

HEART 2 HEART

VOL 6 ISSUE 6, JUNE 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Section</u>
03	BETWEEN YOU AND US
	SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS
06	SATHYA SAI SPEAKS: This Bank and That Bank
09	CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI: SATHYOPANISHAD - Part 5
15	<i>CHINNA KATHA</i> – The One Basis
16	<u>COVER STORY: THE SPECTACULAR SAGA OF SAI IN KASHMIR</u>
	FEATURE ARTICLES
37	IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 16
47	THE LOVE OF LAW AND THE LAW OF LOVE
53	CHOICES... AND WHY I MADE THEM
	SERIAL ARTICLES
58	THE DIVINE STORY OF SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI - Part 42
62	MUSINGS ON THE AVATARS – Part 4
	WINDOW TO SAI SEVA
69	'SAI ANANDAM' - A GARDEN OF DIVINE BLOSSOMS
80	PRASHANTI DIARY
	SWAMI AND ME
89	NEAR AND DEAR FOREVER
95	THE SWAMI I GREW UP WITH – Part 2
	H2H SPECIAL
107	MESMERIZING MOMENTS WITH THE DIVINE MASTER – Part 3

SAI WORLD NEWS

- 113** RAILWAY MINISTER LALU YADAV LAUDS THE SAI
CHILDREN IN NEW DELHI

GET INSPIRED

- 119** THE LITTLE GIRL'S WISH
121 THE RED MAHOGNAY PIANO
123 THE CAB RIDE

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

- 125** MULTI-FAITH QUIZ
132 QUIZ ON DIVINE SUMMER SHOWER DISCOURSES
140 QUIZ ON HEART 2 HEART

THE HEALING TOUCH

- 144** A STARFISH AND THE OCEAN

- 149** YOUR SAY

BETWEEN YOU AND US

It was the time when the most significant event to unfold in the twentieth century for one of the most ancient and holy lands on this planet, was still eighty one days away. Subjected to colonial rule and careless exploitation for centuries, India was still groping in darkness, trying hard to extricate herself from the clutches of her foreign rulers. There was despair, death and distress in every hamlet and home. And it was no different in the house of Seshamaraju, the teacher of Telugu, in Urvakonda, an obscure little town miles away from the nearest big city of Bangalore. But his tensions and trials had an altogether unique dimension – his younger brother, Sathya Narayana Raju's bizarre behaviour was baffling him more than ever before. His 'simple village-grown brother' was now being taken away in cars and carriages to horizons much beyond their tiny hamlet – into the maze of teeming cities and big towns. Fear, pain and helplessness gripped his heart. It became most severe when local newspapers started carrying horrid news about the twenty-year old, who was 'doing tricks and collecting people'. It had breached the barrier of his patience and endurance; but he could do nothing to stop Him. So, one day he wrote Him a letter, seriously warning about His 'wayward ways' and the possible 'disastrous impact' it could have in His life and future. And the response he received, without much waiting, was one which altered his own understanding of life forever, and changed not only his future or his family's or town's, but of the whole of humanity!

In that historic reply, on May 25, 1947, the young Sathya - His age not more than a score -, wrote, nay declared, "I have a 'Task': To foster all mankind and ensure for all of themselves lives full of *Ananda* (bliss). I have a 'Vow': To lead all who stray away from the straight path, again into goodness and save them. I am attached to a 'Work' that I love: To remove the sufferings of the poor and grant them what they lack." Sixty summers and winters have entered and exited on this earth since then, and what have we seen? How many millions have been blessed and benefited, beyond their imagination and belief, with the taste of the *Ananda*, the bliss, that He promised on that historic day!

Right from the early days of His Avatharhood when He sent the tiny band of devotees into heavens of ecstasy on the sands of the Chitravathi by bestowing on them the experience of the supranatural (the glimpse of the third eye of Lord Shiva! The vision of the Sun after it had set! The gifts of *vada* [a south Indian delicacy] picked from inside the sands, dripping with ghee (!) with no dust particle sticking onto them!..), He has incessantly been engaged in raising the consciousness of mankind from the physical to the meta physical, from mundane to the Divine, by conferring on them a taste of that bliss, which could grant them happiness that is perennial. And so eager is He to confer this Blessing, that in the earlier years, the Lord did not wait for the devotees to come to Him, He Himself went to their towns and cities, villages and settlements. In 1944 itself, the young Sathya went to Bangalore, and thereafter to Mysore, Madras (now Chennai), Hyderabad, Karur, Kerala, Udumalpet, Ooty and so on.

Seven years after the inauguration of Prasanthi Nilayam, in 1950, Swami made His first visit to North India, to Srinagar in Kashmir, but that was a brief 2-day trip. The next year, He was in the southern most tip of India, Kanyakumari, and the fortunate devotees who were around Him, saw the breathtaking scene of the sea offering her salutations to Him by enigmatically encircling His feet with a garland of pearls! In 1961, Swami was in the Himalayas again, now to the holy shrine in Badrinath. And how mysteriously He materialised there a four-armed Narayana icon, about 12 inches high, followed by a charming thousand petalled 'golden' Lotus, and again, a Jyothirlinga, to be placed on the shining Lotus. The creation spree continued. Later that day, to do *abhishekam* to this *lingam*, came a silver vessel and 108 miniature golden *bilva* leaves from nowhere, and then the most incredible - 108 actual 'thumme' flowers, fresh with even the touch of the morning dew! It was a rare event of Divine sport for a fortunate few. But the numbers were huge and overwhelming, when Swami went to East Africa in 1968 – His first and only visit outside India till date. Having never before tasted such Love, when Baba gave light to many – to some who were physically sightless and many mentally - in that hitherto dark continent, they cried, "Father! Do not leave us so soon!"

After this, in 1970, the Lord traveled to Goa where, out of His immense compassion, He took over the malignant illness of a dear devotee. It was another moving revelation of His Infinite Love. In 1973, He was in Hyderabad to inaugurate 'Shivam' – an architectural marvel shaped in the form of a *Linga* which is the epicenter of Sai Mission in the capital city of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Later, Swami went to Mumbai, Jaipur and Rajkot in the West of India, and even to Shimla in the North in 1973. Every visit was a testimony to the infinitely powerful Divine magnet that He is. But the most outstanding of all these was yet to come. The Lord had been dropping big hints and working inscrutably behind the scene; but few were aware, and even among them, who knew a little of what was coming, nobody ever believed a bit. That is how silent and shrouded, the Divine Master Plan was. But when it actually happened – the dream visit of Swami to Kashmir in 1980 for an amazing twelve days! – it virtually blew their minds away. What they saw and experienced was out from a Divine fairy tale; it was as if a piece of heaven had fallen off on earth. Exactly 28 years ago, in this same month of June, this paradisiacal gem of a journey of the Divine finally unfolded. What was the Divine scheme behind this spiritual odyssey? How did this idea originate? Who were the blessed Divine instruments through whom the Lord played out this dream of a divine drama? You will find all these fascinating tales when you read our cover story "The Spectacular Saga of Sai in Kashmir".

Dear reader, when you read the story you will probably say that the title should have been, not just 'spectacular saga...', but 'supremely spectacular....', because the manifestations and miracles, ethereal *darshans* and enchanting *leelas* that Sai, who was physically in His fifties then, enacted was simply extraordinary. The valley of Kashmir, was as if swept over by a force that was so irresistible and elevating - the divine play of pure Love in the pristine lap of nature amidst pining devotees was too overpowering. It was again a lesson to humanity on the humungous potential of this one virtue and

strength – Love, and at the same time, offered to the fortunate thousands, who were present, a glimpse of what an incredible experience it could be when *Sathyam*, *Shivam* and *Sundaram* – Truth, Goodness and Beauty become One; it is just unsullied 'bliss'.

What does one do when he or she becomes a recipient of this 'bliss' from the divine? They want to relive it and recreate it! And how each one does this is really beautiful. We have one sweet and inspiring instance in our Sai Seva section, and interestingly, it is entitled "Sai *Anandam* (bliss) – A Garden of Divine Blossoms". This is a touching tale of how a former student of Swami's University, longing to experience that bliss of Bhagavan perennially, has created an environment that is subsumed with this supreme emotion. When you read how hapless and haunted orphans, who would otherwise have destroyed their lives, are today not only shining symbols of bliss, but are also eager to share it with others, you will get a real taste of what it is that confers on us limitless happiness, and as they say, 'adds life to our years and not years to our lives.'

Swami says, "The bliss that you can experience in service, in helping the needy and neglected, is not found anywhere else." And that is the reason why the Lord is always happy – in a state of undiluted bliss. In fact, He says, "Bliss is My food." And one can see this in every *darshan*. How hungry is the Lord to only give, give and give! If only we design our lives in a manner that in every moment of our lives we exist not for ourselves, but for others, then we too would surely become Sai, our beloved 'Baba', - '**Being Awareness Bliss Atman**' as Swami explains.

Lets us make the brief sojourn of our existence on this planet a tiny bubble of bliss!

Loving Regards,

Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

This Bank and That Bank

This is an excerpt of a beautiful discourse delivered by Bhagavan Baba on the occasion of the inauguration of a branch office of State Bank of India in Prashanti Nilayam more than 40 years ago.

I am glad that the State Bank of India is opening a branch here in the Prashanthi Nilayam area. *Artha* (wealth) is one of the *Purushaarthas* – legitimate objects of human endeavour. The four *purushaarthas* are *dharma*, *artha*, *kaama* and *moksha* (righteousness, wealth, desire and liberation). They have been listed so, in that order, on purpose.

Dharma (righteousness) has to direct and control the process of earning wealth (*artha*) and *moksha* (liberation) is to be the regulating factor of desire (*kaama*). All wealth accruing from sources minted by *adharma* (unrighteous means) is to be treated with contempt as unworthy of man. All desires that do not subserve the one supreme need for liberation are to be given up as beneath the dignity of man. So, the *Adhyaathmic* (spiritual) basis of *dharma* and *moksha*, has to be the root of both *artha* and *kaama*. Without it, earning degenerates into plundering; desire degenerates into death.

This Bank helps you to keep your money safe when you deposit it with them. They are happy to receive it from you; they will allow you to make use of it when you are in difficulty. But your money helps you only in worldly distress. You accumulate it with great care, by thousands of acts of denial, denying yourselves this comfort or that convenience, saving in this item and that, spending less and earning more; but a day comes when you have to leave the pile and go, empty-handed. This passbook will not be looked into there. Why, even while here, when the pile grows into an attractive quantity, sons start fighting for it, causing you anxiety and fear; taxes take away a large share; thieves and crooks have an eye on it.

What is the Other Bank?

There is another Bank which receives deposits and maintains accounts strictly and confidentially. Every little sum is entered and accounted for deeds, thoughts, words, good, bad and indifferent. If this Bank takes good care of your *aasthi* (properties, wealth), that Bank watches whether you are an *aasthika*, a person who acts on the assumption that there is *asthi* – a sovereign guiding principle that is divine, that whispers warnings from the heart when *dharma* and *sathya* are infringed, when *artha* and *kaama* enslave man unchecked. No son can sue for that *aasthi* (wealth); no tax-gatherer can lay his hands on it. No crook can transfer it to his purse. Open a deposit account there, in that Bank, for your prosperity here and hereafter. That deposit, growing by your spiritual efforts, will give you joy and peace.

While you should develop this saving habit here, for the sake of old age and a rainy day, it is necessary that you should develop that "saving habit" for the hereafter, so that you may be saved. *Dharmam chara, sathyam vada* is the method. *Dharma, sathya* and *prema* (*Righteousness, Truth and Love*) are the currency accepted by that other Bank. All acts, words and feelings ringing with the purity of these metals will be accepted as deposits. So, along with an account in this bank, you must take care to have an account in that other Bank also...

The Unique Features of the Other Bank

This bank will not give loans to all and sundry; its help is only for those who are credit-worthy, who have impressed by their industry and integrity that they will make good use of the money and keep their word. That other Bank too will save from distress and grief those who have *sathya, dharma, shanthi* and *prema*. This bank will help only in proportion to the deposits that stand in your name; that Bank too deals like that. The consequences of the meritorious activities of previous births can be drawn upon now; but unless you have them, no cheque will be honoured. Moreover, only those who have the account can operate. Each must have a separate account in his own name; one brother cannot draw on the account of another brother; the wife cannot draw on the account of the husband.

This bank will give loans if you mortgage your house or lands, property that has come down to you from your ancestors, gold jewellery that has come to you from your mothers, etc. That Bank also will allow you to draw upon the accounts of previous births, and deposits made then. That is why you find some people, who are obviously wicked and cruel, mean and miserly, yet leading 'happy' lives, free from pain and grief. They have drawn upon deposits made in the past. They are entitled to that happiness.

Sometimes, this bank will grant you overdrafts, so that you tide over temporary crisis; the extent of the overdraft is settled by the Manager with reference to your reliability and capabilities. It is like the *anugraha* (Grace), that God will confer on you when you have earned it by *sath karma, sath chinthana, sath bhaava, sath sanga* and *Naamasmarana* (good deeds, good thoughts, good feelings, good company and constant contemplation on the name of God and the glory it seeks to express).

Surrender Your Ego to God's Safe Deposit Vault

Banks have safe deposit vaults, where customers can keep their valuables, jewels, legal documents and other things like silver and gold, which attract thieves; they can then be free from worry and sleep in peace. Surrender them to the custody of the Bank and dismiss anxiety from the mind.

