unpaved roads to Parthi, although the car had had difficulties driving on much better National Highways earlier. My father was puzzled and was proved wrong about his fears of these bad roads.

The truck driver remained with us assisting us at Parthi during our stay for a day there. My mother kept asking him what would happen to his truck. His response was not to worry about the truck and he insisted that instead we enjoy Swami's darshan. After we saw Swami, we completely forgot about the truck driver. After the darshan, as we were preparing to continue our journey to Chennai, the truck driver insisted that he would accompany us to Chittoor, a town close to Chennai. My parents agreed and he drove to that town. My father thanked him and bid him goodbye, completely forgetful of his expenses to go back to Kadri. My mother then chided my father, and asked him to find the driver and give him a small token of our gratitude. My father searched for him, but he was no where to be found.

During our next trip to Parthi, we were very fortunate to have an interview with Swami and as the interview was going on He revealed, "I am your *Antharyami*, the indweller. I Myself drove you here due to your love and prayers". Not only did Swami take care of us during the entire trip, He gently proved my father's statement wrong that the new car would not run well on the Parthi roads. Sai is the *Sanathana Sarathi*, the Eternal Charioteer, in our lives. The infinitely compassionate Lord can come to the rescue of His devotees anywhere and at anytime, as He is beyond the limitations of time and space. When Swami wills it, anything can happen. Can anyone ever prove Him wrong?

"I know you so well!" - Baba

Another indelible incident comes to my mind which beautifully demonstrates to us His omnipresence. When I was at Anantapur during my intermediate years, equivalent to Grade 11 and 12, I was on my study holidays at Puttaparthi, visiting my mother and grandmother there. With the exams round the corner, my mother wanted me to get Swami's blessings. I impatiently told her, "O mother, He knows me as a child. But now that I have grown taller and look different than when I was a kid, He may not know who I am. How can He recognize and bless me?" My mother instantly responded, "Just trust me; He is going to bless you. For my sake, why don't you just go and seek His blessings, you will then do well in your exams."

I grudgingly went to sit there at the 6th or 7th line, fairly far away from where Swami would walk by. And then, what a surprise! Swami stopped, glanced at me and talked to me in His sweet voice! "You are Gayatri, right? You are Suprabatham Kamalama's grand daughter. I know you so well!" I was taken back, but soon composed myself and said, "Yes, Swami! May I seek your blessings for my exams?" "You will do well in the exam, don't worry," He said and blessed me lovingly as He walked away.

I was so humbled by this experience. Just a few hours before this incident, I told my parents that He would not recognize me, let alone bless me. He proved me wrong and blessed me in such an unexpected way. Swami is *Antharyami*. He is aware of our thoughts, our deeds, and our words at all times.

One other occasion comes to my mind that reinforces the thought that our compassionate Lord is our constant companion. I was in the Anantapur campus of Bhagavan's college. We heard that Swami would be visiting our college and were preparing for a cultural event to present in front of Him. It was Shankaranthi time, and in Andhra Pradesh, it is customary to build *Bomma Kolu*, a creative exhibit of toys and dolls during this festival. Some of my friends and I thought that we could dress up as those live dolls to present an interesting set of themes to our beloved Lord. I was one of the participants in this fancy dress display, and I dressed up with a set of vegetables, as a "vegetable queen." When I went to the performance room and found that everyone was in such wonderful costumes, I began to wonder if my choice was right. I thought Swami may not appreciate my ordinary looking costume. I resigned myself to fate and propped my spirits up telling myself that at least I was lucky to see Swami.

Exactly contrary to my thinking, Swami came to the room and walked directly towards me, while here I was thinking that if I get a glimpse of the Lord, I should be lucky. Instead, our loving God was so happy with the simple presentation we did, and spent so much time talking to me. He was quite excited at the costume and began describing all the vegetables I had around me. He then signaled to the photographer to take a picture of me with Him! How kind and loving our Sai is! He is truly *Antharyami*, the all-knowing indweller; He must have felt every thought of mine; how else can I explain my good fortune?

The Closest Companion

Finally, not too long ago, in 2002, my husband was working on an assignment in Saudi Arabia. With the Iraq war looming, I was very uncomfortable and worried about him as an American citizen living in Saudi Arabia. I even suggested that he quit his job and find something else to do in the U.S. or move to India. With this separation and the stress of worrying about his safety, I continued to call on Swami for protection every day. On occasions, I even felt quite frustrated and told my husband that Swami does not care about my cries; He has come for *loka-kalyanam*, i.e. welfare of the world, and not just my travails.

On the day we had this conversation, my father had a wonderful opportunity to get an interview with Swami. And in a pleasantly surprising way, the first thing that Swami asked him was, "How is your first daughter? What is your son-in-law doing?" He continued to enquire about our welfare and then finally said, "Tell her that I am always with her." Tears rolled down my eyes uncontrollably as I heard my father narrating this experience. Such motherly love and fatherly concern can only come from our beloved Lord, as He is *Antharyami*. I have always found Swami as my mother, father, a close relative

and a friend every time I sought His help. Bhagavan is always our close companion, a *Prana Sakha* (soul mate), and He is all we have in this arduous travel of life. One of Swami's inspiring quotes come to my mind, as I conclude this short compilation of my memorable experiences of Swami.

“No matter where you go, always do your duty as you see it.
And know that I will be there inside you, guiding you every step of the way.
You are My very own, dearer than dear to Me.
I will never leave you and you can never leave Me.
From this point on, do not hanker after anything.
Do your duty with unwavering love, seeing all as God.
Have the Lord's name on your lips always.”

INDELIBLE MEMORIES OF LOVE

The experience of being part of the Christmas Choir 2007

On Friday, December 14, there were announcements in the ladies and men's darshan lines calling for those who would like to take part in the Christmas choir both as singers and instrumentalists. They were to assemble on the ground floor level of the double-decker building the next day at 4.30pm, for registration and choir practice information.

Ladies and gentlemen from 58 different countries turned up to register and at the end of the session over 800 devotees had put their names down to be part of the choir. Mrs Sylvia Alden, was the choir director - a veteran in the job of quite a few Christmas Choirs - and welcomed everyone with an informative but loving address, gently reminding them that they were there to sing to the Lord, not to worry about how professional they may be but just to open their hearts and sing their love for Him.

Some people expressed concern that with so many people from diverse countries it might not be possible to mould everyone into a choir singing together in one language. This was understandable. But after eight days of practicing intensely for an hour and a half twice a day, the unbelievable happened; the sceptics were proved wrong. On December 24, at 4.30pm in the afternoon, musicians and singers from all the 58 countries came together as one and sang with intense joy and devotion to Swami. They performed with so much love that many of the participants had tears in their eyes as they sang.

Ms Roxana Guadamus from Costa Rica, who was part of the choir, was moved. Sharing her miraculous experience and feelings, she said,

"I come from Central America and it is my first time in Prashanti Nilayam, and I have to tell you that it has been the most wonderful experience in my life. I felt a great sense of inner transformation from the time I stepped into this Land of Peace. During the daily choir practice sessions we shared love with so many people of different nationalities. There was such unity that made us all tune together in one voice to sing to our Lord. So much Love I used to experience in those practice sessions that tears would fill my eyes while singing. Love for Him would just ooze out from Him from within. The experience on December 24, when we were in front of Swami singing for Him, was indescribable. I realize this opportunity was unique because we were singing for God Himself and it was only His Grace that gave us that precious opportunity.

"And I would also like to tell you how I came to know of Him. It was through a miracle, which He calls as His 'visiting card'. It was 10 years ago. In 1997, my husband and I were keen to have a baby, but four years passed and nothing happened. Then, we visited a doctor, and he had a big photograph of Swami in his office. When we enquired, he told us His Name was Sai Baba and that He is a spiritual Teacher who lives in India, and can do miracles.

“We were actually captivated by His Form and the stories we heard about Him. After we left the clinic, as we were driving in the car, we were surrounded by a wonderful fragrance. It was something that I had never smelt before, and I was really astonished. With that sweet smell started permeating me from head to feet, I started crying because of the emotion that overpowered me so deeply. Nine months after that, we had our first son – truly, a gift from Swami. After that we learnt a lot more about Him and soon took active part in the Sai Organization. Now, ten years later, we had the opportunity to be in Prasanthi, His Abode of Supreme Peace. We are so grateful to Him.”

Oh what a wonderful blessing to be given the opportunity to sing before the Lord – something that will stay with all who took part for ever. But getting there was a lot of hard work. But as the days went by, it seemed to get easier by His Grace; it didn't feel like work, it was just joy. The musicians started the day as a group at 7.30 am each morning and practised until 10.00 am to fine tune their performance.

The choir started practice each morning at 10.30 am and went through to 12.00 pm – sometimes they stayed another half an hour more as they worked hard to achieve perfection with some of the trickier songs. They then met again at 4.30 pm, and went through until 6.00 pm, with the tenors and sopranos sometimes staying on until 8.00 pm to get it absolutely right. Towards the end, the session was filled with such love and unity that everyone looked forward to it eagerly. The combination of professional and non-professional musicians working closely together was a beautiful experience - as well as a steep learning curve for both parties - and with the Lord's Grace it all came together beautifully. All the participants missed most afternoon darshans, and the musicians missed morning darshan each day for eight days. But ask anyone how they felt about this and each one will say, “I could feel Swami was in the hall with me at every practice session. He was there here with us.”

In spite of it being an eclectic crowd comprising of many countries and different cultures, there was no disharmony at any point during the whole period of practice sessions. They felt they were in the Divine Presence of God and this brought about tremendous unity and mutual love among them. And this is probably the reason why Swami was so involved when they sang on that Holy evening of December 24. The Lord gently kept time as He keenly listened to their soulful renderings. They sang all the eleven melodies they had practised and the Lord seemed very pleased. In fact, after their songs, He asked them to continue, now with Bhajans. And while this was going on, Swami beckoned the cello player from Switzerland and surprised her with a gift. He waved His hand and out came a gold chain and pendant. He gently placed it around her neck. It was truly a joy to behold her at this moment – she was shining and in so much bliss that it is hard to describe.

What was really striking was the fact that many of the choir participants were visitors to Prasanthi Nilayam for the very first time. And how was their maiden

experience? H2H caught up with two such newcomers and here is what they shared:

Isabelle from Belgium said,

“My experience in the Christmas Choir touched my heart. I was able to sing with people from 58 countries. Normally I would play piano, but this time I came without my instrument. I was so happy to sing with such a large and diverse group because, as waters mingling in a stream, people can become One by singing together.

“The words of the songs were so moving that sometimes I would choke with emotion. The leader of the choir too was wonderful who shared her love so well and infused us with enthusiasm everyday. In the end it was like a choir of angels with much finesse, fervour and great beauty.

“Ten years ago I had a beautiful experience of hearing Swami’s sweet voice as I read one of His books. I had never heard Him speak before and later when I listened to Him from a video, it was the same scintillating expression and love-filled voice that I had heard. Being in Prasanthi, in His Presence during Christmas, was such a great opportunity.”

A first timer from Poland was a young gentleman, Conrad, who said,

“This is my first time in Puttaparthi and in the Christmas Choir. To take part in it was an incredible experience. The most precious moment was when we were singing in front of Baba – this was absolutely amazing and wonderful. We could feel His love flowing around us and everywhere else. We just knew and felt that He is everywhere, all around us and around everything.

“The Christmas Choir was something that I believe can only happen here. People from so many different nationalities managed to understand each other. We had to practice and learn eleven songs with so many of us not understanding English. We were able to learn and understand everything we needed to. I will never forget this programme. Our love for Baba and His love for us was an experience never to be forgotten. Swami has shown us how He is and how He acts so we can do our best and do good things in the world by helping other people who are in need.”