That other Bank, dealing with spiritual accounts, has also a safe deposit vault. Surrender your jewels of intelligence, cleverness, capacity to serve and the gem that you most value, namely, your ego to the care of God; then, you can be happy. *Maam ekam sharanam vraja*, meaning, "Surrender to Me alone".

This is the way the Lord invites. Then, He assures *Maa suchah*, that is, you need not grieve at all....

This earthly *dhanam* (wealth) you take to this bank; that other *dhanam*, the *punyam* (good deeds) you do, the purity you achieve, the love that you manifest – bring Me those precious things and I shall accept them as deposits.

- From Divine Discourse in Prashanti Nilayam, July 14, 1966

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - Part 5: Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear reader, responding to positive responses from many readers to this section in H2H, where we have a dialogue with the Divine, after we completed serializing Dr. John Hislop's "Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba" in January 2008, we started Prof. Anil Kumar's "Satyopanishad" from the next month.

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

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

CHAPTER II - Trends in Society

(Continued from the previous issue)

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! When we say, 'men and women are equal', why then do we find differences and discrimination between the two sexes?

Bhagavan: Physically, men and women are different. But spiritually, i.e., from the *atmic* point of view, both are equal. In fact, God is the only male while all others are females. The *deham*, body, is also called *puram*, dwelling place. It is the principle of *atma* that works from top to bottom. You know, colleges for women celebrate anniversary functions during which they present cultural items like a play. Here, girls play all the different roles like those of a soldier, a minister, a king, and so on. Similarly, all but God are women in this world. A similar thing happened in the life of Mira, the great devotee of Lord Krishna. She was stopped at the main entrance of a Krishna temple at Brindavan, and was told that women were not permitted to enter a temple of God. Then Mira replied, "Oh! Is that so! Where are men here? I find only women. God is the only male person. "

However, from the worldly point of view, for the division of work, men and women are different from each other. Everything and everyone is Divine. Even though it is your own body, you don't put slippers or footwear on the head or hands. Functionally, all the parts of the body are different from each other, though they may belong to the same person. So also physically and functionally, men and women are separate entities, though spiritually they are one and the same.

AK: Swami! We hear many funny statements in present day society. People speak about the Women's Liberation Movement. Some say that women have not been given their due place since times immemorial. They complain that there has always been discrimination on grounds of gender, and women have never been given a fair deal. Women now fight for equal rights with men. We pray to you to describe to us the role of women in our society?

Bhagavan: This is not true, spiritually speaking. There is a physical difference, but *Atma* or the spirit is one. However, each one has to discharge the duties expected of him or her. In a social order, man and woman are like the two hands, the two eyes, and the two feet. One is the positive, while the other is the negative for the current to flow and operate. Lord Siva is called *ardhanaris'vara*, androgynous God (half of His body being that of a woman) to explain this unity. Man and woman are like matter and energy. A woman is described as *adis'akti*, *paras'akti* Supreme Power, Infinite Power.

You also notice in the history of Bharat (India) the place given to women. Many of them are known today for their sacrifice, wisdom, devotion, and many of them could give better and sane advice to their husbands. Characters like Savitri, Mandodari, Sita, Anasuya, Tara, Damayanti, Madalasa, and Draupadi are very well known. Draupadi served her five husbands most faithfully, never said 'no' to whatever work was assigned to her, and led a life of contentment. When there was a debate between Adi Sankara and Mandanamisra, it was the wife of Mandanamisra, Ubhaya Bharati, who played the role of a judge and pronounced Adi Sankara winner at the end. In ancient times, Gargi and Maitreyi were known for their outstanding scholarship and spiritual excellence. In recent times, have you not heard of the role played by the mother of Emperor Sivaji and of Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, in moulding their character and personality? They learnt lessons of life in the lap of their mothers! It was due to the love and inspiration of Kausalya and Sita towards their respective sons, Lord Rama and the twins Lava and Kusa, that the latter could earn undying reputation and stand till today as ideals to the entire world.

In our daily prayers we say *matr devo bhava*, 'Mother is God'. Don't you see the names of women come first and those of men next, in compounds like SitaRama, GauriSankar, LakshmiNarayana and so on? In the past, there never was an instance of women being humiliated, neglected or treated with disrespect. Don't you hear words like 'motherland', 'mother tongue' that speak highly of women?

The Bhagavad Gita refers to seven types of power enjoyed by women as a matter of right. She has quite a few titles that underscore her contribution to the family and her special role. A housewife is called *illalu*, the one who takes care of the house or *illu*. She is described as *sahadharma carini*, the one who guides her husband along the path of *Dharma* or righteousness. She is praised as *grhalaksmi*, the very embodiment of the wealth, peace and prosperity of the family. She is called *ardhangi*, representing a half of man, the better half.

Woman stands for patience, sacrifice, forbearance, respect, humility and obedience, the qualities, which are usually missing among men. A woman is prepared to die for her child or husband. She slogs and struggles for the progress and the well being of the family. She is the backbone of the country. She is the light and the delight of the family.

AK: Swami! A change is very much needed in every field of our activity. Almost all walks of public life are nowadays polluted, disgusting and disappointing. How is change to be brought about?

Bhagavan: Truly speaking, villagers who are unlettered, innocent and rustic are living in greater peace and cooperation, in more intimate relationships, and mutual love than the so called urban, sophisticated, educated, and seemingly cultured people. The latter are full of ego and jealousy. To bring about a change, they need to work for it. They must put in enough sincere effort to overcome qualities like egoism, pride, jealousy, and hatred. Butter is, no doubt, very soft; but in order to make *ghee* out of it, you must heat it. Similarly, for any change, you have to work for it. You should, first of all, listen to all good things from good people. This listening, *s'ravana* is the first step. It is not enough if you simply listen. You should remember, recall, recollect, and recapitulate the good things you have listened to. This is called *manana*. The third thing is to practice what you have listened and learnt. This is called *nidhidhyasa*. Take a small example. First, your food must be cooked in the kitchen. Then it has to be brought and kept on the dining table and served. It is then that you eat it. Further, the food that you eat must be digested, assimilated, and the nourishment supplied to different parts of your body. Is it not so? Similarly, *s'ravana*, listening is like cooking; *manana*, remembering is the same as food kept on the table; whereas *nidhidhyasa*, practicing what is heard is like eating and digesting.

AK: Swami! We are always in a hurry. We have to rush to so many places to catch up and to keep pace with time and work. In this type of fast life, is it possible to be spiritual? Can we hurry here in the spiritual field too?

Bhagavan: Today, many of the diseases are due to the three factors very common among you: hurry, worry, and curry. Haste makes waste, waste makes worry. So, don't be in a hurry. Patience is very important and essential. In my previous body as Shirdi, I laid emphasis on *sraddha* and *saburi*, sincerity and patience.

It is very common to find people running to catch a train or a bus to go to office, and so on. You wait for any length of time standing in long queues in front of cinema theatres. But here, you begin to look at your wrist watches wondering why Swami has not yet come out for *darshan*! So, you must be patient enough to enjoy real bliss. For anything to happen, there is a proper time, preordained, predetermined, and designed by God. You know Arjuna had to wait till his 74th year in order to listen to the Bhagavad Gita, the Song Celestial, from Krishna, although both of them were moving together for years very intimately. Similarly, you too should wait. You should not feel, "What is this! Why is Swami not talking to me?" At the right time, I will do the

appropriate thing for you. See, how a fruit falls down on the ground soon after it is ripe detaching itself from the tree! You will have to wait till the time is ripe for you. You can't and shouldn't be in a hurry in the spiritual field.

AK: Swami! The growing trend today is to earn more and more money. Ego and pride are growing beyond control. Would you kindly give us the solution for this trend?

Bhagavan: The earth revolves round the sun. So also, man today is revolving round money. In fact, money provides only comfort and conveniences. There are many things that money cannot do.

With money you can have delicious food in a five star hotel - but how about your appetite? You can buy a beautiful bed - but can you buy sleep? You can have the latest, costliest medicines - but can you with your money extend the life of a dying man?

You think money makes many things, but it is not so; it leads you on to vices. People have two important resources: 'Head' and 'Heart'. Head carries with it responsibility. It has all the knowledge of *pravrtti*, the external world, but heart stands for *nivrtti*, right internal awakening. Values like sacrifice, truth, charity, love, compassion, come out of the heart. All that you find outside is only 'art', but 'heart' is inside. Don't be carried away by the outer 'art'.

The breeze you get from a number of electric fans is nothing compared to natural breeze. Tank water, river water, and lake water can never equal rain water. God is infinite. Where does man stand in front of Him? Why are you egoistic and proud? What for? Mountains may be of high altitude. But, water from the mountain top flows only downward. Similarly, you may be a great scholar or occupy a good position. If you are proud and egoistic, your fall is near. Light travels upward. So also, the fire of knowledge takes you to the heights. In fact, modern man is much worse than cats and dogs. When they are sick they do not eat anything, they fast or starve. However, man is for a feast even in times of sickness. He never 'fasts'; He only likes 'feasts'. Therefore he falls sick frequently.

The cycle of creation goes by the three attributes or *Gunas*: *tamas*, inertia, *rajas*, passion, and *sattva*, piety represented by the triune, Brahma, Creator; Vishnu, Sustainer; and Siva, Annihilator. Among the eighty-four lakhs of species, the human being is very special. He is blessed by God, his Creator, with mind and intellect. But man has become so egoistic and proud that he even doubts, questions, and denies God, his Creator. This is the significance of the episode of Mohini Bhasmasura in our epics.

There was one demon king by name Bhasmasura. He did penance and pleased Lord Siva. He prayed to Siva to grant him a boon that would give him the power to turn anybody into ashes the moment he lays his hands on his head. Siva granted the boon. Thus, intoxicated with this new found power, Bhasmasura began laying his hand indiscriminately on the heads of all those persons he found near him. Naturally, according to the boon he got from God,

they died and were burnt to ashes. He became so horrible, and highly egoistic that he decided to place his hand even on the head of Siva, the very giver of the boon. Then Lord Vishnu took the form of a beautiful dancer Mohini, and started dancing in front of Bhasmasura who, excited by her enchanting beauty, also started dancing along with her. In the course of gestures and postures, Mohini suddenly put Her hand on Her head and Bhasmasura did the same thing. The moment he placed his hand on his head, he died. So, by denying God, man is ruining himself.

Modern man is like Bhasmasura. He harms the person who helps him. Whatever is said, thought, and done by him is full of selfishness. He has lost the value of fundamental discrimination, which is applicable to all and beneficial to everyone. He lacks divine qualities like truth, peace and love. This is the flaw. He lacks divine qualities and possesses demonic qualities like jealousy, pride, and hatred. He 'kills' knowledge; he has to 'skill' his knowledge to maintain balance. This is the reason for all his troubles. He removes the letter 'S' that stands for 'Sai' from the word 'skill' and loses balance. Ego, avarice, jealousy, and such bad qualities are due to our *ahara*, *vihara*, and *samparka*: food, company, and interaction. When you control and discipline yourself, you will find the solution.

AK: Swami! In an organisation where we have to interact with people, most often we come across people criticizing and blaming each other. This is very frustrating, and divides people into groups. Sincere persons become frustrated because of uncharitable criticism. It looks like character assassination and mud slinging. How are we to take this evil prevalent everywhere?

Bhagavan: It is a sin to criticize others. It is a sign of weakness and inferiority complex. You shouldn't criticize or hate anyone. In fact, no one has any authority to criticize others. To tackle this, first of all, one should put a question to oneself: "Who is being criticized?" Then, you don't feel upset any longer. Why? If the criticism applies to your body, you don't need to feel bad because the body is temporary and ephemeral. You should be indifferent to your own body, which lands you in many difficulties and problems. The other man is doing service to you by criticizing your body. You should be thankful to him for doing so on your behalf. Is it then, the spirit or *atma* that is criticized? This is not possible because the same soul or *atma* is present in the critic also. *Atma* is Self, the same in all. Then, who is the critic and who is criticized? It all amounts to the criticism of one's own self. Ego and jealousy are the root causes that provoke a person to criticize others.

You have put another question. You want to know how you should react to criticism against you. A small example: Suppose you receive a registered letter. If you don't want to accept it, you can refuse to take delivery. The registered letter will then go back to the sender. Will it not? Similarly, criticism against you is a registered letter. Don't acknowledge and receive it. Refuse it, so that the same registered letter of criticism will go back to the sender, the critic himself. If anyone speaks loudly and belligerently against you in public, it

is all lost in the air or in your vicinity. If anybody accuses you secretly, it goes to the accuser himself.

What I feel is that one has to be judged by one's merits and not by one's faults. I ask you repeatedly to seek out your own faults and others' merits. If you enquire deeply, you will notice that personal criticism is nothing but the 'reflection of the inner being'. You spot the bad in the outside world, because of the bad in you. There is nothing that you can find outside yourself. Duryodhana was asked to go in search of a good man. He returned saying that he had found none. If you want to know any good person existing in this world, it is yourself only. Dharmaja was asked to go round and bring a bad person. He returned saying that there was none who was bad other than himself. This is the difference in the attitude of two persons with different views of life. As is your vision, so appears the creation. As is the colour of the glasses you wear, so is the colour of the world you see. If you are aware of this truth, you will never criticize anybody.

Sarva jiva namaskarah kes'avam prati gacchati, 'whomsoever you respect and revere, it amounts to reverence unto God'. Since God is in everyone, if you respect anyone, it means, you respect God. Similarly, *sarva jiva tiraskarah kes'avam prati gacchati*, 'whomsoever you hate, it amounts to hatred of the Divine Himself'. If you deeply look into the eyes of the man standing in front of you, you see your own reflection. Therefore, he is not a separate person but your own reflection.

There is only one without the second, i.e., God who is present in all. When you point out your forefinger at the mistakes of another man, three fingers of yours are turned towards you, reminding you of your own mistakes. If you understand this, you won't criticize anybody or blame anybody. God gives and forgives. I often tell you, past is past and it is beyond recovery. Hence, be careful hereafter.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

The One Basis

You will become a true *Adwaitin* (a man with non-dual vision) when you realize that “I and I” are one or that “you and you” are one.

There is a small story to illustrate this. When a *guru* was sitting and teaching his disciples, one day he said, “*Guru Brahma, Sishya Brahma, Sarvam Brahma.*” Meaning, “the *guru*, the *disciple*, and *everything* in the Universe was *Brahman* to God.”

Every day, one disciple was accustomed to greet the *guru* respectfully on his arrival, but after this particular event, he did not do so, and he never got up from his seat. The *guru* questioned him on this strange behaviour, and the disciple replied that the previous day, the *guru* said that everything is *Brahman* and therefore there was no difference between them.

Then the teacher thought that what he had said had come back to him like a boomerang and he wanted to teach the student a good lesson. He went to the board and wrote “*Guru Brahma*” as two different words. He also wrote “*Sishya Brahma*” and “*Sarvam Brahma*”.

When you look at these three, though *Brahma* is occurring as the same in all the three, the *guru*, *sishya* and *sarvam* are different. Only when these three words also become One, can you say that all are One. Thus, until you are able to experience this Oneness of all in practice, the student will remain a student and the teacher will remain a teacher and there is no escape from the need for the student having to respect the teacher. The basis is One but the containers are different.

- Baba

COVER STORY

THE SPECTACULAR SAGA OF SAI IN KASHMIR

Kashmir, the confluence of Truth, Beauty and Goodness

Imagine being enveloped in pristine Nature! A fresh, cool breeze, soothing and reviving every pore of your being - you breathe-in a lung full and it feels like your body is renewed with new and pure cells. You are sitting, absolutely relaxed, on earth that is lush, green and unending; an unknown serenity pervades your senses. Majestic snow-capped mountains fill your vision – so white and pristine that they mesmerize you. As you stare at the tiny streams and springs that gleefully glide down the peaks through small mounds and little valleys, like a happy kid on a new bicycle, you are speechless at the innocent play of Nature. And then, you see the emerald green fields merging into a dense flora of blooming fruit, pine and chinar trees. The sky above, of course, is a clear canopy of soft blue – so beautiful that it feels ethereal.

Senses Subdued by the Serene Scenery

Wherever your eyes fall, it is a celebration of Nature – breathtakingly beautiful and picturesque landscapes, captivating forests, clear rivers, gorgeous streams, enchanting flowers, and the air – so clean, refreshing, relaxing, rich and rejuvenating. Effortlessly, your mind slips into a state of never-before calmness; the soul, after long, feels so much at peace. The overpowering aesthetics confer a spiritual high unasked. So much beautify, such perfections that it numbs the senses as they grapple to soak in the vision. You feel you are in paradise!

Projector and the Projection Blend into One

Yes, you are surrounded by the best and purest of creation. But what if we add another elevating element to this enthralling picture? Imagine the Creator Himself in the midst of this most magnificent creation of His! Imagine the gentle breeze wafting through the green meadows playing with His hair and caressing His cheeks! And on the Divine lips sprouts a lovely smile! The Lord looks so radiant, bubbly and full of charm; He is just joyful, relishing each moment with every brook and bower, flower and forest, twig and tree – He is lost, completely at one with His reflection; the façade of duality there is none. The creation and the Creator blend as perfect partners, one as an extension of the other! To this picture of perfection, add a sound card. Now imagine His Voice reverberating in that ethereal valley! It is as if the Creator communicates, and the Creation responds, reflects and rejoices. Anyone fortunate enough to witness this Divine sport, is simply in raptures of bliss!

But this is not all.

Now, there is a third dimension. This sight worthy to beheld by Gods in high heavens is not for just a few celestial beings. There are thousands of blessed

souls who witness this divine spectacle! One sighting of the Lord in this idyllic setting and the crowd is ecstatic. They are dancing in joy and crying in Love for Him. They want to treasure every second, savouring it deep into their souls. They are pining to be near Him, to behold Him up close. They are from every region and religion but their reactions to the moment of bliss is one of indescribable joy.

There is a Muslim from whose eyes tears roll down copiously, a Hindu with his hands folded, obsequiously prostrates on the ground in prayer, and the third, a lady – something mysterious happens to her the moment she catches one glimpse. She starts dancing as if possessed and moves away. One precious glance is enough to last her a life time. It looks like now she only wants to zealously safeguard that one image in her heart, and just relive that moment till the end of eternity. To watch the reaction of the thousands to His presence in this virtual paradise is simply electrifying, uplifting ... beyond words indeed!

It is an unparalleled play of pure love by the Pure Love in the purest of places on earth. The moment is indescribable for the synchronicity of mysterious forces at play. It marks an amazingly fascinating confluence of the best of creation, the finest of sublime emotions, and the Source of all manifestation that is this beautiful creation. It almost seems like a divine fairy tale, a fantasy spun by a wishful mind; but is as real as the fresh dew drops on an early spring morning.

The incredible story of Swami's visit, in 1980, to the vale of Kashmir, in northern most India, once described by the Moghuls as "Paradise on Earth", is the stuff that legends are usually made of. Yet, some blessed souls live among us to tell the tale.

Spontaneous Surge of Devotion

"I came to Swami as a boy of eight in 1962, but had never before seen such ecstasy and longing for the Lord," says Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy, one of the fortunate members of Swami's entourage. "Wherever Swami went, people were just euphoric; they shouted 'Baba! Baba!..' with their arms, either raised or folded, or wide open, beckoning their Beloved to cast one glimpse at them. Their eyes were overflowing, cheeks wet and at every available opportunity, they just rushed forward to His Lotus Feet. When Swami's car passed by on the roads, I used to look behind, and what a sight it was! Excitement is too small a word; they just jumped in joy! They were so thrilled to have seen just the Red Robe or a little of His face or hair. 'Oh my God! Did you see Him!' each one seemed to say to the other.

"They somehow came to know of Swami's whereabouts whenever He traveled to places nearby Kashmir, and for me, truly, they were a revelation. In fact, it reminded me of the Bhagavatha which describes the mad-like devotion of the Gopikas to Lord Krishna, and I, for one, was very skeptical of these mythological accounts. But here, it was live in front of my eyes! I was convinced beyond doubt that the narrations of ecstatic devotion I have read were not just poetic creations, but manifestations of pure love. And as this

thought crossed my mind, Swami, in that instant, threw a glance at me as if chiding me for my disbelief, and at the same time, confirming my new realization. This trip was so special...I cannot describe it in words - the unmatched beauty of the valley, the unparalleled devotion of the Kashmiris, and Swami, so beautiful..."

So, that was just a glimpse of this glorious odyssey of Sai into the lap of the Himalayas. For those who were part of this divine adventure, it was an incomparable boon, and even now, those memories are as fresh and green in their minds as are the hills and dales in the Valley of Kashmir, often referred to as the 'Switzerland of the East', only richer due to its deep spiritual history.

So, how did this sublime excursion with the Divine take shape? What motivated Swami to journey to the State of Jammu and Kashmir in North India in the summer of 1980?

They Pray...and Plan

"Swami had been to Kashmir for the first time in 1957, but that was a big group and the trip was very short. Then, Swami hardly saw any of the captivating scenery of Kashmir," says Mrs. Ratanlal, who came to Swami nearly half a century ago and since then has been blessed with the Lord's close proximity. "So, around 1979, we started praying to Swami again. 'Swami, let us go to Kashmir. Please, let us go to Kashmir.' But Swami did not relent. Still, we persisted and were hopeful. So I asked Mr. Sohanlal to do all the ground work before we prayed to Him again. Mr. Sohanlal personally visited Srinagar, the summer capital of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, to survey the place and select suitable accommodation for Swami."

During this visit, Mr. Sohanlal met General Malhotra, who was the Army Commander of that region, and also a Sai Devotee. Swami had blessed the General and his wife, Prem Malhotra, way back in 1973 when He was on a visit to Ooty; the General, then was the Commandant of the Staff College, Wellington, which is near Ooty. The Malhotras had a spacious bungalow in Srinagar known as the Temporary Abode of the Army Commander. This had enough space outside, ideal for Swami to grant *darshan*, while the inside could accommodate a group of 25-30. It was, therefore, the perfect place to serve as Swami's residence, and the Malhotras said, 'Yes, all of this place will be available for Swami's visit'. Jubilantly Mr. Sohanlal returned to Bangalore, where Swami was then, and submitted to Him their prayers yet again. Now, Swami agreed, and then asked, "Is it the same General Malhotra whose wife attended the Summer Course?" The Omniscient Lord was now revealing a little of His Infinite Love. Mrs. Prem Malhotra had indeed attended the last Summer Course.

Trip to Heaven, in the Making for Decades

The Kashmir trip now seemed to be closer to reality than ever before. Apparently, it seems, the trip was going to materialize because of the sincere efforts of Mrs. Ratanlal and Mr. Sohanlal. But this was not even a quarter of

the whole truth. Like all God's Work, what could be seen and understood was only the tip of the iceberg; that it was, in reality, a Divine Master Plan that was unfolding was not obvious to many. The story of the Kashmir trip actually dated back to as early as 1970.

"I was in my XII grade, studying in Brindavan at that time," recalls Mr. Ramkrishna Reddy, who has been a Teacher at the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School for more than 25 years now. "The year was 1970. We were all preparing to write the all-important public examination, and often Swami used to tell us to study well. The hostel at that time had 30-40 boys in all and Swami used to interact with us a lot, and I remember one day I noted down in my dairy that Swami has already told us 30 times to study well. And then, one evening, Swami came into the hostel and said: "Boys, study well and secure first class in the examination. If you secure first class, I will take you to Kashmir....." We were overjoyed, but at the same time did not believe it entirely. Swami just wants to motivate us, we said to ourselves. Swami then, moved a few steps, stopped and turned. "... not only in studies, but in Discipline and Devotion too you should secure a first class". Our dreams now crumbled completely. Securing first class in all three – Duty, Devotion and Discipline – and matching up to His expectations was no mean task. This is just a 'divine eyewash' to enthuse us, we were convinced."

Divine Promises Manifest in God's Own Time

In fact, their conviction was apparently vindicated. Swami never talked about it for many years after that day. But suddenly one morning in 1975, 'Kashmir' seemed to be again on Bhagavan's Lips. Mr. Kamal Sahwney, who was a student then, beautifully narrates that day thus:

"It was a bright Sunday morning. We had gathered near the portico for Bhagavan's *Darshan*. The air was filled with hushed expectancy as we eagerly awaited a flash of bright red signifying His Presence...The door opened and there stood the Lord — magnificent, radiant, majestic, and fresh as the morning dew. His Cosmic gaze surveyed His Creation. He smiled. There was a merry twinkle in His eyes.

'When are the exams?' He enquired.

'Next week, Swami,' we chorused.

Silence. Only the fading notes of a *bhajan* from the distant filled the air.

Secure First Class, Earn Boarding Pass: Baba

'Those of you who get a first class in the forthcoming exams will be rewarded. I shall take you to Kashmir – only first class boys. Arrangements are being made already. We will go by plane and sing *bhajans* all along the way.'

With these words He proceeded down the avenue lined by boys and trees alike towards the devotees gathered near the 'Sairam shed'; and as He walked along He kept reminding the boys —'First Class —Kashmir—First class—Kashmir'.

'Did you hear?' I asked one of the senior students. 'Swami has promised to take us to Kashmir if we get a First class. Great isn't it?'

'Aah!' he said with a voice that echoed his imminent incumbency to a second class. 'That promise was made four years ago in 1971 when we had gathered under the shade of a tree during the opening of the Anantapur College.'

'Oh!' I said, still keeping my hopes alive, 'perhaps you boys didn't manage a first class.'

'We did!' he retorted. 'But there were other complications. You know how it is!' All I could say was, 'Anyway, wish you the best this time.'

...The same evening we were again delighted to hear from Bhagavan Himself. 'I will take those of you who get a first class to Kashmir. How many of you will come?'

We all put up our hands.

'Sure?' He asked.

'Yes' we shouted.

'Let's see — let's see'. A promise had been made!"

And again, 1975 passed and many years after that rolled by too, Kashmir was elusive as ever, confirming the belief of the long-timers. It was only a divine 'motivational tool', the boys had concluded. Still, inside many, Kashmir remained a highly mental activity: a dream unrealised, a desire unfulfilled, a goal unattainable — that is, till 1980. Let us now return to Mr. Kamal Sahwney:

God's Delays are Not His Denials

'Swami is calling you,' called one of the students. It was May (1980). Swami had just returned from Bombay. I was ushered into the Divine Presence.