If all the participants were little flowers of different hues and sizes, Mrs. Sylvia Alden, was the gardener grooming them, while His love was the string that bound everyone tightly together. How Sylvia got involved with the Christmas Choir is a fascinating story which actually dates back nearly two decades.

“I was here in Prasanthi in the eighties and someone came up to me and said that I should help in the choir as they cannot do it this time,” Sylvia recalls. “Well I am not a musician. I do love music but I have no formal training in music. She said I should just get up and wave my hands in the air! I thought, well, I think I can do that.

“It was in the Poornachandra Hall and if I remember rightly I directed two songs. I sat down and a man got up. I think he directed one song and then Swami said to the boys ‘Look at this. He’s directing the director’. It kind of grew from that.

“People would come from all countries to join the Christmas choir – the usual format was we would have a study circle, sing Christmas Carols and people would tell their stories. There was one famous time, maybe in 1986, Swami came in when we were practicing and everyone wanted to stop and look at the Lord; but Swami said, “No, don’t stop, continue”. So ever since then we always tried to maintain discipline and continued singing even if we were graced with His visit.

“One year we staged a drama and it was called ‘The Wizard of Love’. It was a very professional performance. I think Swami was showing just what He can do with nothing. If I was trained in anyway it would be a different story, but I am not trained and what Swami did with me is pure testament to just what He can do if one throws up their hands and says ‘I am nothing’ and really mean it. It is wonderful what He does to show His Majesty, His Mercy and His extreme Grace.

“In August of 1990, Swami told me to come back in December as He said He had a lot of work for me to do and I have clear recollection of that as at that time I was a kindergarten teacher, so I brought my autoharp, stickers for the children and some music. I ended up with the adult choir and they wanted stickers too! One of the songs I was listening to at that time was “Lord You Are” and I just changed the words to “Sai You Are” and we sang those words on the Christmas morning. Swami came through the silver doors of the Mandir balcony and He was absolutely so resplendent and beautiful - He was not just my dear Swami but He was the Lord of the Universe. And how He shone! Just to sing “You are more precious than silver, more valuable than diamonds” in front of Him that blessed morning was thrilling. I don’t think the memory of seeing Him at that time will ever leave me.

“It is delightful as Swami seems to allow us to play our way to our spiritual goal. We pray our way home but He lets us play our way home – not childish but childlike, with all the wonder which brings out this miracle every year.”

Francis Sosa from El Salvador was one such who was touched by the ‘Miracle of love’ of the Christmas Choir 2007. She said,

“Singing for Swami for the first time is something that I could have never imagined, it is something special and I wish it for everyone.

“Fortunately, I was born into a family which was in the Sai Organisation, and therefore, I went to Bal Vikas and am now in the Youth Group. By His Grace, I received a Diploma in Human Values and I am studying to be a Teacher. Swami has been taking me on the best path all my life.

"I wish to continue to serve children always and transform them through human values. They are the most precious thing in the world for me. And I am ever so grateful to Swami for giving me a Sai-filled family and such beautiful opportunities."

Just like Francis Sosa, Sylvia too loved to be with the children and mould them. And the Lord blessed her with ample opportunities in the years to come.

"I had the children's choir for the next couple of years," Sylvia recalls. "That was fun, though a little bit lacking in discipline at times because children are children. We sang in the Poornachandra Auditorium in front of Swami. Someone from Australia had made little bulbs from batteries and masking tape, and the children just touched the wire to the bottom of the battery, waved their lights around, and sang "This Little Light of Mine". It was beautiful.

"After the programme, Swami came into the hall and spoke to the guests. He would ask them where they came from and other questions - He is so gracious like He doesn't know! People would answer 'I come from Australia', 'I am from Germany' and so on. Swami then looked at me and asked me the same question. I said, "Oh Swami, this body comes from America, but I come from You!" And then He looked at His gentlemen guests sitting there and went "Haa!" I was bold enough to say that. Swami seemed to let me be His dearest friend and have that freedom.

"So that was the children's choir and soon we got into a routine of doing the Adult choir too. One time when I took the programme to Him, He said, 'Oh, you've done this for Me for six years'. At this point, I want to tell you something that is so precious to me.

"Many times I have offered cloves to Swami. During Darshans in the early nineties, Swami would throw sweets from trays held by people. All who receive these gifts touched by Him would feel so lucky. And so, I had a tray for the ladies and one for the gents so that all members in the choir could get some sweets blessed by Him, and then I had one big tray that had cashews, almonds, raisins, cloves and chocolates. But I didn't know that you had to take the little buds off the cloves when you present it to Him. When Swami came, He gently took a clove, made certain that He had eye contact with me, and then very carefully took the bud off. I realised that is what I am supposed to do. And then He smiled and put the clove in His mouth. I was of course thrilled.

"In the past few years I have offered Him cloves with the buds off and I did it again this Christmas (2007) when I had made a little kerchief and put the cloves on it to make it easier for Him to pick and put it in His mouth.

"I don't know how to explain it but He has given us everything, more than we can ever imagine. Someone asked me, 'Who is Swami?' I said, 'I have no idea who He is or what He is. All I know is that since He has entered my life in this form I have made a 180 degree turn, and now my life is full of joy!' For me, He is all that there ever has been or ever will be. We always want to give

Him something, so when He takes that clove, which has in it my heart, mind and everything, it is such a blessing. I feel so fulfilled.

“He used to sometimes call me ‘Singer’, or ‘Dancer’, and once, in the eighties, when I got up to direct the children’s choir in Whitefield, He asked, ‘Do you want to dance?’ I looked at Him and replied, “I beg Your pardon?” During the Sixtieth Birthday He had given me an orange sari – the colour of His Robe – when I put it on, I looked rather like a large wrinkled pumpkin. He again asked, ‘Do you want to dance?’ I said, ‘Swami, if You want me to dance then I will’, and I could see the college boys sitting behind Him trying hard to cover up their giggles, though some did escape. But now I do realise that what He meant then was not to move my body around; instead He was asking me, ‘I’ll play the tune and will you dance to it?’ And that has been my joy, especially as I look at my life and see how He has moved me, this nothing, from place to place and made music through me.

“Even this year, before I managed to mould people from 58 countries into a performance in nine days, I prayed: ‘Please Swami, don’t let them see me, let them only see Your Light, and feel Your Love’. And it is He who keeps sending people who have such a yearning to love Him and that is how the whole programme materialised.”

Truly, every member of the choir was one who longed to please His Lord with his or her little offering rendered soulfully. **Arvie Maharaj from New Zealand was one such and this is how he narrated his experience.**

“It was my first time in the Choir and actually I had no special expectations, but little did I know what an amazing experience it was going to be. When I walked in for the first time to the practice session, I was absolutely blown away to find over 700 people sitting from all over the world, from 58 countries. That in itself was extraordinary. And I was surprised that we were attempting so many songs together in such a short span of time, one song itself would be great. And we really did sing them on Christmas evening.

“It actually took me back five years when I came with a New Zealand Youth group with Ms. Mata Betty as our group leader. She used to compose songs on Swami and we were lucky to sing those songs to Swami inside the interview room! We sang six or seven songs sitting right in front of Him and this was an experience which I thought I would never experience again, but when we sang to Him on this Christmas evening (2007) it all came back. I could feel the love pouring out as our hearts unfolded. All 700 plus choir members singing in a united voice and the lyrics of all the songs so beautiful and full of meaning. We felt each word that we sang and it was absolutely incredible watching Swami sitting there listening to us. I remember Him relaxed and enjoying the programme, and at the end of it Swami actually asked for more. Fortunately, we had six bhajans ready to sing for Him before He left. It was an experience that will be with me for the rest of my life and even though this was my first Choir in Prasanthi, it won’t be the last.”

Mrs. Sylvia Alden, the Choir conductor, always emphasised that all the participants ruminate on the meaning of each word they sing and express their true feelings. Talking about the choice of songs for the choir, she says,

“We can sing Christmas carols and some of the old ones are beautiful, but it is so wonderful to sing songs of love and gratitude to Him as these opens up everyone’s hearts. Music is magic; it doesn’t have to be professional, though it helps. But what is important is just to open our hearts to Him. That is so wonderful. When we sing ‘Glory to God and He is here! He is here! He is here!’ What more powerful words could He allow us to sing to Him!

“The choir turns out to be for me, and I am sure for many others, a life changing experience, because for eight and a half days we focus purely on Swami. Everybody sits cramped on the hard concrete floor, with little or no conveniences. And the Russians this year had all the English text of the lyrics translated into Russian, so they knew the meaning. Then they learned the English words phonetically and sang confidently with others with great joy. It was absolutely humbling to see people who have no knowledge of English sing with the same passion and perfection.”

It might be interesting here to know what a lady Russian devotee, who was part of the Choir for the first time, said after their performance.

“This is my first visit to Puttaparthi and my novel Christmas Choir experience. In the 1960s, in the days of the former Soviet Union, there was a popular song which was often translated on radio and TV as “Orange Sky, Orange Sea, Orange Mothers Singing Orange Songs to the Orange Children”. It makes me feel that the author of this song was probably familiar with Swami at that time.

“When I joined the Christmas Choir, I found the practise sessions so filled with sacred vibrations - I was careful not even to sneeze or make any kind of noise. I was fully aware of Swami’s Compassion and Love. And finally singing to Baba was an experience I will never forget. We, Russians, who did not know English, translated the English words of the songs into Russian, so that we could understand and feel what we were singing. And we spent a lot of time learning to sing and pronounce the English words which we accomplished very well in the end.

“I am grateful to all saintly people, to all those who pleaded for this Avatar to come to this world and to His parents, especially His mother Easwamma. In the orthodox religion, there is the prayer, which is chanted by women to God’s Mother Maria: ‘God’s Mother, fill me with Your Grace’. Baba exemplifies from His own life how one should live by tirelessly and selflessly serving others. I thought I worked hard until I met the woman devotees of Bhagavan Baba.”

Mrs. Sylvia Alden was surely an inspiration for all the participants of the choir and seeing her they felt how one could really become a conduit of His love. Narrating a touching incident that demonstrated this, Sylvia says,

“One day I had one man come up to me and said, “No English” I replied “Sai Ram”. He then pointed to his eyes said, “I see Baba in you” I replied that I saw Baba in him too, but he emphatically repeated, “No! I see Baba in you!” So that was the answer to my prayer. He saw Swami’s light, not this old lady! And to be the pitcher that holds that life giving water is so fulfilling. I have people say to me, ‘You are doing this because of past karma’. I say, ‘No way, it’s only Grace, His Grace!’

“The recent choir, therefore, was a miracle; in fact, it was a series of miracles. The story of the cello player is fascinating. 2006 was the first year we did ‘O Christe Domine Jesu’, and I prayed to Swami and said, ‘Swami, we really need the deep rich cello sound for this song. Please arrange for a player’. So this year (2007) I started asking Swami inside, ‘Is a cello player coming?’ Then one evening I went home and found a note on my apartment door from a lady saying that a cello player was coming from Switzerland even though she had to pay for an extra seat on the plane for her cello. I said, ‘Wonderful Swami, thank you so much for the cello’. So she came and met me and said, ‘You know Sylvia, I think I’ve landed in the wrong choir’. I said, ‘Why is that Dorothy?’ And she said, ‘Well, I received an email from the director of the California choir that she wanted me to play cello for her’. I said, “No Dorothy, I have prayed for you for two years, I think you are in the right choir’. And she happily played for us. At the end of our performance, Swami surprised all of us. He called her to Him, made a pendant from thin air and gave it to her. My goodness, her face was glowing! There was light coming from her. Swami was so pleased and she was so happy that, later she came up to me and said, ‘I think I’m in the right choir, may I play again next year?’