'We are going to Kashmir on the 1st of June. Get yourself prepared with some warm clothing,' said the Lord.

Kashmir! A dead and buried concept was resurrected, revived, nay pulsating with life and the warm assurance of the Lord. He smiled the smile of Knowing All. 'Top secret!' I was advised not to divulge this information to anyone since the party fortunate enough to travel with Bhagavan was small (due to reasons of providing accommodation etc.,) and there were no prospects of enlarging it with people flocking the beautiful valley. Carefully protecting this treasured possession, I came out and stood most unassumingly amongst the rest.

'When is Swami going to Kashmir? 1st of June, I hear?' asked my neighbour. Oh, Lord! 'Any idea?' he further asked. 'Plenty' (I told myself)—but for the moment one would be sufficient. How is it that news of Bhagavan's arrival and departure reaches the devotees, in a most mysterious and strange fashion.

Even the most heavily guarded secret is at best only a great assumption, for somehow—through some means — devotees know the itinerary of the Lord.

Weeks rolled into days and days — with thunderous speed — into hours filled with anxiety. The visit could be canceled. The ubiquitous explanation "you know how things are" could crop up any moment. It was, as with a patient in the throes of the final end, a touch and miss chance. Finally, through the tension-packed days, through the latent gloom of a possible cancellation, through purchases and packing, the 1st of June arrived.

'One, two, three... seventeen... plus Myself - eighteen members,' counted the Lord on the morning of our departure. '18 chapters of the Bhagavad Gita. $8+1=9$, Divine Number. Very good!' I could hardly believe it! What glories and wonders would we see? What marvels and mysteries would we witness? What *leelas* and *mahimas* would we observe? What grandeur and glory would be revealed? These were the thoughts that floated in our minds as it was announced: 'Fasten your seat belts.' The engines roared, the wheels rolled, the plane accelerated, and we were airborne —to Kashmir! A promise had been fulfilled."

It was a Divine Word given not only to the students, but to a few devotees as well. For instance, Mrs. Asha Khanna of Delhi, who was extremely busy in the kitchen and in doing up His room during Bhagavan's stay in Srinagar, says, "When Swami came to our home in Delhi in 1975, He had said, when I go to Kashmir *Hum tum dono ko Kashmir leke jaata hai?* (I will take both of you along). Therefore, when Mr. Sohanlal informed us about Swami's visit and asked us to help in preparing for Swami's visit to Delhi and Srinagar, my husband immediately recollected Bhagavan's promise, made five years ago. We never expected that it would really happen and moreover, in this manner."

Yes, it was quite sudden and very secretive too. In fact, some members of the chosen group like Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy did not know where they were headed until the morning of June 1! Only when Swami gave them *pada namaskaram*, and asked them to proceed to the airport, they were absolutely certain that it was indeed the much-promised Kashmir trip! Once the plane was air-borne, the sweet saga of Love started. "Always so concerned about His boys, Swami never fails to look after their every little need, especially when He has hand-picked and taken a few along with Him," says Mr. Reddy.

Attention to Detail Natural to Divinity

"To narrate a small instance, during those days, Swami used to take *pan* (beetle leaves with nuts), and therefore, a *paan* box, which had cloves inside among other things, would always be with Him. A few minutes after the taking off of the plane, Swami turned behind, cast a loving glance on all, and then gave a few cloves to one boy sitting near Him with instruction to pass it on to others who have never flown earlier, and are likely to develop nausea... Swami was just like a sweet mother and we were absolutely in bliss.

"His Love was not restricted to us alone, in fact, during the entire flight of two hours, the Benign Lord was busy granting *pada namaskar* and blessing each

and every passenger (it was an Airbus and there were 250-300 people on board) as they made a beeline to Him. The crew, of course, crowded Swami and wanted to make best use of the golden opportunity. But Swami was most kind; He did not have a single moment of rest during the entire 90 minutes. Even when the plane had a brief stopover in Hyderabad, where the Sai devotees had made excellent arrangements for our lunch, Swami had no time for Himself. He put a spoonful or two in His mouth and rushed to the area where the devotees were passionately singing and praying for His *Darshan*."

Humandrome Longs for Divine Glimpse

Somebody said, "It was not an aerodrome, but a 'humandrome'" as devotees filled every inch of the airport in Hyderabad. But it was not so in Delhi, as Mr. Kamal Sawhney, writes, "Seeing a rather thin gathering this time we were delighted with the prospects of a quiet and peaceful visit. But as we approached 16 Golf Links, the residence where Bhagavan was to stay (in Delhi, the capital of India), promises of a quiet, peaceful visit evaporated with the terrifying heat. There were cars, and people, and still more people, and people again. It was amazing to see people waiting in the oppressing heat just to get a faint glimpse of the Lord."

Delhi's High and Mighty at the Feet of the Almighty

In fact, but for Swami, everybody else had to get down from their cars, two kilometers away from the place of His residence in Delhi and walk through the crowd. "And that evening," writes Mr. Kamal Sawhney, "Political history was re-written with a comforting touch. Members of Parliament belonging to different parties, opposing ideologies, varying principles, contrary view-points, sat together, amongst others like members of a united family — waiting to be served the meal of Love from the Mother Divine. 'A glimpse of future India...?' remarked somebody. It was a sight to behold! The Lord moved amongst the 'elite' crowd that consisted of cabinet ministers, ex-ministers, politicians, lawyers, top industrialists and foreign dignitaries with His usual charm and felicity. He blessed one, instructed the second, chided the third, enquired of another and cautioned yet another. It can never escape one's attention that the Power that Bhagavan Is, is clearly visible on such occasions. The tremendous capacity which He displays in dealing with such a wide variety of disunited human beings, in a manner that would humble the greatest diplomat, is truly amazing."

On June 2, Swami sent the boys on a sight-seeing trip to the city of Delhi, one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world and the epicenter of India's political theatre, while He was busy visiting houses, meeting people and gladdening hearts. He also inspected the site acquired to construct a Sai School in Delhi at devotees' request. When the boys returned, Swami was all theirs again. Handing out sweaters to every student, Swami lovingly said, "It will be very cold in Kashmir....we are going there tomorrow...You need to get up early in the morning." Recalling that evening, Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy says, "More than the article, the joy He would express in giving these things used to get imprinted in our minds."

Preparations Behind the Scenes In Srinagar

While Swami prepared the boys for their Srinagar visit in Delhi the previous day; the couple, Mr. Rajesh and Asha Khanna from Delhi had traveled to Srinagar three weeks earlier and were working round-the-clock along with the Malhotras to welcome Swami in Srinagar. "We worked silently, even my family members did not know about our activities. From Delhi we carried everything including the groceries, beddings, utensils, carpets and so on," recalls Mr. Rajesh Khanna. His wife, Asha, continues, "It was the peak of summer. There were Sevadal with us – only two old ladies – who worked silently, relentlessly. They sat on the terrace and cleaned all the groceries, washed, dried and packed them in different packets and finally neatly labeled them. This went on for days. Not only this, I had the privilege to do the curtains, bed covers, etc. of Swami's room. In fact, we did the whole house up with Mrs. Ratanlal's guidance and the Malhotras' support, making it new for Swami's arrival."

Sai Charm in Chandigarh

Swami left Delhi for Srinagar on the morning of Jun 3, and on the way, the Indian Airlines carrier touched down at Chandigarh for a brief stopover. "As the plane drew to a halt," Mr. Kamal Sawhney, narrates, "a most startling spectacle met our eyes. Devotees had gathered at the airport — men, women and children, gaily dressed — and were chanting *bhajans* with great fervour. They were praying to Bhagavan to alight and give His Benediction. The Lord, touched by this spontaneous flow of devotion, agreed. A ladder was arranged for, and as the sun rose up in the horizon at 7.30 a.m. that morning, Bhagavan got down from the plane and blessed the few hundreds that had collected for His Darshan. Needless to say, they were thrilled and shouted Jai! Jai! Jai! After blessing the devotees, Bhagavan held an interesting conversation with our pilot and officials of the airport. As He was discussing the intricacies of aerodynamics, I was again wonder-struck as to how devotees become knowledgeable of His programme? Who ever informed these people that Bhagavan would pass their way that day? Such incidents are always a remarkable scene to observe — but one that 'passeth all understanding'. Swami Karunyananda, who was seated beside me was moved to tears, 'Do you observe', he asked 'the childlike innocent devotion of these people? Who says this is Kali Yuga. I tell you, this is Sathya Yuga — The Age of Truth.'"

Lofty Himalayas Greet Their Creator

The flight resumed, and as the members of Swami's troupe tried to relive and cherish the Lord's Glory magnificently unfolded in front of their eyes just then, they were witness to another of His majestic manifestations – the gorgeous Himalayas. From thousands of feet above they saw the serene Sutlej River, which has its source in Tibet near Mount Kailas, the Bhakra and Nangal dams constructed over it, and by the time the plane unlocked its wheels on the surface of Jammu – City of Temples, it was 9 a.m.

The airport resounded with full-throated “Jai Sai Ram! Jai Sai Ram!” General Malhotra, along with his staff officers, was on the tarmac. “As the door of the plane opened,” he recalls, “stood the Lord – magnificent, radiant, majestic and fresh, smiling at us, a twinkle in His eyes.” The General lay prostrate on the tarmac overcome with emotion and devotion. Swami was then driven by Colonel Beri, Staff Officer to the Army Commander who was also a devotee, to the Officers’ Mess in Jammu. As the boys had breakfast here, the Lord here too, was busy, blessing the army personnel who longed for a touch, a word, a pat or a gift of Grace.

Joyful Journey to Udhampur

The next destination was Udhampur, about 60-65 kms from Jammu, to be traveled by road. Whenever Swami saw people lined up next to the road, pining for His *Darshan*, the Compassionate Lord would direct Col. Beri to drive slow, and at places would even get down, talk to them, accept their flowers and fill the cups of their hearts to the brim.

“Finally, we arrived in Udhampur,” recalls General Malhotra. Here stood Tara Mount, the official residence of General Malhotra. “My wife received Him with *Arati*,” he continues. “She showed Him His room and then the whole house. We took Him to the *Puja* room too. Swami seemed so happy.”

That evening a public meeting was arranged in Udhampur. The entire town had gathered on the sprawling lawns of the army gymkhana. There was a stir of excitement as Bhagavan arrived and the locals beheld the Lord for the first time. An open air auditorium, aesthetic stage settings, surrounded by green mountains only added to the soothing ethereal vibrations. The party accompanying Bhagavan sang a few bhajans; Swami Karunyananda aged ninety was inspired and proved his versatility by playing on the *tabla* with youthful artistry.

The meeting then commenced. Lt. Gen. S. P. Malhotra spoke first, congratulating the gathering on their good fortune to have Bhagavan in their midst. The Lord then imparted the highest spiritual truths in a lucid and simple manner. He spoke of the virtues of patience, truth and forbearance and exhorted the gathering — consisting largely of defence personnel — to perform their duty in a spirit of dedication to the Motherland. Later on, when the Swami sang a few *bhajans*, the audience went into raptures. Jawans, Majors, Colonels broke their barriers of shyness and clapped their hands in joy and sang aloud the Glory of the Lord.

In fact, Swami was so happy about that one-day halt in Udhampur that reminiscing that day, in an interview to General Malhotra in 2003 (23 years after His Kashmir visit), Swami said, “Udhampur is very clean, very neat, I was very happy.”

When God Becomes the Co-passenger...

This was only the beginning as the party had till now not reached the actual scene of all the magic and miracles – Srinagar. On June 4, at 7 a.m., Swami proceeded to Srinagar with General Malhotra beside Him and Col. Beri

steering the wheel. The students followed behind in an air-conditioned bus. There was a brief halt at Patnitop, a tourist hill station, for tea and snacks, and then Swami proceeded on the national highway towards Srinagar. Though Swami was in the car, the Loving Mother that He is, His constant thought and attention was on the bus behind. In fact, after a while, when He could not see the bus, He enquired with General Malhotra and asked Col. Beri to stop the car. And then, He did something beautiful. He alighted from His car and sweetly climbed into the bus! "The bus was energized!" the General says. "And Swami was Himself singing all the while! It was so beautiful; the whole situation had now reversed! It was the car now which was following the bus!"

"He was always the first to spot the snow-capped mountains or flowing streams," narrates Mr. Kamal Sawhney. "The Jhelum River kept us company as it flowed swiftly and forcefully almost parallel to the road which was lined by blue and silver pines, deodar, cedar, maple, birch, oak and the famous walnut trees. It was a symphony of blue and green."

For the boys, it was a treat they will treasure till eternity. They were traveling to the Himalayas along with Lord Shiva (*Purusha*) surrounded with splendorous signatures of His Creation (*prakriti*). Even as the Lord was lost in the luxuriant and authentic version of His workmanship, He never lost an opportunity to drive home important lessons in the hearts of His loved ones. As the bus approached Verinag, the picturesque little hamlet where the journey was to break for lunch, hundreds of Kashmiris waited with bunches of roses in their hands. As the party entered this beautiful village, the simple folk, in excitement threw hundreds and thousands of roses onto the car in reverence, devotion and joy. They failed to notice that Swami was actually behind, inside the bus. And then, Swami jokingly remarked, "See, because of My company, the car is receiving so much of adoration, but now I am with you and no one respects Me!..."

After imparting this lesson on the value of good company, Swami asked the bus door to be flung open and then, He gently alighted; the joy of the village-folk knew no bounds! "Believe me!" Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy says, "From the place where the bus stopped to the building where we were to have our lunch, we literally walked on the rose-petals! Their devotion and delight in having Bhagavan was to be seen to be believed. They laid a carpet of roses for us. It was absolutely overwhelming."

Warm Welcome to Sai in Srinagar

It is filled with such sweet memories of the Divine journey with Sai – savouring the unmatched charm of Nature along with the Source of all beauty – that the group reached Srinagar. "Here again, my wife warmly welcomed Him with due rituals," recalls General Malhotra. "We, then, showed Him His room in the first floor. He asked my wife, 'Where are you staying?' She turned around to me. So, I said, 'Well, Swami, we are staying at a place which is about one km away from this house. We have kept the whole house for You, all the four bed rooms.' Swami immediately said, 'No! I want the host and the hostess to stay here itself.' So, we stayed in Baba's company. Honestly, we find it difficult to

believe that! Here Swami is moving out of reach of the devotees, as far as His Physical Form is concerned, and there we had the good fortune of spending 12 days in His blessed company! And He was so very relaxed!"

The grounds of 'Prasad Villa', the residence of General Malhotra which had become the Lord's temporary abode, were overcrowded overnight. Thousands – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and a few foreigners too – gathered to be blessed with the *Prasad* of His *Darshan*, *Sparshan* and *Sambhashan* (to behold Him, touch Him and speak with Him). The pathway was packed with people everywhere, jostling, struggling and vying with each other just to touch His Feet. Bhagavan moved amongst them, healing the sick, comforting the distressed, soothing the crying ones, embossing His Emblem of Divinity on each heart. "We have all seen surging crowds before," shares Mr. Kamal Sahwney, "but not of this kind. The very sight of the Red Robe was enough for people to cry — literally. Several cried aloud praying that He should bless them. Some persons, unable to withstand the Call of the Divine broke all human barriers and fell at His Feet, pouring forth their anguish to receive in return, Benediction and *Vibhuthi*. Word spread that God had come. The city was aflame with the Signet of Eternity—the Lord Himself."

People Pine for Sai in Ecstasy

People braved the biting chill in the mornings and waited for Him to emerge, and the Benevolent Lord never disappointed them. Every morning He would go out and give Himself fully to the devotees. But the stream of visitors was unending. Army personnel, businessmen, villagers, hermits, *sadhus*, foreigners, children as well as the sick, the lame, the distressed — all representatives of humanity betook the generosity of Divinity. "The climax was reached on a Thursday when Bhagavan visited the Army auditorium," writes Mr. Kamal Sahwney. "The entire place was full of soldiers and officers. To be able to move a centimetre was indeed a luxury. Swami had to stand on the 'door-step' of the car to wave His Blessings to all the people and they responded back by filling the atmosphere with shouts of 'Jai to Bhagavan'. Humanity was paying its tribute to the Divine Master."

Such was the Glory of the Sai in the crest of India, which He had briefly visited only once before, 23 years ago. "And Swami was not the Godly figure that you see..," says Mrs. Asha Khanna who had the chance of watching the Lord at close quarters. "He was so relaxed, agile and ever active. You could communicate with Him as if He was your closest one; He was just one of yourself, so close."

Mrs. Ratanlal adds, "Some days, after breakfast, Swami would just walk into the garden, absolutely in leisure and play with the flowers and trees. He would pluck a berry here, touch a flower there and just be Himself – so carefree and happy. Later the boys would come and all would sit down in the garden in a nice circle."

Every morning, after breakfast, General Malhotra would discuss with Swami and the day's program would be chalked out. After the regular morning

Darshan, it was a visit to a hill station or a mountain, garden or a guest house, resort or a river.

Shalimar Becomes Shangri-La...Briefly

On the day of Bhagavan's arrival, the hosts and others requested Swami to visit Shalimar Garden, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its sweeping vistas over gardens and lakes, and shallow terraces. But Swami refused. He said, "No, it is well-maintained and beautiful with natural springs. If I go there, there will be a mad rush of people; it will ruin the garden." But the boys and others continued to plead, and Swami reluctantly agreed. The plan was to go there in the early hours of the morning, when the city was not fully awake.

At seven in the morning, Swami, along with the boys, was at the gates of Shalimar. Though the boys had sweaters and other add-ons to save themselves from the chill and the fog, the Lord was His usual self – no shawl or cover over His robe; in fact, Swami did not even use a pair of footwear. As the huge gates were opened in the wee hours of the morning, especially for Swami, and the boys entered its vast premises, a thought crossed in some of their minds - 'Swami said there will be lot of people, but here there is no other soul except us.' The watchman was, in fact, still in sweet slumber. A few boys thought of waking him up and awakening him to the great opportunity that had come his way, but they dismissed the idea, not sure of Swami's possible reaction. So, as the group strolled with Swami, suddenly the watchman woke up, rubbed his eyes, watched the scene, hurried to a nearby rose bush, carefully broke a branch which had three beautiful roses, ran towards Swami, offered the flowers and fell at His Feet! The boys watched transfixed to the spot. "Huh! And we thought we will 'educate' him about Swami!" they seemed to say to each other through their glances, which were laden with bewilderment and bliss.

Swami continued to gently stride along as if nothing had happened, and now, after a few yards, from the opposite direction advanced two modern youngsters with long hairs, carefree attitude, *et al.* Intentionally or accidentally, they possibly had spent the night in the garden itself. A few seconds ticked by quickly and they were now approaching Swami from the front - no sign of reverence in their gait. The boys were getting ready to move them away once they came very close to the Lord, but all of sudden, the pair turned aside, broke two branches, threw the roses at Bhagavan's Feet and fell flat on the ground! Every moment that morning was a roller coaster ride of shock and surprise, reverence and revelation. And it was not over yet.

After they had walked about 200 yards, noise of a slight commotion wafted from behind and when the boys turned around what did they see? Hundreds of eager folk jumping the gate, some even the parapet walls, and then, hastily plucking flowers and rushing towards Swami with loud shouts of "Baba! Babaji *Darshan Devo!*" It was a different kind of shock now! Swami turned to the boys and said, "Didn't I tell you about this yesterday! You did not listen...now, if the garden is spoilt, people will say Sai Baba is responsible for it!" The next moment, Swami did a complete U-turn and returned immediately to Prasad

Villa, but not before instructing the boys to get back only after seeing the beautiful mogul garden, which was spread over 2.4 hectares and nicknamed as 'Garden of Love'.

But without their Sai, there was no love in their hearts or life in their bodies to sight-see the great garden. They went around placidly, only not to disobey Him again, and returned to His residence with their spirits soured and heads down. They had never expected such surging crowds, that too in the early hours of the morning when it was biting cold. There was absolutely no publicity of Swami's visit to the unique valley. In fact, the Chief Minister of Kashmir, Mr. Sheikh Abdullah pleaded with Swami to permit him to announce His Presence in the capital city of Srinagar, but Swami flatly refused. "As it is, there are thousands everywhere, do you realise what will happen if you broadcast this news!" Swami seemed to say.

To stimulate and restore the sunken hearts of the boys, Swami, in the evening, sent all of them to the Srinagar Bazaar. As they were all 'men in whites', the boys thought the shopkeepers would probably place them as a cricket team, and when somebody asked them, "Where do you come from?" they hesitantly said "Puttaparthi", not sure if the vender would connect with the holy hamlet. But the trader exclaimed with joy writ large on his face. "Oh Puttaparthi! Baba's ashram! Come! Please come!" It was a continuous experience of overwhelming love as each shop owner obsequiously invited them to visit their shop. The boys were humbled, to say the least. The story of the Glory of their Lord was as infinite as the Lord Himself.

In the days to come, they were only left more delighted and dazed. On the morning of the next day, Swami, as usual, blessed the hungry crowd in front of Prasad Villa with His beatific smiles and benedictory acts of Grace. Once in a while, the 'tiny brown hand' would move in circles, and in a gentle stream, *vibhuti* would fill the cupped palms of a crying soul. The *leelas* and *mahimas* of the Lord (Divine sport and manifestations) of the Lord were ceaseless. "But, some incidents, however, were remarkable for their uniqueness, for they were reminiscent of those days when Bhagavan performed His *leelas* on the sands of Chitravathi, where wonders and wonders were witnessed," writes Mr. Kamal Sawhney.

Delectable *Leelas* at Dachhigam

This particular reference was to Dachhigam, the most charming dale of Kashmir. Surrounded on all sides by emerald green grass, decorated with flowers growing everywhere, spotted with elegant trees, inhabited by a myriad varieties of colourful birds, Dachhigam is a sylvan resort of rare beauty. Once upon a time, it was the private entertainment estate of the King of Kashmir, Maharaj Hari Singh. After Kashmir became a part of independent India, the Chief Minister of the State controlled the area. General Malhotra had obtained special permission from the Chief Minister and given how sylvan the place was, he wanted Bhagavan to spend a couple of days in that exquisite resort. But the Lord said, "No. I am not going to stay there for 4-5 days, but I will definitely go there!"

Therefore, after the morning *Darshan* on June 6, Swami, along with His students, proceeded towards this slice of unsullied nature that was Dachigam, almost 30 kms away from Srinagar. "We passed through 20 kms of apple orchards," recalls Mr. Ramkrishna Reddy jubilantly. "Once we reached the special guest house, we were really taken aback with the awesome scene. It was nestled literally in the lap of nature - mountains covered it on three sides, a tiny creek flowed down just beside the building and roses! They were everywhere, in all hues and colours, sizes and shades. You could not be in a better place on earth if Nature enchanted you. Even the walls of the rooms inside were laid with a special bark, just like it was done on the outside. But the special house did not excite the Lord, He relished being outside. A few minutes passed and Swami sat on a small chair placed under a China tree, this special flora apparently changed the colours of its leaves five times in a year.

"As we sat surrounding the Lord in that serene setting, Swami started speaking very casually to a few of us and then suddenly, as if struck with an idea, He asked General Malhotra. 'Is there any sand here?' 'Yes, Swami. There is a small creek nearby; there is little sand on its bank, but not too much though.' 'Ok, that's enough. You know... I used to do wonders on the sands of Chitravathi. I will show you how! Lets go!' the Lord retorted.

"And when we reached that spot, Swami sat on the sand cross-legged and like a small child started playing with it. And as the group excitedly watched, the Lord made the sand even, made it into a mound, poured more sand, made it flat again...and then drew a small figure, a sketch with His tiny finger...plastered that with more sand on top it...and then dipped His fingers inside the minuscule mound just then created, and out came a golden plate with beautiful and exquisite images of Lord Badrinarayan and Goddess Lakshmi standing! Wet sands were still sticking onto it, He shook it mildly and then handing it over, said, "Pass it around" as if nothing had happened. As everyone with big eyes and open mouths, adored, touched and worshipped the fresh creation, the Lord sat with Divine contentment, as calm as ever.

"But this was not all. A few more blissful moments passed on the sands, and then the Lord enquired, 'Does any one have a pen?' Immediately somebody handed one to Him. He took it into His hands and now started using it as stylus. His 'artwork' on the sand started yet again - a round motion, a touch here, a finish there – and His little empty hands dug into His sketch on the sand again.

"What is it? Our hearts stopped beating! We craned our necks. Cameras were ready, we gazed with wide-eyed expectation. Out emerged a beautiful 2 inch crystal *Linga* – bigger than a duck's egg, white, round and resplendent. He held it up with the sun as a background. Unspeakable delight!

"This is Amarnath *Lingam*,' He shared. 'This is the true one installed by Shankaracharya...what you see there on the outside is only ice. One has to walk 20 kms on snow to reach Amarnath...how can you go? I brought it for

your sake...' The Kind Lord then Himself showed it to all...we did not know how to thank the Lord. We just stared at Him with awe, love and gratitude."

"According to me, this was the best day in the whole trip of Kashmir," says General Malhotra. "The serenity of Dachigam and the superb *leelas* of the Lord made it an incredible day."

His Concern for His Children Knows No Bounds

On the agenda for the next day, June 7, was Gulmarg, one of the most splendid resorts of India. *Gul* means 'flower', and just as the name suggests, it was literally a 'valley of flowers'. Swami spent sometime lost in the maze of colours, and then Mr. Sohanlal suggested to Swami to visit Khilanmarg, located nearby on a higher altitude which is known for the beauty and majesty of its snow covered peaks. But for this, one had to take the ropeway. Swami and the group went to the rope station, but the Lord could not come out of the car! People thronged to His Presence! And so, Swami drove back, but asked the organizers to make arrangements for the boys to see the snow. The boys took the flight on the heavenly ropes and were stunned with the snowy beauty. After passing through forests of snow-smeared-trees on horses, they reached a plain – miles and miles of clear snow. They could not resist the temptation to play and were lost in their ice-game. It was a never-before experience and they became oblivious to everything around, and even Swami. Soon 12 pm turned into 1 pm. They had not had anything for lunch; that did not bother them, but it did bother someone else. Swami started getting concerned, He asked the General, "Where are the boys?" Frantic efforts were made to send message to the boys. Col. Beri who also there around Swami at this time, recalls, "Swami was so uneasy...actually, that gave me jitters. Swami always referred to the boys as 'My children' and I could, in this instant, see the Mother in Him so patently. He was like a mother hen pacing up and down, watching, waiting and looking out for her little ones."