“And when I think of the professionals, Stan, the lead violinist, comes to mind first. He is an exceedingly competent musician not only for theory but from the heart. We have done this together for 5 years now and when I mentioned something about professionalism to him, he said, ‘Sylvia, what is professionalism? It is nothing; it’s what’s in the heart!’

Let us now hear from one of the musicians Mr Brian Anderson from the USA:

“I really love to make music for Swami, and so I eagerly looked forward to being in the Overseas Devotees’ Christmas Choir. Singing and playing in front of Swami on Christmas Eve was an amazing experience, but I would also like to mention the intense but wonderful practice sessions held over the nine days. We had to miss many Darshan sessions, but all the rehearsals and practice sessions were done in such a spirit of love and unity that it was really wonderful. If there were any disagreements, it was resolved with a spirit of tolerance, forbearance and love. It was obvious that Swami was guiding the whole process. There was so much love in the rehearsal hall. It was my first time as a musician in the Christmas Choir and it is something I will never forget.”

One opportunity to perform before the Lord and it leaves memories that can energize you for an entire life time. Narrating the experience of another gentleman, Sylvia says,

“One thing I must tell you; once I was in Salt Lake City, USA, and I had been invited to an open meeting to talk about Swami. I started with ‘I am here to talk to you about Sri Sathya Sai Baba’, and a person sitting in the front row burst into tears. He was openly sobbing so profusely, and I silently prayed to Swami not to let me say anything that causes pain to this man. Later I went to him and said, ‘I saw you were weeping; if I said anything that offended you, please accept my apologies’. Very slowly but clearly he said, ‘You don’t understand!’ And I said, ‘Please tell me’. Then he replied, ‘To be allowed to say that Name – you don’t understand how powerful it is!’ And truly, he was right. To say the name Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is not only a *mantra*, it is the *mantra* of all *mantras*. It is the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bible, the Koran and all there is to me. And I am grateful to be allowed to say it.”

“The precious gift that Sai is to so many millions world over – each one of whom feels that He has come just for him or her – is a mystery and grand manifestation of His Love that you can never fathom; only experience, enjoy and elevate yourself. **Luis Sosa, a 26 year old from El Salvador, sharing her coveted association with Sai, said,**

“I have had the blessing of being in Sai’s fold all of my life. I was in Bal Vikas for a long time, then I joined the Youth Group, afterwards I became Youth President for 5 years. It was a very gratifying experience because to help people in Swami’s Name is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I saw this responsibility as a gift from God to serve Him and myself. Now, I am the President of a Sai Centre in El Salvador and I am so grateful to Him for all that He has given to me.

“With His Grace El Salvador is working very hard in the area of community Service. We have one Clinic in the Sai Centre of Gerardo Barrios that works all Saturdays and is helping those who are most in need. But this is my first time in Puttaparthi and I could see God in Human Form and experience the Love that emanates from His Physical Proximity - Love that I could feel in every Darshan.

“On the first day during Darshan, I saw a sevadal and asked Swami mentally that I wanted to be a sevadal, but that seemed impossible as that chance is given only to Indians. But He, in His Omniscience and Omnipresence heard me, and I could serve as an overseas’ sevadal during the Christmas Celebrations. I know He always listens to everything that we pray for and that we don’t need an intermediary to communicate with Him. We simply need to keep our hearts pure, and talk to Him, and know that He is always listening. I pray to Swami to make us His instruments so that we can give His Love to everyone around us. I am so grateful to Swami for this unique opportunity to be in Prasanthi with Him.”

If we were to describe the feelings of all the choir participants of Christmas 2007 in two phrases – it would be 'Heartfelt Gratitude' and 'Immense Love'. For, there is nothing else available in Prasanthi, than this Eternal and Inexhaustible Reservoir of Pure Love who can transmute ordinary beings into light houses without even speaking a word. His Presence is enough. His Glance can convert dust into diamonds.

AMAZING GRACE

By Ms. Nooshin Meherbani

Ms. Nooshin Mehrabani was born 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.

Only in Prashanthi Nilayam, the spiritual oasis where all faiths flourish freely, can an Iranian Muslim devotee experience such unsullied joy on the day when Christians around the world celebrate the arrival of the son of God. Nooshin recalls the divine Love and Grace that came her way from a simple opportunity to serveduring Christmas 2007 at the abode of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, leaving her with blissful memories to cherish for all time to come.

After sixteen years of traveling to India and attending many festivals in Prasanthi Nilayam, I got my first chance to be in the Ashram on the Holy occasion of Christmas, the birthday of Beloved Jesus, the Lord of Light and Love, only last year (2007). Through one of my friends, I learned that help was needed for decorations. Happily I was able to join the decorating committee. In the beginning, we were just a handful of people working in a small ashram room. Another lady and I began by stitching together the curtains that would hang on the gates around ashram. Other people arrived and gradually the scope of the work grew. For two weeks, I worked closely with one lady from Italy. We could not speak each other's language, but we understood one another very well. Our common language was mutual respect, kindness, patience and love.

Even though I was raised as a Moslem, I lived in the U.S. and Canada for many years and had a chance to participate in different types of Christmas celebrations. Outside of the Sai community, the holiday was mostly about gifts, parties, drinking and food. It was at Sai Centre celebrations where I first felt the true spirit of love and peace that Jesus came to teach. Even this could not compare with the deep experience of universal brotherhood and holiness of my first Christmas in Baba's Divine Presence.

Dedicated Decorators

All of us on the decorating committee had the same goal. We prayed that through these decorations we would be able to offer our love to Lord Sai, who is not separate from Jesus, Allah, Moses or Buddha. We began our labour of love in Roundhouse 3 and ended in Shed No. 32. As our work expanded, more people of different nationalities and religions came and joined in. Still, I was the only Iranian and the only Moslem, until two ladies from Bosnia arrived.

The Italians had never heard a name like mine and had difficulty remembering it. Finally they asked me what it meant, and I said, "sweet". This delighted them and they began to call me "dolce", which means "sweet" in the Italian language. This was fine with me. All names are only given to identify the body and have nothing to do with the true self.

"Sai Ram" and a big smile were our common language. In the silence of our hearts, we practiced Swami's teaching, looking beyond the differences of nationality, religion, colour and language; we felt how we were all beautiful beads on the common thread of God, everyone putting forth their best effort to please Swami.

One day, while the nativity scene was being set up, the baby Jesus went missing. The man in charge was moving around the room, asking people, "Have you seen the baby, Jesus?" When he came to me, I answered without thinking, from the depth of my soul, "Yes, I have seen the baby Jesus 2000 years ago." It was then that I remembered a dream I had a few years ago. Swami was directing a Christmas play. I was sitting and waiting to see if He was going to give me any part. Finally He called me over and said, "You play one of the three wise men." I asked, "Swami, is this role more important than others?" (That was my ego talking.) Swami answered, "No." I realized that all roles that we play in life are of equal importance to God.

A Very Special Duty

Then the most exciting part of our role in the Prasanthi Christmas celebration came. It was time for us to begin to install the decorations outside of Swami's residence. At 8:30 in the evening we entered the gates leading to Swami's home.

We moved silently and talked in whispers so as not to disturb our dear Swami. For a few seconds I stood in the corner looking at the sky, moon and stars and then at all my colleagues, ranging in age from 17 to 75. I felt like we were all children in heaven, full of divine energy and joy. For two nights we worked inside the gates of Swami's residence, to make a beautiful offering to our Lord. I was praying to Swami to approve and accept this work of love. When He came for darshan, it seemed that He looked all around the hall, showing His appreciation, making us feel loved and special.

The decorating committee was also given the privilege of sitting close to Swami for a few darshans. We sat eye to eye and received His blessings. It was more than I expected. At the same time, I reminded myself that He is the director of this play. If anyone deserves credit, it is Him. He is the doer that lives and works through all hearts.

A few days after Christmas, I received a phone call from the coordinator of the decorating group. Swami had given us permission to remove the decorations following the next morning's bhajan. We had only two and a half hours to empty the hall so the seva dals could prepare it for afternoon darshan.

Blessedly, lots of people showed up to take down everything and move it back to the shed where it was to be prepared for storage.

Lasting Fragrance

I worked on the veranda, undoing the décor from the two pillars next to the lions. We found that some of the glue had stuck to the pillars and so we had to use paint thinner. The smell was so strong, even after washing with soap. How could we get rid of this smell? I wondered. Swami was about to come in just a few hours. A solution came to me. I went out into the village and bought two bottles of rose water.

By this time almost everyone was gone. I took a new cloth and the rose water and started washing the pillars. From there I moved on to the lions, removing all the dust. I even took this opportunity to wash the feet of Ganesha with rose water. Then I thought, why not the other deities on the veranda too? I ended up cleaning the whole veranda, including the gold railing where Swami stands. I dried it all with my scarf.

During this time the seva dal volunteers arrived to wipe the floor and prepare the hall. They left me alone to do my job. As I worked, I silently talked to Swami in my heart, thanking Him for giving me this amazing grace, the opportunity of many lifetimes. I felt very blessed to be part of this service project. How blissful I was to experience the real spirit of Christmas. The outside decorations were only the instrument Swami used to help us all experience the inner meaning of the Holy Day. We were able to expand our hearts and to work together with love and harmony as brothers and sisters under the Divine Umbrella.

H2H SPECIAL

HOW THE BEATIFIC SAI BEWITCHED ME

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. JAYALAKSHMI GOPINATH, PART-1

This is the first part of a Radio Sai interview recorded in May 2003 with Prof. Jayalakshmi Gopinath, the Warden and Head of the Department of English, Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur campus. Prof. Gopinath's association with Bhagavan goes back to as early as 1948 when she was a little girl! An epitome of dedication, service and love at His Lotus Feet for more than half a century, in this interview Jayamma (this is how Swami calls her) shares some of her cherished memories and fascinating experiences with Dr. Rajeshwari Patel, an alumnus and currently a faculty member of Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur Campus.

Dr. Rajeshwari Patel (RP): Sairam Professor Jayalakshmi Gopinath and welcome to Radio Sai Global Harmony. Madame, it is a pleasure to have you with us today. You have had a long association of 55 years with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Can you take a walk down the memory lane?

In the Hindu spiritual tradition, among the nine modes of devotion, one is *Shravana* or 'Listening to the Glory of God'. We would like you to open your golden casket of treasured experiences and share the spiritual treat with our listeners who have tuned into Radio Sai. Please tell our listeners a little of your early life. How old were you when you came to Bhagavan and how old was Bhagavan physically, then?

Prof. Jayalakshmi Gopinath (Jayamma): Thank you Rajeshwari for all that you have said. I was in my early teens when I came to the Lotus Feet. I saw Him in 1947 and Swami was about 21 years, I think. Bhagavan should have been that young.

RP: "Your tryst with God" - Did you sense it coming or did it happen unexpectedly? What brought you to Bhagavan?

Jayamma: I cannot call it mere chance. It must have been Divine Design!

Prior to his retirement, my father had settled down in Bangalore and I was then still studying. I was with my parents then and my father would go every day for a walk. And one day he met a person who told him about Bhagavan Baba.