"Swami did not have His lunch that day," recalls Mrs. Ratanlal. "He was all the time waiting." When the boys returned, she asked the boys to come inside the other door and first have their lunch and only then see Swami. But while the boys were in front of their plates, Swami came in and expressed His unhappiness for being so careless about time. "There are many guests, therefore, I do not want to reprimand you," He said and let them off.

"His concern for us was phenomenal," says Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy. "He may talk to anybody or go anywhere, but His thoughts were always centered on us." The next day, June 8, Swami sent all the boys to visit the Sankarmath, the temple visited by Sri Shankaracharya centuries ago. This was located very close to Prasad Villa and even though Swami never visited the place, He saw it from far and talked about it, not only then but 23 years later too in an interview He gave to General Malhotra in 2003. He asked, "Which was the temple located nearby the house we stayed?" Amusingly, the General could not recollect the name immediately, but did so just before he was about to come out of the interview room, and so, he blurted out

"Shankaracharya!" Swami smiled and responded, 'Right! Right! It was Shankaracharya!'"

Heads of State Salute the Lord

Therefore, on June 8, Swami did not travel anywhere, but He was extremely busy in Prasad Villa. The Chief Minister, Mr. Sheik Abdullah and his wife had called on Him. When the boys returned, the interview had just concluded and they saw the tall and impressive Abdullah walk out of Swami's residence. Swami introduced all the boys to the Chief Minister. "They are My students; all of them are now teachers." And then, to the boys, He said, "I know Sheikh Abdullah since a long time; I met him in Hyderabad 20 years ago." Swami then posed with the dignitary couple for pictures. They were very grateful and in fact, Mr. Abdullah returned another day with his whole family. During one of these days, the then Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Mr. Jha and his wife too drove down to Prasad Villa seeking audience and blessings. And this was followed by the deputy chief minister and nearly 20 cabinet ministers. Swami was all giving, all the time.

Pahalgam - The Wonders Continue!

While June 8 was for distinguished personalities, for the students and other members of the group, there was something special awaiting the next day. On the schedule on June 9 was Pahalgam, a pristine hill station untouched by the ravages of progress. Known as the 'village of shepherds', it was abounding with pastures and lakes, tiny rivers and huge meadows. "To reach our guest house for lunch, we had to cross a tiny rivulet," recalls Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy. "And it was such a memorable scene! Swami alighted from the vehicle and began to walk. The waters of the tiny river were so pure, so clear; you could not see even a grain of sand, only the round and shining pebbles on its floor. Swami was on the banks and next, He lifted His robe slightly and gently got into the water! He seemed to enjoy it so much! Slowly and happily, smiling and shining, the Lord moved; the Sun was as if peeping from above eagerly to savour every second. Swami even took a palm full of water and showing it to us, said, 'See, how clear it is!' We, actually, sipped one or two drops because this water was verily as sacred as the *abhishekam tirtham* (consecrated water after performing rituals on the Shiva *linga*).

"And then as we moved along, we entered a garden of roses and the Lord casually picked a tiny rose and transformed it immediately into a *Shiva lingam*. Col. Beri was the lucky recipient of this spontaneous gift of love. After a while, Swami settled down on a chair on a scenic spot very close to the Lidder River and more creations followed, now a ring for General Malhotra and also another one for a Major of the army.

"The evening was a thrilling experience. Swami took us for a walk on the banks of the Lidder River and we soon entered an apple orchard. Swami pointed out the apple-bunches hanging on their branches with comments like 'This is not yet ripe...' 'This has to still attain more colour...' and so on. And then, at a picturesque location, He decided to pose for an individual picture

with each one of us! Very satisfied with Himself, having filled our hearts with delight, the beloved Lord moved further. Now, Swami noticed a small patch of sand and settled down, again on the sand floor just like Dachigam. Our hearts jumped with anticipation and excitement. Who knows what wonder will we see now? Swami started discussing spirituality and soon the topic veered to Shankaracharya. 'Shankara had installed a *linga* of great spiritual vibration at Chidamabaram,' Swami said, 'And now,' the Lord continued, 'I shall show you an exact replica of the Chidamabara *linga*.' With a bewitching smile on His face and the enthusiasm of a school kid, the Lord flattened the sand in front of Him. He then, drew a circle...filled it with sand and then with excitement said, "It has come, see!" And lo and behold! Out of the silvery sands appeared a 3 inch round, black and glittering oval shaped *linga*. Swami then picked it up, wiped the wet sand sticking onto it with His white handkerchief and lovingly showed it to every one around. After all this was over, an enigmatic smile blossomed on His lips and He remarked, "This is all *tamasha*, fun!"

"For the Lord of the Universe, all this was a play, mere trifles, but to the fortunate few who were a witness to this, it was a ticket to instant bliss. But the story of sacred June 9 was not over yet. Next, out of the sands, in a similar fashion, came a small pendant on which was engraved the sacred Srichakra.

"The session on the sands went on, and was filled with signs and wonders as Swami talked about Indian culture and spirituality. But suddenly we were witness to a different kind of wonder. From nowhere, suddenly two busloads of people arrived near the sand bed where we were seated and jumping down from the buses they cried, "Babaji! Babaji! Babaji!" They fell at His Feet and sought His Blessings, which the Lord granted with much Love and Compassion. They were possibly pilgrims on the way to the Amarnath shrine and seeing the red robe at a distance diverted the route to hurry to His Presence."

This intense pining for His Love and Touch, Grace and Blessings, in a land which was thousands of miles from Puttaparthi with no commonality with the South of India except for the fact that it was a part of India, is, in fact, the greatest spectacle of the Srinagar odyssey of Sai. And another glimpse of this phenomenon was present before all on Jun 10 when the hosts had arranged for a '*shikara*' ride for Swami and the boys on the famous Dal Lake. Here again, there was no way Swami could get onto the boat; the crowd was enormous and at times uncontrollable. But Swami did not want the boys to miss out the experience, and therefore, asked them to do the ride on the waters, even though, without Swami, they were more than keen to skip the trip.

Swami's Concern for the Dedicated Sohanlal

It was nearly a week in Srinagar now and 10 days since Swami arrived at Delhi. But it had passed like a breeze and Swami was so happy too – with the arrangements, the boys' discipline, the devotees' devotion and the hosts' dedication. In fact, He had great plans. One day He called Col. Beri and said,

"You look for a nice location which has sand. We will go there and I will ask every member of the army to put his hand into the sand, and each one could pull out whatever he desired." Col. Beri was obviously excited and made all arrangements possible. But, unfortunately, at that time, Mr. Sohanlal fell ill. When Swami did not find him during the dinner session, Swami enquired about him and was informed of his poor health. Swami said, "Alright" and asked Col. Beri to fetch a glass of water. And then He materialized two tablets and said, "*Sohanlal ko dedo. Kal subhe Vo nachte breakfast pe ayega*" (Give it to Sohanlal, and tomorrow morning he'll come dancing to the breakfast table).

And sure enough, Sohanlal was fine and was promptly there for breakfast. Still, Swami was concerned about Mr. Sohanlal's health and never agreed for any major outing. Swami asked him to take rest and would go near his bed often and say: "You are working and worrying too much about everybody's comforts and needs, not bothered about your health." But Mr. Sohanlal wanted to do more work! Swami said, "No! You are very sick and you need to rest at least one full day." Swami then created an *akshayapatra* (an inexhaustible vibhuti container) and gave it to him. Before Swami retired to His room in the night, He went to see him one more time. But, Sohanlal would always say: "No Swami, it is a pleasure. I would like to serve You more." When the boys went to meet him, he simply brushed all talk about his condition aside and said, "I am getting old; it's natural that I have blood pressure..." He was just happy that Swami had indeed visited Kashmir and had chosen him to be an instrument. Later, Swami created a ring and a watch for him and his wife too.

Prasad Villa Hosts More Divine Sessions

Therefore, June 11 and 12 had little adventure with Swami outside Prasad Villa. Swami gave His Love and time to the dedicated souls who had made the Kashmir trip happen. In the evening was discourse and *bhajans*. One day, he asked General Malhotra to show his hand and then quietly placed a watch in his palm. He said, "Time! This will remind you of time!" But General responded, "Swami! I don't waste time!" "I know, that is not enough. You need to know a little bit more," Swami said and explained, "What is spelling of Watch? W.A.T.C.H. Yes, this is the real meaning of the watch. So, watch your Words, Actions, Thoughts, Character and Heart. So it is not merely for keeping time, you have to remember all these things too. All this means spirituality."

"The evening sessions used to very informal," recalls a group member. "Sitting on the lawn, or in a room when it was chilly, the Divine Master would expound the sublime Truth of Vedanta, or the interpretation of the *Gayatri Mantra*. On other days, He would talk on the purpose of life, on the disasters we meet with if we pursue materialism. There were some days when He would sing, in His resonant voice, *bhajans*. Oh! what limpid delight! We wore the Shroud of His Delight. Bliss! Absolute Bliss!"

Sai Soothes Even Animals' Hearts

On the morning of June 13, Swami created another *akshaya patra* (inexhaustible Vibhuti container) this time for Col. Beri and his wife. In the afternoon, He took the group to the banks of the Sindhu River. And here, once again, to everybody's joy, Swami went into the water holding the robe in both of His hands and walked gently wading and playing with the waters. At some spots, He just stood and looked intently down at the placid movement of the cool river. Later, Swami went to a guest house nearby and here, a very strange scene occurred. "It was drizzling that day," Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy narrates, "And suddenly about 15 dogs appeared and started barking continuously facing the guest house. The next moment, Swami came out smilingly as if a few guests were calling Him! He started waving His hand, and the canines, though ferocious, responded with love wagging their tails. The whole bunch kept staring at Swami in one-pointed attention. Swami then asked us to get some food. So we brought biscuits from inside, and Swami lovingly threw the pieces at them. After they had their fill, they silently left. The Lord seemed to 'know' them and 'understand' them; we just enjoyed the Divine drama."

Perhaps, every element of nature – flora and fauna – wanted to have their share of His Love and Grace, and the Lord was always most willing. Apart from the beautiful sites already mentioned, Swami visited many other splendid mogul gardens too like Chashm-e-shahi, Nishat and Nagin. And thousands were recipients of His Love. The most blessed, of course were the students. Their day started with touching the Feet of the Lord every morning and they prostrated again for the last time in the day when Swami retired after dinner. There was nothing more they could ask for. In fact, one day Swami forced all the boys to ask for a gift and they were all silent. "What could we ask?" says Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy. "The very fact that He had brought us along was the greatest gift. In fact, many times during the day, looking at the devotees outside, I used to ask myself 'Do I really deserve this great chance?'" They knew that they could not possibly have accumulated so much merit to be blessed so profusely, it was just His Infinite Love. That is the greatest boon when the Lord comes in Human Form. He simply showers!"

Swami Gave and Gave...

It was the same experience of all the organizers and hosts too. No one was left out of His overwhelming Grace. In fact, in an interview that Swami gave to Col. Beri, Swami forewarned Mrs. Beri about an impending illness and when the deadly cancer finally did affect her health, He cancelled it in His own mysterious way. Swami blessed Mrs. Ratanlal too, profusely. He, in fact, gave her the Amarnath Lingam materialized by Him to keep, apart from other gifts. She was the one who worked tirelessly in the kitchen, and whenever Swami went out of Prasad Villa, she followed later in another vehicle with lunch and snacks for all the members of the group, and of course, Swami. The Lord, till this day, has graced her with innumerable opportunities to serve Him.

With the Lord in a giving spree, everybody knew that the dream trip was about to end. The very thought enveloped their hearts with intense sadness. "We were almost in tears!" says Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy. "General Malhotra, though a military man, became very emotional. Talking to us, he said, 'You are all Swami's special students; it is my good fortune to serve you all...This was my first experience and I am lost in divine thoughts. I don't know what I have done; I am not yet been able to digest all that Swami has given. I am still not able to imagine that an Avatar is staying in my own house!'

"Even on the final day (June 14), when we had to leave at 10 o'clock, the General became very hesitant in letting us go and taking us to the airport! Swami said: 'We have to go! Come on, we are getting late!' but he drove us very reluctantly. And as we got into the plane, he waved to each and every person; it was such a touching scene! Swami was looking at all of us! Rarely have I seen emotions as high as that morning. It was too difficult to accept the inevitable."

The Final Blessing

Once Swami was in the plane, General Malhotra and Col. Beri lay prostrate on the tarmac offering their gratitude and reverence. The start of the Indian Airlines carrier was delayed because of inclement weather and devotees gathered at the airport, started shouting out to the Lord, and Swami did open the door of the plane and bless everyone with His last beatific *Darshan* in the beautiful valley. The General stayed put in the airport for the next 40 minutes till he received the news from Delhi that Swami had landed safely. Swami, along with His boys spent a day in the capital city and then returned to Bangalore on June 17 after a day's halt in Mumbai. Thus, the curtains came down on one of the most spectacular chapters of the Sai Saga.

After the trip, one of the students remarked, "We accompanied the Lord to experience the spell of His Nature's Beauty. Little did we realize that He would make us meet reflections of His Gospel. What devotion, humility, patience, concern and genuine love did we see!" For all the members of the party, every moment with Sai in Srinagar was a revelation. They were stuck with the Glory of their God. They saw a powerful positive wave surging everywhere and taking the world by its sweep and on the crest of this wave was their own Lord – the Redeemer, the unmatched Unifier, and God of all. They saw the irrepressible power of pure love that could one day overpower the whole world.