Baba was then residing in the house of Mrs. Sakkamma, the Coffee Magnet. Father himself, well I suppose, had certain occult powers. He could hypnotize and could cure certain diseases; ours was a very pious family. So my father

got interested and said, "Well, let me know where He lives, give us the address, we would like to go". That's how father, mother and I went to Smt. Sakkamma's house for the first time. I am indebted to my parents for having brought me to God.

RP: During your early childhood, did you ever feel a kind of seeking for God which brought you to Bhagavan?

Jayamma: Yes, absolutely. It might seem very funny. As a little child, I had an idol of Sri Krishna made out of clay. I would fondle it and even take it to my bed when I slept. Mother didn't say anything. She sort of indulged me and for a long time that attachment to the Krishna idol was there. Apart from that, our family itself was so very devoted. They hosted the *Sadhus* and *Sants* (saints and pious people) in our house. I suppose that must have fostered in me to merely love God, not ask Him for this or that.

When we saw Bhagavan Baba - I do not know how to explain - there was something that happened to me! I felt a tremendous ecstasy and my eyes filled with tears. Baba was very young at the time.

Incredible Intimacy with the Divine

RP: Was the experience of ecstasy instant, as soon as you saw Him?

Jayamma: Yes, as soon as I looked at Him! He threw a rose at me! He was very kind with my father. He took him aside and spoke to him. I suppose that day sealed the bond between Divinity and us. Since then, it has been that way.

RP: You must have visited Prashanthi Nilayam in the 1950s and 1960s several times. What was Puttaparthi like in those days?

Jayamma: We were there even during the Old Mandir days, which was a very small building of rough stones. Bhagavan's residence itself was none too enviable. And it was wilderness all around and the transformation that has taken to today's Prashanthi Nilayam is unimaginable.

RP: What was Bhagavan's daily routine in that glorious past? You have been a direct witness to Him in many years.

Jayamma: In the Old Mandir there was nothing like a daily routine. At that time we did not have *Suprabhatham* in the early morning. We were just a handful of devotees. As usual, there was the discipline of men on one side and women on the other. And early morning, as soon as we got up, most of us were in a state of heightened bliss, which perhaps can be related to Sri Krishna and His devotees mentioned in the Bhagavatha. It was so with me.

Baba would be up early, around 5 a.m. There was no such thing like Darshan. He would be out of His room. Everybody would be around Him and He would be moving amidst us. We were always standing near Him and looking at Him

enraptured. He would play with us. During the Bhajan time, He would sing with us. Many a time, Bhagavan has sung along with me. The altar was on a platform; any devotee could go and clean it up.

One little experience I can tell you from those days. We had come after we went to Mrs. Sakkamma's house many a times for Darshan; Bhajans would be held there. Baba told my father to come to Puttaparthi. It was not Prashanthi Nilayam at that time. So once during my holidays, we thought we would make the first trip. In those days, Bhagavan would be standing right at the portico of the Mandir to receive each and every devotee, whatever time they came. And so He received us and He was very happy.

At that time we were not aware that Baba would give interview to devotees. It was time for us to leave after a few days. And before that, I was motivated to clean the altar, put the wicks in order, cut it and fill the oil in the lamp. There was a curtain which was covering the altar from the rest of the place, so nobody could see me. If I could confess, I would go and hug Shirdi Baba's idol. And I would feel so happy.

On the day of our departure, my father and mother had been called for an interview. But I didn't know that. I was completely oblivious, busy with doing small chores at the altar. And as I was cleaning, a devotee called, "Jayamma! (that's how Baba calls me) What is this? Your parents have gone for an interview and you didn't go?" I went hurriedly but the door had been latched from inside!

A terrible sadness overcame me. I sat in a corner and was sobbing my heart out! After a little while, I heard my father calling me, "Jaya, Jaya come, it is late; let us go." Thinking I shouldn't go out with a tear stained face, I just lifted my hot tear stained face and whom do I see in front of me? Bhagavan Baba!

He said, "Why are you crying?"

He said it so tenderly, that tears came so profusely again!

"What do you want?" He asked.

At that time, I needed nothing. I said, "Swami I want your Photo." I spoke to Him in Kannada.

He looked at me with such tenderness and He said, "You want a Photo? If you put the photo in water, it gets dissolved; if you throw it into fire, it gets burnt to ashes; if you tear it, it becomes fragmented. Why do you want a photo? Keep Me in your heart." I was thrilled!

Nevertheless, He materialized a small photograph and gave it to me. It is with me even today. He listened to my small prayer. That was the first one.

“Singing for the Lord”

RP: Can you share with our listeners some more experiences you have with Baba.

Jayamma: He is the unchangeable one. It is just circumstances have changed. And the devotees now are coming in huge numbers. There are so many things that Baba has taken upon Himself.

There in the Old Mandir, it was entirely a personal contact between God and the devotees. It was just a state of absolute enchantment. That is what I could call it.

Another instance comes to my mind from the old days, when we used to come to Puttaparthi. My mother had left for Delhi because my second older sister was about to deliver. Father and I were at home in Bangalore. Father was also crazy about Bhagavan. One day my father said, “Let us go to Puttaparthi.” And I was overjoyed to make the journey.

We alighted and Baba came to the portico and took us inside. In front of the altar, Baba just stopped. Naturally, Father and I stood there. Then, Baba looked at me and said, “Sing”. I was very nervous to sing in His presence. Baba encouraged me and asked me to sing. There were a few devotees and as I was singing, I had an amazing experience.

There were life-size photographs of Shirdi Baba and Sathya Sai Baba in the altar. The garlands were right from the toe to the head. First Shirdi Baba’s garlands started to sway and it gained momentum. It swayed, and swayed so forcibly that all the garlands snapped and fell down while I was singing. My hair stood on end! Baba looked at me and said, “Sing another song”. I sang a Meerabai Bhajan. He would usually ask me to sing Purandara Dasa’s Kirtans and Meera Bhajans.

As I started the next song, the garlands on our Baba’s picture started swaying and gaining momentum; then they snapped and fell down too. Baba looked at me very meaningfully. I wanted to stop but He asked me to sing. I sang a third song and the garlands around the silver idol of Shirdi Baba, slowly rolled down. They didn’t snap this time! That was the end of that experience. I knew Baba was very happy. As far as I was concerned, I was in the heaven of delight.

A Prized Gift

RP: I remember you telling us that you won the first prize in the music competition organized by Bhagavan in the Old Mandir; can you narrate that story?

Jayamma: This was something impromptu; it came all of a sudden. During that trip, I came first with a devotee and my parents were to follow. As soon as

I alighted, they told me that a music competition was being conducted by Bhagavan Baba. I was interested to hear this, but then immediately one person came running to me and said, "Swami is calling you." I was very nervous to sing in the presence of Bhagavan.

The new Mandir was a little different then; it was not so polished. Of course the altar had the life-size pictures of Bhagavan and where the chariot is now, there Bhagavan was sitting as the judge.

Men and women on either side - whom He had asked to sing - had to sit there and sing through the mike. So after a few had sung, both men and women, He called me. I always used to be a little fearful when Baba called me. He asked me to sit down, named a few Meera Bhajans and asked me to sing. I sang the song and then there were a few more participants to go. At the end of it all, Baba announced that I got the first prize, which I never expected. He gave me a lovely silver cup and saucer tinted with gold inside. I have it with me even today. He gave it to me and said, "Jayamma, drink milk with this."

The Divine Bondage: Grandfather and his Divine Grandson

RP: Were you fortunate to see Swami's grandfather?

Jayamma: Yes, I have seen His Grandfather. Then the grandfather must have been 105 years old (this was when He used to come occasionally to the Old Mandir), the new Mandir wasn't there then.

He was thin and very tall. He had a personality of his own, even at that age, as if he is one of the chief persons in the village. It was a very beautiful sight to see: He would come with a stick and somebody would help him and then they would put a chair in the outside enclosure where the altar was. He would sit and wait for the Divine Grandson. Swami would come so quickly from His room as if He was rushing forth to meet the human grandfather and He would go to him, clasp his hands and I have seen the grandfather literally hugging Him. It was a wonderful sight.

RP: Bhagavan has said in some private discourses that His Grandfather was the only person who really recognized His Divinity.

Jayamma: Absolutely, we could see this interaction. There was definitely a Divine bondage between the grandfather and the grand-son.

Medallions from Vibhuti: "A Miracle I witnessed"

Jayamma: In those days during Dasara and Swami's birthday, people would take a procession of Swami in a flower bedecked palanquin. And Swami gave Darshan of the Avatars to so many devotees. Once, I saw that when Baba got off the *Palanquin*, once the procession returned to the Old Mandir, He just shook His robes and from His robes, came plentiful vibhuti! It came out in flakes and it spread to such a distance that people started gathering it. Right on His forehead, there would be thick flakes of vibhuti.

When we returned from the procession, He would take some flowers and throw the petals of the flowers with both His Hands. They would get transformed into medallions! I was a witness to it! My mother got one such medallion, which was very significant for us. My father's name was Keshav Vittal; he was called Vittal Rao. On one side of the medallion was Bhagavan Baba's image and on the other side was of Lord Panduranga Vittal.

RP: Each medallion had a different deity?

Jayamma: Yes, each one had a different deity!

RP: This is a wonderful story. Please tell us one more of your precious experiences which speaks of Bhagavan's Glory.

Jayamma: Let me share two from quite a few. Mrs. Sakkamma, was very devoted to Swami. She looked after Him like her own son. She was a pure soul and He too loved her very much.

Earlier, Sakkamma had lot of faith in my father, so she used to tell him, "This small Old Mandir for Swami is very cramped." It was a crude stone building. Baba's room was so small; He didn't even have an attached bathroom. There was no privacy at all for Baba. It was a sad thing.

She said, "Why not we put an effort, collect some contribution and build a Mandir for Bhagavan?" That is how it started. Father took it up and some people contributed. One amongst them, at that time, was this very rich merchant, Sri Thiruvencatam Shetty. That's how the new Mandir was opened in 1950.

The Divine Declaration: "Everything is in My Hands"

RP: What did Bhagavan say to you about His life and Mission? Did He say anything then?

Jayamma: My uncle Dr. Prasanna Simha Rao, who was the Chief Surgeon in the Victoria Hospital, was a devotee. One day in 1952, he and my aunt said they would like to have Baba's Darshan. I said, "I will go with them". So they took me with them.

This incident is something that made an indelible mark in my mind, I can never forget it! The New Mandir was plain. It didn't have all the curves and the embellishments. Baba was in the portico, the front verandah that still remains, at that time it wasn't done up so well; it was just cement.

Baba had come down and was standing in that verandah. He gave an interview to my uncle and aunt, but didn't call me for the interview. There were some others and devotees were so happy that the new Mandir had come up.

Some of them expressed to Swami, "How beautiful this Mandir is! Earlier, some devotees cast some aspersions and they had said, 'This Mandir's wall would not come up beyond one foot'. It was such arrogance they had before the construction! Swami, how stupid and ignorant they are, what a beautiful Mandir has come up!"

Swami then made a wonderful declaration. The whole world should know about it. He was standing there and then He became very solemn. Sometimes there is such a change between the Baba who plays with us and talks with us, and the Baba who becomes absolutely Divinity Personified and pulls Himself to that Majesty. That look was on Swami's face! There was a far off aloofness in His eyes.

He said, "Let people talk. They do not know. I just have to clap My hands, and a whole Mandir will come up. Everything is in These Hands!"

That declaration He made so loudly, I suppose it went home to all of us. It sort of, made our hair stand up. Just imagine - He doesn't need us! We think we are doing something, but He is getting it done by us to give us that fulfillment, that's all! To get us the satisfaction that we have contributed! As He said that, He went on repeating, **"I have everything, everything is in My Hands!"**

Somehow He felt detached from those of us who were standing there and slowly walked off. He climbed the steps and went to His room. It made a tremendous impression upon me.

"Where am I?"

RP: Once, many years ago, you were asked by Bhagavan to translate for an interview that Bhagavan gave to Mr. Howard Murphet. After you returned to Anantapur, you shared with the students - I was a student then and remember this - some of the profound Truths uttered by Bhagavan during the interview. Do you remember some of them?

Jayamma: Sure! That was another incident where the small interview room, at that moment, lost its contour. It became something as vast as space, because of the things that Swami said.

Mr. Murphet had asked this question. "Swami, You incarnated as Shirdi Baba. Now You are the reincarnation of that deity, eight years later. Swami, where were You during this short span of eight years?"

Swami said, "Where was I? I permeated the whole Universe! There is no single place for Me, I was the Whole Universe."

Thus He uttered with such solemnity, I staggered with this answer. This went on. This is one of the most important things.

(To be continued...)

GET INSPIRED

Adding Purpose To Life

This is a story of an elementary school teacher named Mrs. Thompson. As she stood in front of her fifth grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children a lie.

Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. But that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he didn't play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. And Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big "F" at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise. Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners...he is a joy to be around."

His second grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle."

His third grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best but his father doesn't show much interest and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken."

Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometimes sleeps in class."

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag.

Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing and a bottle that was one quarter full of perfume.

But she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed, how pretty the bracelet was. She put it on and dabbed some of the perfume on her wrist.

Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to." After the children left she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children.

Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her "pets."

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer. The letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

The story doesn't end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he'd met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit in the place at the wedding that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom.

Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. And she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you, Mrs. Thompson, for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference." Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back. She said, "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."

Never underestimate the Power of Purpose. Unconditional and unselfish love, we know, can do even greater miracles. Before we hit the sack every night, let

us for a moment ponder if we could inject a little love into someone's life, if we could lend our shoulder to one who can never return the favour.

Deeds and Rewards

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the most merciful.

Don't be disappointed! A man woke up early in the morning order to do the Fajr prayer (first of the five daily prayers recited by practicing Muslims) in the masjid. He got dressed, made his ablution and was on his way to the masjid. On his way, he fell and his clothes got dirty. He got up, brushed himself off, and headed home.

At home, he cleaned himself, changed his clothes, and was again on his way to the masjid. As he walked in the dawn, accidentally, he fell again and at the same spot! He got up, brushed himself off and headed home. At home he, once again, changed his clothes, washed his hands and feet, and walked towards the masjid yet another time, though it was the third time and the way was still not clear as the rising Sun was yet to break the darkness of the night.

Now, on his way to the masjid, he met a man holding a lamp. "May I know who are you?" He asked him. The man with the light replied, "I saw you fall twice on your way to the masjid, so I brought a lamp to light your way" He thanked him profusely and they started talking as they made their way to the masjid. Once at the holy place, as the first man entered the sacred precincts, he noticed the man with the lamp just stop there. "Why don't you come into the masjid and pray Fajr with me?" he asked. The second man refused.

He asked him again, but "No" was the only answer he would get. He persisted and wanted to know the reason for such usual behavior, then the second man revealed, "I am Satan". He was shocked to hear this reply. But Satan went on to explain,

"I saw you on your way to the masjid and it was I who made you fall. When you went home, cleaned yourself and returned on your way to the masjid, Allah forgave all of your sins.

"I made you fall a second time, and even that did not encourage you to stay home, rather, you came back again and with the same vigour and composure continued your journey towards the masjid. And because of that, Allah forgave all the sins of the people of your household. I was afraid if I made you fall one more time, then Allah will forgive the sins of the people of your village, so I made sure that you reached the masjid safely."

So let us not allow Satan to benefit from his actions. More importantly, all our choices and decisions in the present time bear consequences on our future, even if they are not apparent immediately. So do not put off any good that you intended to do as you never know how much reward you might receive from the hardships you encounter while trying to achieve that good. Let us never postpone a pious task, especially if it can bring joy in the life of another being.

The Violin Story

An old man was visiting a city for the first time in his life. He had grown up in a remote mountain village, worked hard raising his children, and was then enjoying his first visit to his children's modern homes.

While being shown around the city, the old man heard a sound that stung his ears. He had never heard such an awful noise in his quiet mountain village. Following the grating sound back to its source, he came to a room in the back of a house where a small boy was practising on a violin.

'Screech! Screech!' came the discordant notes from the groaning violin.

When he was told that it was called a 'violin', he decided he never wanted to hear such a horrible thing again.

The next day, in a different part of the city, the old man heard a beautiful sound, which seemed to caress his aged ears. He had never heard such an enchanting melody in his mountain valley. Following the delightful sound back to its source, he came to a room in the front of a house where an old lady, a maestro, was performing a sonata on a violin.

At once, the old man realised his mistake. The terrible sound that he had heard the previous day was not the fault of the violin, nor even the boy. It was just that the young man had yet to learn his instrument well.

With a wisdom reserved for the simple folk, the old man thought it was the same with religion. When we come across a religious enthusiast causing such strife with his beliefs, it is incorrect to blame the religion. It is just that the novice has yet to learn his religion well. When we come across a saint, a maestro of her religion, it is such a sweet encounter that it inspires us for many years, whatever their beliefs.

But that was not the end of the story.....

The third day, in a different part of the city, the old man heard another sound that surpassed in its beauty and purity even that of the maestro on her violin. What do you think that sound was?

It was a sound more beautiful than the cascade of the mountain stream in spring, than the autumn wind through the forest groves, or than the mountain birds singing after a heavy rain. It was even more beautiful than the silence in the mountain hollows on a still winter's night. What was that sound that moved the old man's heart more powerfully than anything before?

It was a large orchestra playing a symphony.

The reason it was, for the old man, the most beautiful sound in the world is that firstly, every member of that orchestra was a maestro of

their own instrument; and secondly, they had further learned how to play together in harmony.

'May it be the same with religion,' the old man thought. 'Let each one of us learn through the lessons of life the soft heart of our beliefs. Let us each be a maestro of the love within our religion. Then, having learned our religion well, let us go further and learn how to play, like members of an orchestra, with other religions in harmony together!'

That would be the most beautiful melody!

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

This quiz concerns festivals celebrated by people of different faiths all around the world in the month of February. It shows how for generations man has exalted God and His Presence on earth in this blessed month in so many beautiful ways and found light, peace, bliss.

1. 'Candlemas' is a day of purification, renewal, and hope, and commemorates the day Mary took Jesus to the Temple at Jerusalem to present him to God. Thus, it is often called 'The Presentation of Christ' in the Temple. The festival is called 'Candlemas' because it is the day of the year when all the candles that are to be used in the church during the coming year are brought into church and a blessing is said over them – so it is the festival day (or 'mass') of the candles.

After which important Christian celebration is this day observed?

- A. Thanksgiving
- B. Christmas
- C. Epiphany
- D. Easter

2. For Christians, 6 February 2008, is the start of 'Lent', one of the most important seasons of the church year. It is a period of 40 days of penitence and soul searching introspection. Three traditional practices to be taken up with renewed vigour during Lent are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The festival commemorates Jesus' 40 days of meditation and withdrawal from the world. Where was He during that time?

- A. On a mountain top.
- B. In a cave.
- C. In a neighboring village.
- D. In the desert.

3. Chinese New Year's Eve is known as *Chúxì*. *Chu* literally means "change" and *xi* means "Eve". Chinese New Year is the longest and most important celebration in the Chinese calendar and begins this year on 7 February 2008. New Year festivities traditionally start on the first day of the month and continue until the fifteenth, when the moon is brightest. At Chinese New Year celebrations, people wear red clothes, compose decorative poems on red paper, and give children "lucky money" in red envelopes.

What does the red colour symbolize?

- A. Purity
- B. Joy
- C. Fire
- D. Happiness

4. On 8 February this year, 'Losar' the most important holiday in Tibet, is celebrated, marking the Tibetan New Year. The celebration lasts three days. The word Losar is a Tibetan word for New Year. 'Lo' means year and 'Sar' means new. Losar is celebrated for 15 days, with the main celebrations on the first three days. Everyone exchanges the traditional greeting, "Tashi Delek". What does this greeting mean?

- A. Happy New Year
- B. Good Luck and Best wishes
- C. Hello
- D. God Bless you

5. In the Islamic tradition, the word 'Insha Allah' is often used. What does it mean?

- A. May God be with you
- B. Have a God-Blessed Journey
- C. God Willing
- D. Goodbye

6. In India, 11 February 2008 is the festival that marks the first day of spring called 'Vasanta Panchami', which heralds the advent of spring. 'Vasanta' means spring. The fields are mustard yellow with the ripening of crops and nature displays her majestic finery. Men, women and girls wear yellow clothes. The yellow colour is a sign of auspiciousness and spirituality. This auspicious day is also known and celebrated as Saraswathi Puja. What significant aspect does the Goddess Saraswathi represent?

- A. Education
- B. Health
- C. Wealth
- D. Prosperity

7. Most Buddhists' celebrate 'Nirvana Day' on 8 February, while some also call it as 'Parinirvana' which is celebrated by some on February 15th. The

meaning of 'Nirvana', according to Buddhist scholars, is – 'vāna', or the path of rebirth, + 'nir', meaning 'leaving off'; or "being away from the path of rebirth." Nirvāṇa, then, is not a place nor a state, it is an Absolute Truth to be realized, and a person can do so without dying. When a person who has realized Nirvāṇa dies, his death is referred as his parinirvāṇa, his fully passing away, as his life was his last link to the cycle of death and rebirth (samsara), and he will not be reborn again. At what age did Buddha achieve Nirvāṇa?

- A. 40
- B. 50
- C. 60
- D. 80

8. In China, the Lantern Festival is also known as the Little New Year since it marks the end of the series of celebrations which begin the Chinese New Year. Lanterns of various shapes and sizes are hung in the streets, attracting countless visitors.

"Guessing lantern riddles" is an essential part of the festival. Lantern owners write riddles on a piece of paper and post them on the lanterns. If visitors have solutions to the riddles, they can pull the paper out and go to the lantern owners to check their answer. If they are right, they will get a little gift.

At what phase of the moon is this event celebrated?

- A. New Moon Day
- B. Full Moon Day
- C. First Quarter
- D. Last Quarter

9. In the Shinto religion, 3 February 2008 marks the transition from winter to spring. The name of the festival is Rissun. Traditionally a male member of the family scatters ____ around the home, saying "demons out, good luck in". What object is being thrown?

- A. Rice
- B. Confetti
- C. Sweets
- D. Beans

10. In Sikhism, The word 'Panja' is derived from 'panj' meaning five and refers to the five fingers of the hand or the hand itself. Sikhs use the word 'Sahib' for the names of sacred persons, places or books. Gurudwara Panja Sahib is one

of the most holy places for Sikhs because of the presence of a sacred rock with the handprint of one of their 10 Guru's. Twice a year, Sikhs visit this Gurdwara from all over the world.

To which of the ten Guru's does the handprint belong?

- A. Guru Nanak
- B. Guru Gobind Singh
- C. Giru Tegh Bahadur
- D. Guru Ram Das

ANSWERS:

1B

'Candlemas' is a Christian festival observed on February 2 and occurs 40 days after Christmas. The festival marks the end of the Christmas cycle.