Kashmir – The Holy Land of Yore Divinely Recharged

Now, 28 years later, in hindsight, the historic trip by the Living Divinity to the Kashmir region acquires even deeper significance. The land named after the venerable Sage Kashyap, known as the abode of the *rishis*, and an ancient seat of sacred learning was sanctified by the Divine Touch of the Avatar's visit. Perhaps to assuage the spiritual thirst of the aspirants or to recharge the

divine energy of the various centres of esoteric importance that are found in the mosques, temples, gurudwaras, churches...in the hills, valleys, mountains, caves and the hearts of its people ... Kashmir welcomed the Supreme Lord with ecstasy and élan, before the political disturbances and turmoil marred its peace. As though to bless the noble people and endow them with the strength to deal with the hardships that came to them in later years, His visit left their cup of joy overflowing with unsurpassable sweetness.

When the Lord descends in human form, He walks and talks, lives and laughs, eats and acts just like any other human being so that humanity feels kinship with Him; but on rare occasions, to awaken and enlighten, to inspire and reinvigorate the slipping and sleeping humanity, He suddenly executes something that is supremely extraordinary, so that every man and woman may realize the importance of the immense opportunity that has come their way, and live up to it to redeem their lives, as well as that of their fellow brethren. This spiritual voyage to the state of Jammu and Kashmir (often in the media for news that is disheartening), was one such 'Divine performance' to demonstrate to erring mankind what could be possible, if only they believed in the wisdom that has existed since the time of the Himalayas. It was a story of Love, of divine unity, of peace, of togetherness, of beauty, of serenity, of being One with the Sublime, of being One with *Sathyam*, *Shivam* and *Sundaram* – Truth, Goodness and Divine Beauty!

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 16

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Universal Cycles

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. I hope you remember where we cut off last time. Just to refresh your memory, I brought you up to the point where I gave you a very rough outline of the Ekpyrotic Model of the Universe. In this model, the Universe has a cyclic existence, somewhat like what I described earlier with one major difference, which is that in this case, it is the repeated collision of two adjacent branes that leads to the repeated birth of the Universe. Last time, I merely gave a very rough outline, leaving the details for the next instalment; that is where I shall pick up from, this time.

Let me start with the following sketch that compares the Inflationary Model [where one does have any question of the Universe being born again and again], and the essentials of the Cyclic Model.

(For all images please refer to the internet version)

FIGURE 1. This figure, adapted from the book of Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok, shows side by side, the sequence of events in the Inflation Model [based on the work of Alan Guth] on the one hand and the Cyclic Model on the other [based on the work of Paul and Neil]. The essential difference is that in the former, once dark energy takes over, the Universe keeps on expanding till eternity. In the Cyclic Model, however, a contraction process takes over from dark energy on account of energy considerations. This would become clearer later in the article. For, now, the two sketches above may be regarded as the “statements” of the two “camps”.

Notice, that where the Cyclic Model is concerned, there are certain physical processes that repeat over and over again, cycle after cycle. The processes mentioned are nothing new, and bits and pieces of this scenario have been mentioned earlier [like radiation domination, dark energy dominating, etc.] all of which, by the way, feature in the Inflationary Model also. There is, however, one significant difference and I am sure you would have noticed it; which is that in the Cyclic Model, there is a contraction process that comes into play towards the end, after expansion has had its full say; this contraction is of course absent in the purely Inflationary Model. What is left for me to do now is place all the different steps of the Cyclic Model within the framework of what Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok refer to as Ekpyrotic Model. Not an easy task, but let me give a try anyway!

Describing the Ekpyrotic Model

It all boils down to describing what happens at three levels so to speak. Level 1 would be all about the separation between the two participating branes, which, through periodic collision, are responsible for the Cosmic Dance of the Branes, leading to a Cyclic Model of the Universe. In level 2, I would have to focus on what happens in the brane which carries our Universe. Then there is level 3, wherein I shall try and link the changes occurring during the evolutionary process to the energetics of the process; this is like describing what is happening in the engine of a car, as the car is travelling on a road that goes up and down and has many curves. That pitch, I hope, would have you tuned to hearing now the amazing story of the Dance of the Branes, and repeated incarnation of the Universe.

I shall present this narrative using a figure that appears below. This figure has three parts, related respectively to the various “levels” that I just referred to.

FIGURE 2. This figure has three parts, related to the three levels mentioned above. In (a) is shown a schematic depiction of one complete cycle according to Paul and Neil; this sketch is based on an illustration in their book. The sketch in (b) is a repetition of Figure 1, but tuned to that in (a). The sketch in (c) has two parts; in the first we have 2 (b) shown with dots in a sequence. The other part of (c) relates the states 1, 2, 3, etc., to the energetics of the brane-pair. The latter aspect is important and would receive mention again later.

Let me now explain slowly what the above figure portrays. The best way of doing that would be to give a “blow-by-blow” running commentary, starting with the point marked “YOU ARE NOW HERE”. By way of adding some fun, maybe I shall call upon the famous Sanjaya of *Mahabharatha* fame to do the commentary [broadcast to the innumerable Universes created by God!]

Sanjaya on the ‘Dance of the Branes’

Hello folks! This is your ethereal Sanjaya, reporting to you in this Kali Era and bringing to you a never before presented drama, the Cosmic Drama of the Branes ordained by the Lord. The scenes you are now about to witness, are not only breathtaking and staggering but may also be frightening; so we advise that if there are kids around, they be given some candy and sent out to play. Make sure you keep them out till this show is over. Maybe they can see a DVD of this Cosmic spectacle, when they grow up; but right now, it may be a bit too much for them!

Well, what do you know? I thought my job was over when I reported live on the Mahabharatha War, but here I am again, doing yet another live commentary. This is a very different kind of job, for I am not in the world nor even in the Universe, where you are, watching all this on your nice plasma screen. I am out there – I don't know what to call it for this cannot be the space you folks talk about. This is outside the Universe I once was in, and also its companion Universe, about which you are going to soon hear a lot. I

am far away from these branes on the collision path, hanging out I do not know where, maybe some kind of a Trishanku (the middleground according to mythology which is neither earth nor the sky and is somewhere in between)!

Anyway, get set for a new spectacular show, a never-before-in-motion-picture-industry job, far, far superior to any Hollywood or Bollywood block buster; and the strange thing is we are going to keep you at the edge of your seat without any of the usual heroes or gangsters, and the standard chase scenes, gunfights, and what not. In fact, you will not see a single human, or for that matter, even an ant. Indeed, this block-buster is for real and far superior to any Star Trek type movie you could think of!

Enough of this prattle, for the Cosmic Director has just given the command ACTION and so here I go!

The opening scene. I see two branes, separated by a small distance, a part of the third dimension. In a sense, it is ridiculous to call it the third dimension – it is so small in length; yet, it has been declared to be a dimension by the script writers Paul and Neil, and so I shall stick to that terminology.

Scene 1 Image: 2 Wrinkled Branes With Dense Matter

So there you have these two branes, about one mm or one cm apart, I cannot really say exactly how much. But the separation is not really the important part of the story. As I look at what appears before me, I see two brane Universes, sort of wrinkled somewhat. One of these, the one on the right I believe, is the Universe where planet Earth exists.

Glancing quickly at my notes, I can say we are looking at the Universes at the moment when dark energy is taking over and beginning to call the shots. If you recall, dark energy is a kind of negative gravity force, a force that causes repulsion rather than attraction. Thus, dark energy leads to expansion instead of contraction; that is the point you have to bear in mind.

Trillions of Years Go By...

There is a fast forward now, and we have moved ahead, oh maybe a trillion years. And what do I see? I see the same two brane Universes. They have not moved much in terms of their positions or separation. But something has changed; and that is the brane sheets are now flatter, with fewer wrinkles. Also, the two Universes have expanded a lot – remember that it is dark energy which is now in charge. And thanks to the expansion that I just mentioned, matter density is very small.

Scene 1 Image: 2 Smoother Branes Spaced Out Matter.../ 2 Smooth Branes With No Stars Or Matter

We move forward some more in time, and now the branes are pretty flat and have zero matter you might say; also no radiation to speak of. This is the sort of pristine situation that forms the precursor for brane collision and the birth of

a new Universe. So are we heading to something exciting? Let us wait and watch.

Some more fast forwarding, and what do I see now? Looks like something is beginning to happen; let me try and get a close look. Oh yes, it appears as if the dark energy has had its say, and something else is coming into play. Hey wait a minute! I see the branes start to come closer together! Does it mean that the spring like force that binds the branes has got switched on? It would seem so, which means that the state of the brane pair has started moving along the energy curve. You can see what I mean by taking a look at the inset on your screen. You see it? You follow what is happening, don't you?

Scene 1 Image: Branes Move Tighter Together

The Branes Dance Ever Closer

Don't move, for things are going to get pretty exciting soon. And yes, sure enough, things have begun to happen, new things I might add. I can see the branes beginning to move closer and closer and even as they are doing so, wrinkles are beginning to appear on the branes. My notes tell me that these wrinkles are due to quantum fluctuations. Frankly I do not understand what that means; I mean when I cannot even understand what stock market fluctuations mean, how can I understand all this complicated stuff? Like I do, just pretend you understand what quantum fluctuations stand for, and let us wait and see if there are going to be any fireworks.

Scene 1 Image: Branes Begin To Wrinkle

I have just been handed a note giving me some tips about what these quantum fluctuations are, and why they are important, and how they would influence the birth of the new Universe as also its subsequent developments. Apparently, the Good Lord knows – He knows everything does He not? – that if the new born Universe is super smooth, then it would be difficult to get gas clouds going; and I guess you are aware that without the gas clouds shrinking and all that, one cannot have stars; and where would planets be without stars? And where would humans be, without planet Earth? So, keeping all this in mind, the Lord has apparently ordained that even before the Universe is born, He would build in "special genes" that would facilitate the formation of galaxies, etc. Yes, it is all a part of the Supreme Master's Master Plan, shall I say? See how thoughtful He is and so very compassionate? See how well He prepares and organises everything so much in advance?! And yet, amazingly, humans are so ready to forget Him, preferring video games, stupid TV shows, and so on! Anyway, that is a different matter altogether and let me get on with my reporting.

The Consequences of Temperature Fluxes

Folks, hold on! Looks like things are beginning to happen a bit more rapidly right now. The quantum ripples are all over the place; they are neither big in size nor in depth. I would say the biggest ripple is just about a couple of

metres across and may be fifty cm in depth? Can't see quite clearly from out here, but that roughly is what I would estimate the size as. I think this means that when the two branes actually hit each other, the so-called contact may not occur uniformly all across the brane; the contact may be earlier in some spots and later at others. Remember, when contact occurs, there is a Cosmic Fire meaning the temperature is going to shoot up – a few million degrees may be. But right now, the exact rise in temperature is not important. What is more important is that though the contacts across the plane of the branes may take place at slightly different times, which might be different only to the extent of who knows, about 10^{-25} seconds. However, that miniscule difference is enough to make regions hotter than others.

Scene 1 Image: More Intense Wrinkling With Change In Color

You get the total picture, don't you? The two branes are approaching each other; this approach is due to gravity pull. The branes are flat to start with but develop quantum ripples when they are about to collide. As a result of the ripples, the contact between the branes does not occur simultaneously all across the branes but at slightly different times at different spots. Thus, while the collision does produce a Cosmic Inferno, the temperature across the branes is not quite the same at different places; they differ slightly, and it is this slight temperature variation that later would act as a great incentive for galaxies to form in some places and not in others.

A New Universe is Born

As I speak, what do I see? Oh my God! I see a huge inferno, and I simply cannot describe it!! The last time I saw such a spectacle was when the Good Lord as Krishna revealed His Cosmic Form to Arjuna, and at that time I said it was brighter than a thousand Suns! That was a gross understatement; the Cosmic Inferno I now see before me is brighter than countless Suns; it is Infinity itself! Imagine that, actually seeing the birth of a new Universe!

Scene 1 Image: Explosion Radiating Out

But Where is God?

But there is something missing, and I have just realised what that is. A new Universe is being created, out of a Cosmic Fire of immense and Mind-boggling proportions; but where is the Lord? Where is He hiding Himself? Where is He? Don't understand that at all! Is He hiding Himself as He often does, so that we might be seized with eternal doubts as to whether He exists or not? Is this one of His inscrutable Leelas?

Hold on folks! I have just been handed a slip from our news desk that monitors the wire services. It says, according to a report by Sage Narada, the Lord was sighted in a country called India and He was last seen at a place called Puttaparthi; the report also says that it looks like the Lord is likely to temporarily shift to some other place – I can't quite read what is scribbled here; oh I can see one of those words it says Bangalore or is it Bengaluru? I

cannot make out which. But I see another word also; can't quite pronounce it – but I shall spell it out for you; it goes like this: K, O, D, A, I, K, A, N, A, L! Well, there it is, the latest rumour about the Lord's physical whereabouts. I really do not know where He is but I do recall His telling Arjuna, "Oh Arjuna, do not look for Me here and there; if you really want to find Me, search in your Heart." That being the case, I wonder why humans are having a problem finding the Lord; maybe a lot of heart problems out there!