For Christians, the candles are a reminder of something even more important. Christians often talk of Jesus as 'the light of the world' – and candles are lit during church services to remind Christians of this. The lighted candles are a sign of the Divine splendor of the one who comes to expel the dark shadows of evil and to make the whole universe radiant with the brilliance of His Eternal Light. The candles also illustrate how bright our souls should be. They invite man to shine in divine splendor, and be so resplendent that none remain in darkness.

2D

'Lent' is an introspective period, which represents the time Jesus spent in the desert. So, by observing the forty days of Lent, the individual Christian imitates Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days. During Lent each one follows the example of Jesus by sacrificing his own will to the purpose of God. One takes stock of one's life and relationships to discover and change what one must to prepare for Easter and experience the spiritual renewal that comes when one engages in this type of "making right" activity.

There are traditionally forty days in Lent, as the six Sundays in Lent are not counted, which are marked by fasting, both from foods and festivities, and by other acts of penance. On this day, some people give up something they enjoy, add something that will bring them closer to God, and often give the time or money spent doing that to charitable purposes or organizations.

3C

In China, red is used to attract good luck because red symbolizes fire, which according to legend can drive away bad luck. Traditional foods are served,

and gifts of money in red packets are distributed. Old grudges are forgiven and forgotten as behaving badly will bring bad luck all year. People are cheerful, and friends, family and neighbors spend days in visiting each other.

4B

"Tashi Delek" means "Good luck and Best wishes" in all things, health, wealth, and happiness. The spectacle of thousands of Buddhist monks dressed in their deep-red robes celebrating the Tibetan New Year during the annual Losar festival is a sight not to be missed. It is the time of the year for Tibetans to be with family, friends and loved ones. During the celebrations, many people dress in their best clothes and attend religious services held in monasteries. The celebrations are a dramatic affair and usually involve great open-air performances where costumed dancers representing good and evil stage a lively performance.

5C

When a person wishes to plan for the future; when he promises, makes resolutions, and when he makes a pledge, he makes them with permission and the Will of Allah. For this reason, a Muslim uses the Qur'anic instructions by saying "Insha Allah." The meaning of this statement is: "If Allah wills." encouraging Muslims to strive hard and to put their trust with Allah. They leave the results in the hands of Allah.

6A

This day is considered auspicious for education, so it is basically a festival for students. On this holy day students worship Goddess Saraswathi with full reverence. All the folk get together and sing songs connected with spring and get up in the early morning, take bath and worship the sun, Mother Ganga - the Deity of the sacred river Ganges - and the earth. A ritual not connected with worship, but equally essential, to the celebration is that of flying kites on this day.

7D

Nirvāṇa Day is the celebration of Buddha's death when he reached total Nirvāṇa, at the age of 80 when he was in meditation. The idea that all things are transient is central to Buddhist teaching. Loss and impermanence are things to be accepted rather than causes of grief.

8B

According to the Chinese tradition, at the very beginning of a new year, when there is a bright full moon hanging in the sky, [February 21, this year], there should be thousands of colorful lanterns hung out for people to appreciate. At this time, people will try to solve the puzzles on the lanterns and eat 'yuan

xiao' (glutinous rice ball) and all families are united in the joyful atmosphere. This is a festival for people having fun. On the night of the festival, people go out on the streets with a variety of lanterns under the full moon, watching lions or dragons dancing, playing Chinese riddles and games, and lighting up firecrackers. There is really a lot of fun for the young and the old.

9D

The festival is also known as Setsubun and as the 'bean-throwing festival'. At shrines, lucky beans are thrown into the congregation, who attempt to catch them.

10A

Panja Sahib Gurdwara, is sacred to Guru Nanak, who briefly stopped there on his way back to the Punjab from his western journey which took him as far West as Mecca. According to tradition, Guru Nanak and his Muslim companion of long travels, Mardana, halted at the foot of a hill. On the top of the hill lived a Muslim recluse known in those parts as Kandhari. Feeling fatigued and thirsty and seeing no water in the vicinity, Mardana climbed up to Kandhari's hut and begged him for water to quench his thirst. Questioned as to who he was and what had brought him to that place, Mardana said that he was professionally a musician and had come in the train of a great saint, Baba Nanak. Kandhari refused to give him water and quipped instead that if his master was so accomplished a saint, he should not let his follower go thirsty. Mardana walked back disappointed and told the Guru what he had said. Guru Nanak asked Mardana to go once again and supplicate Kandhari with humility. Mardana obeyed, but returned only to report the failure of his mission. Guru Nanak thereupon touched the hillside with the tip of the stick he was holding. Instantly, water spouted forth from that point and Mardana drank his fill. But simultaneously Kandhari's reservoir on top of the hill began to ebb and soon dried up. Blind with rage, Kandhari rolled down a big boulder towards the travelers. Guru Nanak gently raised his arm and the rocky mass, as goes the tradition, stopped in its downward career as it came in touch with his palm, (panja, in Punjabi). The impression of his palm was left on the stone which is still shown to the visitors at that place, now famous as Panja Sahib, the Holy Palm and the Gurudwara was built at the site.

QUIZ ON HEART 2 HEART

This quiz tests your recall powers from reading Heart2Heart and in the answers we have included the links to all the stories and articles from which they have been taken. So please click on these links and enjoy reading about His glory.

1. In our cover story 'Sanathana Sarathi...Recreating a Prashanti in Every Home' - Feb 2007 issue, Professor Kasturi recalls a very memorable learning experience! "I remember one evening in 1959, when He sent someone to bring me to His room at the mandir. Baba told me that the Editor of a daily published from Hyderabad had asked for my photograph, for he was announcing me in his paper, alongside a nice write-up as the Editor of the 'Sanathana Sarathi'. Baba had promised to send him my photograph and He asked me to prepare myself for being shot within minutes by Baba Himself, with a brand new camera He had specially selected for the purpose." What lesson did he learn from Swami from the experience that followed?

- A. Serve with dedication the God and the Godly.
- B. Smile genuinely in front of the camera.
- C. Be dressed meticulously.
- D. Remain dedicated to one's job.

2. In our 'H2H Special: An Interview With Anil Kumar', Feb 2006 issue, Professor Anil Kumar points out that Swami's stories are understood immediately, because they are full of fun and good taste, because they apply to our day-to-day situation and many a times, make us laugh. Then he narrated this story:

"One day, in Darshan, Sai Baba was talking to the children from the primary school. He asked one young boy, just six or seven years old, "Where do you come from, boy?" What was the boy's reply?

- A. I am from Puttaparthi.
- B. I come from my parents.
- C. I come from England.
- D. I come from You.

3. In the Chinna Katha from the Feb 2006 issue, Bhagavan enlightens us with a very important message illustrated by a story of a merchant dealing in gems, who was willing to pay fifty thousand rupees in exchange for a gem that a boy was playing with, thinking it was a marble.

What did Swami compare the 'marble' to?

- A. Chanting the Lord's Name.

- B. Friendship.
- C. Honesty in business.
- D. Respect to elders.

4. In 'Conversations with Sai', Feb 2006 issue, Swami explains to Hislop a very important concept by illustration with a brilliant example:

"The body is not the truth we attribute to it. An example: a man worships the mother who gave him birth for 30 years. He massages her feet, prostrates before her, gazes into her eyes with love, listens to her voice, is warmed and made happy by her affectionate and loving regard. At age 60, the mother dies. At once the son cries out, 'Mother, Mother, why have you left me?'

Why did the man cry out? The body he worshipped was there, the feet he massaged daily were there, but he cried out that his mother was not there, that she had left him. We have to conclude that even though the man had for the past 30 years regarded the body and mother as one and the same, yet when the mother died he instantly knew that 'mother' was not body and that 'mother' had departed even though body remained. So, of what value was the body, which was never the mother, even though for a time it had been regarded as mother?"

What concept was Swami referring to?

- A. Body is an illusion.
- B. Mind is an illusion.
- C. Form is a medium to know the Formless.
- D. All attachments lead to sorrow.

5. In 'Sathya Sai Speaks', Feb 2005 issue, Swami teaches us how to discern discrimination and detachment. He said: "These two are the first and the second steps that man has to take in order to reach the Eternal *Atmic* Truth. The mind can be steadied only by means of the mastery of desire, the quality of unwavering Detachment. Once the mind is still, peace reigns and bliss prevails."

How does Swami teach us to develop detachment?

- A. By developing awareness of the basic blemish in all material things.
- B. By enforcing a ceiling on our desires.
- C. By going on satisfying our senses until we become disgusted.
- D. By finally giving everything away in charity.

ANSWERS:

1A

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

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

Baba mercifully helps us, slowly and subtly, to shed the burden of the ego....He advises that we should be just ourselves and not wear masks behind which we hide. **'What greater status can you attain than being the medium for packaging and posting My message to thousands of devotees every month?'** He asked me. Baba is too bright a Sun for human eyes; we can bask and bathe in sunlight but we cannot gaze at Him."

2D

Anil Kumar continues:

The boy replied, "Swami, I come from you." Sai Baba then turned around and said to all the VIP's sitting on the verandah "See, if I was to ask you that question, you would say "I come from Bombay" or "I come from Madras" or "I come from England", but this little boy says, "I come from You", now that is divine. Children are divine. Then Sai Baba put a second question to the boy, "How many brothers do you have?" Back comes the reply, "Swami, all are my brothers." Sai Baba then said "See how broad minded children are. This little boy considers all are his brothers, but if I were to ask you that question, you would say 'Two brothers, Swami' or 'Three brothers, Swami', you are so narrow minded."

Then Sai Baba put a third question to the boy, "How many sisters do you have?" Back comes the reply, "Swami, all are my sisters." "No, no, no" said Sai Baba, "All are your sisters excepting one, your wife." Well, everybody laughed and then Sai Baba asked the boy, "How many wives do you have?" to which the boy replied, "Swami, all are my wives."

"Oh no, no, no, you are wrong," said Sai Baba, adding, "That boy thinks that he is smart enough to give a reply to Bhagavan." Then Swami said to the boy "Who are you?" Back comes the reply, "Swami, I am God." Sai Baba then said, "**Well, if you are God, then you can go and give Darshan**" and everyone burst into laughter. People love His jokes, His Humour."

3A

Baba stated:

The merchant told the mother that he was ready to give even a thousand rupees on the spot if the marble was placed in his hand! On hearing this, she forbade the child to play with it outside the house. He could play only within the rooms. The merchant could not be shooed off like that. He appeared the next day in front of the house. He held out ten thousand rupees as his offer for the marble. The mother refused to part with it but kept it now in an iron safe, under lock and key! When the merchant came the next day with fifty thousand rupees she took it to a bank and deposited it in their safety vaults.

You are also playing marbles with the Name of God, unaware of its value. Once you realize its worth, you will keep it in your heart of hearts as the most precious treasure. Know that the Name is the key to success in your search for consolation, confidence, courage, illumination and liberation.

4C

Swami explained further: "Contemplating this mystery, it is apparent that had it not been for the body, the mother could not have been known. It was only through the medium of body that the man had been able to experience and thus knows the tender, loving, sublime quality of the mother which resulted in love rising up in his heart. **The formless, timeless quality of 'mother' could be known and attained only through the impermanent form.** The same is true of the Formless Transcendent Divine. Without form, it is non-existent for us. **We become cognizant of the Divine through the medium of Form.**

5A

Swami teaches us: "Detachment or the giving up of the tendency to pursue what attracts the mind is often misconstrued as asceticism which renounces social and family life and escapes into the loneliness of the forests. But, it involves, more than anything else, awareness of the basic blemish in all material things.

"When we are drawn towards some source of pleasure, we examine it carefully and analyze the pleasure that it promises to give. Imagine that you have longed to eat a particular sweet dish. You have got it cooked and served on your plate. You are anticipating all the while the relish it can confer. But while about to place it on the tongue, the cook rushes in and informs you that a lizard had fallen into the vessel in which it was cooked, and so, your favourite food is fouled and poisoned. This creates disgust and your attachment disappears.

So too, when you examine the quality of the pleasure you hope to derive or the fame you toil to earn by your struggles, you will certainly blame yourselves for being so serious about them."

THE HEALING TOUCH

“When Love Beckons...”

In this month's issue we bring you a patient story written by the patient herself - a student of literature, who pours her heart out and shares her life's experiences, of being tossed between agony and ecstasy, culminating in the precise moment when she stepped into Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield. Reading her life-altering experience, you will never again take your life's blessings for granted.

I shall call myself Shweta; but this is not my real name. I ask for your understanding desire to remain anonymous. It may come as a surprise to you that this story is written in the first person. Well! That is so because I wrote it myself. In fact I requested Heart2Heart to have it as it is, with some editing, if needed, but without changing the essence. I want the world to know what I have received - the greatest gift of all...the gift of Life.

I don't know where to begin...with thanksgiving and gratitude which is my present state of mind, or from when I was diagnosed with a heart ailment. Let's keep things straight - I will do what the 'King of Hearts' said in Lewis Carroll's 'Through Alice in Wonderland': "Start at the beginning, go on till you come to the end and then stop".

Doctor's Dreaded Diagnosis

It all began six years ago. I was still in high school in Grade ten, when I began falling ill often. Persistent coughs, colds and breathlessness put a full stop to my sports and extracurricular activities. I was forced to be a spectator at events where I had excelled earlier. It was disappointing and since the problems were longstanding – my family decided to take me to a specialist.

My family and I approached a local specialist who immediately suspected cardiac disease and prescribed a series of tests. We got them done and the clincher was the Echo/Doppler test which showed that I had a valve problem. It was the mitral valve. I was advised immediate surgery and was told to get admitted. My parents suggested that we go home, think it over, and return. The doctor felt it is his bound duty to drive the final nail into the coffin – he pegged the cost of surgery at Rs. 3,00,000 (about US \$ 8000). And that was just the beginning. I was also told that I was to take medication for the rest of my life.

A Daughter's Despondence

Imagine my condition. I am the only daughter of my parents, studying, dependent on them for everything and suddenly this shocking news and the exorbitant price tag...I just could not take it. I was so disturbed that I broke down in the clinic. My parents too were shaken but they held a stiff upper lip. We came back home and I asked to be left alone.

I sat in silence and brooded over my situation. My parents had done everything for me. Given me a good education, treated me as a friend when I grew to my teens. And here I was hanging like a millstone round their neck, instead of being a help to them...On my study table I have a figurine of Mother Saraswathi, the Goddess of Learning. I began to pour out my feelings to Her – after all, prayer is talking to God and I was literally doing so. As student of Literature, I had a good collection of books and was enamored by Khalil Gibran...I reached out and opened "The Prophet"...and the words sprang out at me.

"When love beckons to you, follow him,
Though his ways are hard and steep.
And when his wings enfold you, yield to him,
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.
And when he speaks to you, believe him,
Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind lays waste the
garden.
For even as love crowns you, so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your
growth, so is he for your pruning."

I looked up at Mother Saraswathi and my eyes brimmed with tears. The oft repeated words of my grandparents came to me "everything that happens, happens for the good. God does not give us suffering that we cannot endure". I lowered my eyes to the page and continued to read.

"Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches
that quiver in the sun,
So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the
earth.
Like the sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.
He threshes you to make you naked.
He sifts you to free you from your husks.
He grinds you to whiteness.
He kneads you until you are plain;
And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred
bread for God's sacred feast."

Pangs and Pain of Introspection

After reading this I was even more at odds with God. Why me? What had I done to deserve this? And all the other questions that tear at one's being at such a stark moment rose up in me. It is said that books are one's best friends. I turned back to my bookshelf and my eyes landed on "The Diary of Anne Frank". I did not reach out to take it or read it. I had gone through it at least ten times. A voice in me said, "This is not the end... you are still alive. Anne knew she was going to die but she did not lose faith in humanity. And here you are losing faith in yourself?" I dried my tears.

I will not lie that my mood was suddenly uplifted and I felt the warm glow of sunshine on my shoulders. It sounds so good in poetry and prose, but real life was way too different. I had to face the facts – Rs. 3,00,000 (US \$8000) of my

parents hard-earned money, and then an uncertain future...after all I was young. And as any young heart would rebel...I felt I was too young to die.

I surfed the net and got to know more about the mitral valve disease. My father met some of his friends who suggested a second opinion. This time, the doctor was not so brutally frank; he suggested that we “medically manage the condition” and leave surgery as a last resort. He did not raise any false hopes that the condition would rectify itself. He was just postponing the inevitable to reduce the impact on my growing body.

I accepted my condition and arranged my life around it. I started my medication and over time it came to include the painful injection of *Penidure*. My literary oriented mind broke the name into “pain – endure”. I didn’t mean to be philosophical, but there was not much else to distract or console myself with. Periodically we would go to the diagnostic center only to be told that the disease was progressing. My parents were saving up for my operation, without upsetting the apple cart. They had great plans for me and not once did they allow me to feel I was different.

By now I was sufficiently knowledgeable about my condition and did not demur. We prepared for the process of admission and then surgery. The money was not yet available and my family decided to take a loan to foot the medical expenses.

In the midst of such uncertainty, when all seems lost, there remains hope. It is hope which keeps us alive. I was still hoping that there could be some way to dent the impact of this situation on our lives. God allows us to struggle till we give up and then He takes over.

The Miracle of Faith

One evening, my father returned home excited and without talking to us headed for the prayer room. He prostrated to the Lord and then after a few silent moments, told us, “We are going to Bangalore”. Before we could react he continued,

“My friend and I were at the hospital today asking about the valve surgery packages, when a stranger accosted us. He is no longer a stranger”, he smiled. Incidentally, I was seeing a genuine smile on my father’s face after a long time that day. He continued: “He overheard our conversation and came to us. He told us about this hospital in Bangalore, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS), a hospital that offers medical care in Cardiac and Neuro Sciences **totally free of charge**. We are going there and the rest is up to God.”

Needless to say, we came to Bangalore and I got my preliminary checkup done. The results were the same and we were told to come back after receiving the intimation from the Hospital for a surgery date. I am cutting a long story short here...I got the call letter and came over to the Hospital. My surgery was uneventful and here I am writing this piece, seated on the bed in the post-operative ward of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, in Whitefield, near the city of Bangalore, India.

It is true that the disease changed my outlook towards life. It is also true that the cure changed me for the better. I am not referring to the cure of the

physical ailment alone. I am referring to a deeper cure that the SSSIHMS experience confers.

Cosmic Cure That Pervades the Air

I don't know for certain what subliminal power the Hospital exudes, but to me it was the temple from which God answered my prayers. I was awestruck by the grandeur of the hall and the dome. The resplendent, reassuring presence of Lord Ganesha in the central hall, the wide lawns outside the window, the expansive balconies, long corridors...vastness everywhere. The architecture lends itself the opening of the spiritual heart, allowing the soul to seek and soar higher.

Here, my mind was at rest and my heart, at peace. In fact, I actually felt happy that I was in this Hospital. There was no fear of the unknown. The doctors and nurses were frank, but so gentle. I was always told that truth is bitter, but here I found that it is possible to speak the truth without hurting. It was during my stay at SSSIHMS that I have found the true meaning of service, loving and selfless service.

I can go on about what I feel now and how I was before, but as my benefactor Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba says, past is past, forget the past, future is uncertain, live in the present, it is the gift of God. That is why it is referred to as a "present". Bhagavan Baba further says our present is not an ordinary one but it is "omnipresent" for in it lies dormant the future of each of us.

Seize the Now

Today, I believe in "the power of now". I am currently in the final year of my Bachelor's degree, and have no doubt that I am going to achieve whatever I will. Each of us has a purpose in life and it is for us to find it. To paraphrase Mario Puzo in his famous novel 'God Father', 'every man has but one destiny and some spend a lifetime in search of it'. I drew one meaning from this aphorism, "live life by the moment, for the present, for, it is precious." I realized the value of "now".

One must live life as though there is no tomorrow. Do all the good you can every moment, for, the next instant, life may be a 'past'. Words are insufficient to express what I feel, but were I to succeed in conveying my idea of the value of time, the power of now and the gift of life to even a few...I will consider myself lucky. To all those lucky 'normal' people out there, congratulations, you have the greatest gift – **LIFE!**

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the January issue

Feedback on the Cover Story: *Sai's Kasturi... A Phantasmagoric Fragrance Forever*

Dear Sir,

The cover story on Sri Kasturi was magnificent and very touching. What a privilege to read about him and to hear him again after nearly 20 years! It was inspiring to read about some of my erstwhile teachers – Sri Nanjundaiah and Sri B N Narasimha Moorthy. Years ago, in 1977 when I was a student staying in the Brindavan hostel as part of the summer course, I used to walk with Sri Kasturi from the newly built college auditorium back to the guest room in the hostel where he used to stay with his son, Sri MVN Murthy. It was a cherished association as we talked about what Swami had just spoken on in His discourse (on the Ramayana for the whole month) and all the other issues of the day.

He used to regale me with old stories from his books in Kannada – one was called the “Ana-arthakosha” meaning the “undictionary” as he used to call it. One of my most distinct memories is of the day that both Sri Kasturi and Sri GP Rajaratnam (another titan of Kannada literature) both spoke at the summer course on the same morning. These presentations even attracted Swami's presence – the Lord came specially to listen to them speak, He sat for the full 2 hours along with the boys and thoroughly enjoyed it. Thank you for bringing to all of us this wonderful piece of Sai History.

Perry Naik,

Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., Atlanta, USA

Dear H2H Editorial Team:

Sairam! Congratulations on producing a delectably and wonderful cover story on Professor Kasturi. I had the privilege and the good fortune of meeting this wonderful personality in my formative years as a Bal Vikas student and as a young adult. For many of us in the Sai family, Professor Kasturi was the prism through which we first glimpsed the multitude of colours of Sai's glory and grandeur. Chinna Katha - one of my all time favourites - is a book that I return to constantly for insight, inspiration, and illumination. This book would not have seen the light of the day but for the loving and painstaking efforts of Professor Kasturi. The stories from Chinna Katha have come to my rescue many a time in life's journey - if only to apply a soothing ethereal balm that helps me endure the ephemeral. Since becoming a Bal-Vikas teacher, I have

narrated many of the Chinna Katha stories to my students who have experienced similar joy and delight upon hearing these stories.

The contribution of Professor Kasturi is not easy to estimate and neither is it easy to describe the multi-faceted personality that he was. That your team has painstakingly researched and uncovered the multitude of reflections of this exemplar of a personality is patently evident in the text, pictures, and audio clips that are part of this inspiring cover story. May Swami bless you with more opportunities to uncover such personalities on your cover story.

Allow me to leave you with a small personal anecdote that only illustrates the evolution that is inevitable when one is fortunate to spend one's time in the crucible of Sai. My father - Dr. Vijai Kumar of Chennai - was closely associated with Dr. Murthy (Son of Professor Kasturi). When Dr. Murthy passed away - quite unexpectedly - at a relatively young age, my father called upon Professor Kasturi in Prashanthi Nilayam to offer condolences. To my father's surprise, it was Professor Kasturi who offered condolences to my father saying "Poor fellow, you lost your friend, isn't it."

Not only was a father's grief conspicuous in its absence, the father had transcended grieving at a personal level to be able to see and feel the grief of another person. Such thinking and such disposition is exemplary and is evidence of him having Swami in the forefront of his awareness at all times. Thank you once again and looking forward to such inspiring stories in future.

With Loving Sairam to all of you,

Sanjai

Sairam H2H team,

The cover story on Prof. Kasturi was an absolutely delightful read. The format was also refreshing with video clips neatly tucked in between. Could you please continue this 'Old is Gold' series with cover stories on stalwarts in the Sai Mission.

It is very encouraging to read about the strong faith and confidence that these devotees showed and how they put into practice Bhagavan's teachings to the letter. Also, it was encouraging to read the responses that Bhagavan gave to some queries posed to Him early on. Those kind of 'punch liners' that He gives 'punches' the answer into the questioner's heart.

These older devotees had the fortune to be taught by Bhagavan each and every step of their well utilised life. The golden lessons and words of Bhagavan taught to these devotees would be a real treasure applicable to one and all; one example is the New Year prayer that was penned by Swami for Prof. Kasturi. I kindly request you to continue and do more cover stories on old devotees.

Sai Ram, and please keep up the good and holy work.

- H2H reader

Dear Heart2Heart Team: Sai Ram!

I have read your story on Prof. Kasturi and thoroughly enjoyed it. It reminds me of Mother Theresa's love and yearning for Jesus (from her letters published in "Mother Theresa - Come Be My Light"). Thank you for posting the clips from talks given by him - being of the younger generation, I was never fortunate to hear any of his talks.

You ask at the end of your story whether we feel inspired or helped in any way, and the answer is 'yes' to both questions. It is so easy today to lose faith, hope and love - even with Swami here with us - because we sway so quickly towards what we know and what is familiar and lose sight of what is truly important. Prof. Kasturi's complete trust, faith, love and devotion to Swami is a reminder to me of all the things that I need to develop in my own life. His story gives us a glimpse of Swami's love for us, even though I admit I don't always understand it.

Thank you for the wonderful way in which you presented Prof. Kasturi's experiences, insights and humour to us. Sai Ram.

Respectfully,
Kayshee Seshadri

Om Sri Sai Ram,

Dear Prof Venkataraman and the blessed H2H Team,

This month's cover story on *Sai's Kasturi* was absolutely soul stirring. In fact words fail me in describing the feelings in my heart. The yearning in our hearts to be dear to Swami has been multiplied an infinite fold. Blessed indeed are the fortunate few who had the good fortune of meeting this dear devotee of the Lord and who witnessed the love between the Lord and His beloved devotee - like the love between Lord Krishna and the gopis in the Srimad Bhagavatam.

May Swami shower His abundant grace on each one of you, for bringing to us such wonderful, elevating, transforming, episodes of Sai Love. With most loving and humble pranams at the lotus feet of our ever present Swami,

Jai Sairam,

Shobha Menon

Dear all,

At the outset, I wish everybody at Radio Sai a very Happy New Year. The Journal is par excellence, the article on Shri Kasturi really brought tears to my eyes. I felt the prayer written by Bhagavan to Himself (for Kasturiji) is equally applicable to all of us. I express my sincere gratitude to Swami for letting all this happen and to you all at Radio Sai and H2H for your wonderful efforts.

Jai Sai Ram,

Mohan K. Rao

Sai Ram Dear Heart 2 Heart Team,

I just read Sai's Kasturi from start to finish - I could not leave the computer. Your story brought tears of joy to my eyes. We are indeed lucky to be living in this time of the Sai Avatar. Your work is professional, inspiring and sincerely appreciated. Thank you.

John B. (Australia)

Dear All at Radio Sai,

As I read on 1st of Jan 2008 the cover story on Kasturi, It brought tears to my eyes and also made me realise the greatness of our Sai, His kindness and love for His devotees.

Sri Kasturi's life also depicted an outstanding example of true devotion to our Lord. What a better way to begin our new year than reading about Kasturiji and Baba in Heart to Heart. You all have touched our hearts and inspired us. Thanks again to the entire team at Radio Sai. Sai Ram and Happy New Year to all of you

Regards

Krishnan, Singapore

I love reading all your journals. I read them in the morning and again in the night. I'm thankful to you and Baba for letting me read His messages on a daily basis. Words cannot express what great service you are doing. I read an article about Prof. Kasturi and I compare your service to his.

You bring Baba to my home everyday. Baba is my love, my life, my mother, and I see Him through your articles. Sai Ma bless you all for this enormous service you are providing. I always prayed to Baba to come to my home so that I could hear Him, see Him and your daily emails have almost fulfilled that.

Sai Ram,

Latika Mogla, Mississauga, Canada

Sai Ram to the heart2heart team,

My humble salutations to the lotus Feet of Bhagavan Baba on this new year's day. A very happy new year to the heart2heart team which is virtually touching million hearts which await for the Sai spiritual messages every day across the globe.

Today's "Sai's Kasturi" which starts from a soul stirring prayer beside the bromide colour close up picture of Prof Kasturigaru and ending with another picture of him in warm clothing (indeed a rare photo) titled as "on to a new odyssey " is a great tribute to that great gem of a person. Splendid are the twenty five page texts, images and voice of noble contemporaries.

I hope by Swami's grace this will come out in the form of a book let so that devotees who have no ready access to the electronic media can treasure this article in their Sai Literature.

Jai Sai Raama,

Krishna Prasad

Dear brothers and team, Sai Ram.

Words fail me to express my feelings on going through your presentation of the lead article on Swami and Sri Kasturi. I was transported to Prashanthi Nilayam. Swami has blessed you all as His instruments to educate us all about his divine love and His grace. I can only say thank you very much.

Viswanath

The cover story on Kasturi's beautiful life is too good. The feeling was similar to the one I got seeing the huge sets the Brindavan boys put up scene after scene in the Kabir drama on January 13. So huge, so grand, so intricate, so beautiful - they blow you away. It makes you wonder - is it possible? Such extraordinary results are achieved when we let go the 'i' and let the 'I' take over. All extraordinary results need the factor of 'let go' to let the higher

source work through. Appreciate the labour that would have gone into making this. May His Blessings and Grace be always with you.

R Prusty, Puttaparthi

Sairam H2H Team,

Reading the cover story of our beloved Kasturi led me to discover the love of a devotee for the Lord. I was reading the article for almost 2 hours.....many times I could not follow the script being interrupted by tears in my eyes...such was the vibration in my heart. The life line of the great soul has awakened my heart and imprinted with life and love for Swami's Mission.

I thank Swami for giving the world such fragrance to inspire every devotee of this age...it's really heart touching to read the narrations and listen to the reactions of many. I pray Swami to make this H2H Journal play a lead role in moulding lives of many...let your sacred writings make us all to be sacred instruments in His Hands...let your inspiring articles throw an insight in our hearts to do His work.

Let your nectarine thoughts be source of inspiration for many around the globe.

Sai Ram,

CS Balachandra Sunku,

Hyderabad Sai Youth.

Feedback on: *Precious Association*,

Namaskaaram,

Per chance I happened to read the article *Precious Association*, by Mr. Subhash Subramaniam on your website and was very impressed by the level of faith (*Bhakti*) and felt how very fortunate you must be. In the article, I took the story of the pencil and stored it in my collection as it is one of the best examples of surrender (*Samarpan*) that I have read.

I feel very fortunate to have come across this website and the article and could feel the touch and association of *Bhagavad Bhakti* during this period. Thank you once again and my sincere salutation to the Lotus Feet of Sri Sai.

Gowtam Das Gupta, Maharashtra

Feedback on: *Dissolving The Bitterness Of Life*

Jai Sai Ram to all at h2h,

Just thought that I would write a few words on this very inspirational story. I have got so many problems in life, but after reading this article, I feel that they have all vanished into thin air. Especially the last line: 'tell your problems how big your God is'. I leave all my problems in Baba's hands. Thank you very much for writing this story and I think that you all are doing a fantastic job.

Jai Sai Ram

Shakuntala Taank, UK

Feedback on: *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: Fiery Will and Nerves of Steel*

Dear Heart to Heart,

I am greatly touched and inspired by the personal drive and patriotism of Sri Bose. Baba's comments on Bose's behind the scenes activities for India's liberation, only serves to remind us that nothing is unnoticed by the Lord of the Universe. His pointed question 'Is there no one like Bose'leaves a new stirring in me.

Yours truly,

Davendra Ojar

Feedback on: *How Baba Reinvented Me*

This story is a great eye opener. After reading this, I feel my son (17 years) is also undergoing the same empty feeling. Probably many youngsters are feeling the emptiness of our education system which has dumped them with mostly irrelevant information and not the art of living this life. I pray to Swami to guide them towards blissful living.

Koti pranams at the lotus feet,

Sandhya Kotian, Mumbai

Feedback on: *Multi-Faith Akhanda Bhajan for World Peace in UK*

Dear friends in Sai,

That was superb! Of course we want more of the same. Swami's message is unstoppable, unarguable, and obviously meaningful to every denomination.

All roads lead to the top of Mount Everest even if they appear different on the way. And there, at the top, stands Love, what else!

And love to you.

Om Sai Ram

Jacqueline Trost MA, Australia

Feedback on: *In Russia With The Love Of Sai*

Sai Ram,

The article on Russia was a very beautiful one. It was nice to see Dr. Nikhila Pandya being interviewed at your studio. She was one of the doctors who came for the Malawi camp also. It's also very interesting to hear experiences of various people, especially the old students. Thank you all very much at Radio Sai and h2h for the effort you are putting in to give Sai devotees all over the world an insight of what's happening in Prasanthi.

Sai Ram,

Asha

General Feedback

Thank you for such wonderful and heart warming episodes that you send us. We are very far away in a small island in the Pacific yet after reading about the happenings in Parthi I feel as I am there personally witnessing the happenings. I feel so very close to Swami all the time and as He is omnipresent; we don't doubt this. Please keep up the good work and let us keep in touch with Swami through your media.

Jai Sai Ram,

Nalini Naidu

Sai Ram,

I simply wanted to take a moment to extend my heart felt gratitude for the amazing work you do in compiling, assembling, publishing and maintaining the Heart to Heart and other Sai websites. I read the articles every single chance I get and it is not rare that I find myself pulling back that tear that wants to roll down my cheek as I read yet another Swami story.

We all have different paths. As for myself, all I can say is that reading about Swami brings me very close to Him. I try to avoid TV and reading dark news and I find Swami keeps me alive in the heart. I am often surprised because the sentiments that rise in me by Swami are ones I had no idea I had. Spiritual love can sure be buried deep underneath in the Kali age.

We have a laptop in the kitchen with a wireless connection. Every so often I turn to Sai Videos and ask my three year old daughter to watch; she is very

enthusiastic and likes to watch the videos as well. When I travel on business I read books on Swami but I hardly seem to get the time to absorb all the material on Him.

Thank you again for your Seva, and know that you are truly keeping me alive!

With Love,

Oscar Chavarria

Loving Sai Ram to the whole Heart 2 Heart team.

We wish you all a very happy New Year. We wish to convey our thankfulness and gratitude for the wonderful work you are doing. You keep us connected with Divinity everyday and "Sai Inspires" is inspiring us and helping us to improve ourselves everyday. Again thank you. You are Sai's instruments and are serving Him directly by bringing to the entire world His Divine Teachings and Messages. You are indeed blessed.

Yours Sincerely,

Devin, Amrita, Rajiv and Prithviraj