Anyway, let me get on; sorry for that interruption. Things are really beginning to happen out there in the strange world of Cosmic Branes, trying to create Universes through collision. Earlier I told you about the two branes, rushing towards each other, not super smooth as they once were, but with tiny quantum wrinkles – could they be called Cosmic pimples? Maybe I had better not! This is God's Drama and I had better watch out and be careful about the words I use!

I then told you about the collision, temperature rise and all that, when I started digressing about Krishna. That collision was over in a flash. Technically, however, because of the wrinkles, different regions of the branes made contacts at different times. These time differences were extremely small but large enough to cause temperature ripples, and these temperature ripples, I told you were the genes that later produced galaxies. Let me now pick up from there.

The First Moments of the Baby Universe

Well the first thing that happened after the collision was that the two branes were bouncing back, like a recoil from collision. Interesting point here – the branes were rebounding with practically the same speed with which they collided. Imagine two billiard balls colliding head on, each with a particular speed. After the collision, you would expect them to rebound; that exactly is what happened here. Of course, if you think of two cars colliding head on, you would not expect this, would you? But then, this is God's Drama and He has His own rules and grammar!

I have an expert here in the commentary box, Dr. Robert Super Brilliant, and let me shoot a few questions to him. By the way, last time when Krishna staged a Cosmic Extravaganza, it was a purely Spiritual affair, and therefore I had no need for an expert, technical commentator, all that padding to my prosaic narration to Dhritarashtra was done later by Sage Vyasa, who dictated a very detailed account of the entire proceedings to Lord Ganesha. Now, it is all different! A Cosmic Telecast, that describes the birth of the Universe in which Avatars incarnate, and this telecast goes out to all the other Universes where maybe it is the Devas who are watching. Mercifully, there are no commercial breaks; that is an abomination that only humans can invent! Anyway, here is Bob and let me turn to him.

A Super Scientist Explains

'Hi Bob, how are you!'

'Fine Sanjaya, nice commentary and congratulations. Will all this be available later as a podcast?'

'Thanks Bob for your kind words; about the podcast, I don't know, but I guess there must be some announcement in our website. But anyway, let us get to the point, and here I must say that I am thankful that you are here to hold my hands and help me through the sticky and technical aspects of what we are witnessing.'

'Happy to help you Sanjaya, but I too have a problem.'

'You, the Super Whiz Kid, have a problem? Can't believe it!'

'Sanjay, normally I speak only to my tribe and we folks simply wave hands, yell at each other and settle matter by writing complicated equations and arguing about them. I cannot do any of that, and I really do not know how to reach out to your audience out there!'

'Well, I can see, you too have a problem, but it does not matter; just kick off and maybe we two would hold hands and come out safely!'

'OK, go ahead, and ask what is it that you wanted to.'

'Good, now tell me something about this rebound, why it happens, and how it plays out?'

'I'll give it all a try. You know Sanjay, it all starts somewhat like in a billiard ball collision. The branes collide and then they rebound. However, branes are not billiard balls, and being very different and with amazing properties of their own, there are many things different when you follow the post-collision scenario.'

'Such as?'

'Well, for one thing, the collision is so violent that the temperature produced is very high, like 10^{23} degrees.'

'Wow! That is so high I cannot even imagine it!!'

'No wonder, remember, this is God's fireworks! Thanks to the astronomical temperature produced, there is a huge spray of particles and radiation, which fill both branes. This cocktail of particles and radiation is called a plasma – it is like a gas but instead of neutral atoms and molecules that we normally have in a gas, in a plasma we have charged particles. And it is this plasma that has such a high temperature. Now here comes a technical point.'

'What is that?'

'Frankly I do not know how to describe it – it is quite complicated really – but I can tell you what happens as a result.'

'Which is?'

'It is simply that the two branes fly away from each other after collision pretty fast, and when I say fast it means real fast. It is all over in an extremely short interval of time. That is to say, almost immediately after the collision, the two branes are where they were when they slowly started coming towards each other, about 1 mm or 1 cm apart, I cannot say exactly what the figure is.'

'Wow! Now let me see if I have got it right. There they are, the two branes, all ready to move towards each to collide. They move slowly first and then accelerate, develop small quantum wrinkles along the line and finally collide. That produces real fireworks, and in the twinkling of an eye it is all over, with the branes back almost where they started from for the collision run – have I got right?'

'Boy, you have done a terrific job! That would have done Carl Sagan proud! Let me continue and tell you what happens next. Even as the branes get back to their standard separation, the remnants of the collision, namely, particles and radiation, are filling up the branes. Radiation dominates but as the branes stretch, the radiation starts diluting. Matter does not spread out so fast and so in course of time, radiation dilutes away and we have a brane that is matter dominated.'

Image: Two Branes With Quantum Soup

'I guess that is when galaxies start forming, right?'

'On the dot, and congratulations Sanjay for catching on so fast!'

'Thank you; being with you has got me so excited, maybe I am learning without being aware of it! Please continue.'

Image: Two Branes With Proto-Galaxies

'Sure, will; now where was I? Oh yes, I was telling you something about what happens immediately after the two branes collide. We could describe this collision as a Big Bang, because after this collision, the Universe is born again.'

'Hold on Bob; do you think that when this new Universe is born, it would have any excess baggage from the earlier birth?'

'Oh, you are thinking of Karma, are you?! Well, in this case, according the authors of this new Ekpyrotic model, there should be none.'

'Why?'

'Because, during the last phases of the previous cycle, when dark energy dominates and the Universe stretches on and on, matter and radiation get diluted to almost vanishing density. It is only at that stage the contraction starts, leading first to small quantum ripples and then the collision, which, the historian for this new Universe would describe as the Big Bang. Actually, this particular Bang would be one of a series of Big Bangs, coming one after another.'

Repeat Of Expansion And Contracting Brane Image

*'Bob, you know what? As I look around, I see the quantum ripples getting amplified and blossoming into galaxies. In the Inflationary Model, the ripples came **after** the Big Bang, and formed due to inflation. But when branes dance, it seems the seeds are sown even **before** the collision occurs and the Bang takes place.'*

*'That is exactly right, Sanjay. In the old inflation model, the quantum fluctuations were registered **during** the inflation, which occurred **after** the Big Bang. In the present scenario, there is no inflation; nevertheless, we do have quantum ripples and galaxy formation; the only difference is that the ripples form **before** the Big Bang and hang around afterwards too. I guess they are too small to get wiped out and manage to survive. And having survived and come thorough into a new era, they now play their assigned role – so it would appear.'*

'Very true Bob, and all that the Universe is supposed to do according to the Inflationary Model is happening right now via brane collision.'

'Indeed Sanjay, but there are important differences and we must keep track of that.'

'What are these differences Bob?'

'Here they are - Difference 1: In the earlier scenario, we had one Universe that was born in a Big Bang, inflated like crazy in an incredibly short time, and thereafter lazily expanded, never ceasing to grow fat; this Cosmic obesity came not as the result of hamburgers but dark energy!'

'Ha, ha, that is a good one!'

'Continuing with what I was saying, in the present scenario, there is no inflation but repeated births. And that brings in Difference 2: The opportunity for repeated births means that time stretches legitimately even before the Big Bang, and so, the expansion rates, sizes, etc., can be adjusted such that one avoids inflation.'

'Hey, wait a minute! There is something I do not quite understand. If what you are saying is right, it means that the Universe could have started with an "empty shell" shall I say at the time of the Big Bang, and thus had a finite size? In that case, all the earlier controversy about packing infinite energy into

a geometrical point, having to do deal with a nasty singularity etc., - all those difficulties get swept away?

'Yes, it would seem so!'

'And once the galaxies form, the routine is more or less as in the earlier birth?'

'Pretty much so, I guess.'

The purists much among you might object to the above "stunt presentation", bringing in a running commentary, consulting an "expert" and all that! I am sorry if I have offended your finer sensibilities, but my aim was just to take you through some difficult territory in as simple a manner as possible.

Just to make sure that you have got the gist of all that imaginary conversation between Sanjay and Bob right, let me present it in the form of the figure below. Here, you see all that was said above and earlier too, as a linear timeline. I trust, this figure would clear residual doubts if any.

FIGURE 3. Some of the sketches presented earlier are repeated here as a linear timeline to help understand the process better. In (a) are depicted eight states of the brane-pair, as they move forward and backwards, colliding in between to create a new Universe. This is the sequence for one cycle. In (b), we have the energy of the brane-pair in Fig. 2 (c) plotted as a "time stretch" extending indefinitely over many cycles. The dots in this figure relate to the eight states depicted in (a). It is important to note that the time stretch is highly non-linear. Thus the time span (ii) maybe a hundred billion times the time span (i).

It is important to appreciate that by building a spring-like mechanism into their model, Paul and Neil are able to over ride the dominance of the dark energy after a while and let contraction take over. It is this take over that then brings the branes close to each other and leads to collision, following which there is yet another Big Bang and a [re-]birth of the Universe.

At this stage, the question would inevitably arise: "How much of this model-making is supported by actual detailed calculations, computer simulations, etc.? Is this all a one big spin, or is there some basis for it? And, as one always asks in Physics, can one think of experiments via which this Ekpyrotic Model and the older Inflationary Model that could be pitted against each other, and we can check out which of the two options Nature has **actually** chosen?"

Those are topics reserved for the next instalment! Till then, all the best and may God be with you always! Jai Sai Ram.

THE LOVE OF LAW AND THE LAW OF LOVE

By Dr. Sara Pavan

Dr. Sara Pavan is an Anaesthesiologist from Australia, who has travelled widely and held consultant appointments in many countries including the U.K., New Zealand and Australia. He came into Bhagavan's fold in 1980 and served actively in the Sathya Sai Organisation of Australia for more than a decade. In 1993, he was fortunate to join the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prashanthi Nilayam, where he served for nearly fifteen years. He currently resides in Prashanthi Nilayam ashram, and still travels often to spread His Love and Message around the globe.

"Suffering and misery are the inescapable acts of the Cosmic Drama. God does not decree these calamities, but man invites them by way of retribution for his own evil deeds. You are reaping in the present what you had sown in the past, and what you are sowing in the present you will reap in the future. Thus, the past as well as the future are both contained in the present." - Baba.

When writing about experiences of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, most of us would describe only miracles, interviews, blessings and incredible achievements. I would like to share my experience of a different kind. In a worldly sense this experience could be termed disastrous and painful, but in a spiritual context becomes enlightening and liberating. Higher truths and understanding are often unattainable without going through personal, painful processes which in actuality clear our karma.

Swami refers to everything as **Action, Reaction, Reflection** and **Resound**. We are experiencing the echoes of our past thoughts, words and deeds, every moment of our lives. There seems to be a subconscious warehouse of past impressions, thoughts, behaviours and actions to draw from. The existence of a "Karmic boomerang" is an undeniable fact. No one can escape the consequences of their actions, *Karma* and *Karma-Phala*, which is the Law of the Universe. The Lord chooses from this warehouse what will best suit our spiritual evolution at the time, whether pleasant or painful. Thus nothing is arbitrary. The goal is to surrender, to throw all responsibility upon God, permitting Him to bear the burden. If we surrender to God, there will be no cause for anxiety. The sense of relief is in direct proportion to the reliance on God. Personal experience is like an anvil. The vagaries of the mind have to be hammered into shape through painful and disastrous experiences. Only then can the mind make a quantum leap in awareness.

'Saving' for the Saviour

When Baba entered our life in 1980 our world became simple overnight. Our lives, we felt, were from now on devoted to God. Although my income had taken a downturn we had surplus savings; my inner voice kept urging me to

put aside a portion of our income for charitable work. A third of our income was put aside for this purpose from 1982, in the hope we could someday fund a major project with Swami's blessing. We established a family trust and started a special savings account, but soon realised that more than half the interest earned would be lost in tax! So in early 1983 we sought our accountant's help to invest our savings for a higher return. He invited us to invest in a commercial property, recommending us to put our money into a new development project that he himself was undertaking. In that way he could take good care of our investment. He lured me into this proposal by asking me to keep the matter confidential, lest other clients of his become jealous, thinking that he was doing us a special favour. It was quite clear that the property would yield high rent and had great potential for capital gain. We were grateful for his help.

The property development had the approval of the various statutory bodies and was in the name of a Company he himself created. I was happy to purchase two strata units. I sold one of our properties and paid a large sum of money as down payment. He was keen to lend us the balance from his company at half percent less interest than the going bank rate and to repay the loan monthly by direct debit, which amounted to almost a third of our income. He suggested that his solicitor would attend to our legal matters without any cost to us.

Sai Cautions Surely, but Subtly

We visited Swami frequently and were too busy with Sai activities - running a centre, publishing newsletters—to give this matter our full attention. Our accountant would bring all documents and tax returns for our signatures at the last minute and we would trustingly sign them without scrutinising them. Swami Himself had told me in my interview in December 1982 that I was very careless with my money. I presumed He was referring to my extravagance. A Divine hint is a command; I completely missed what Swami was trying to tell me. My accountant knew how trusting and naïve I was, and certainly took advantage of it. It was foolish of me to part with such large sums of money without involving my own solicitor to scrutinise all the documents and act on my behalf. My accountant merely sent me a letter on his newly formed company letterhead about the terms of agreement and the loan details; but only when I kept demanding for something in writing. I did not realise then that the letter had no legal validity.

The building was completed and the strata units titled within a year, but the accountant did not give us a copy of the title deed. After repeated requests he sent us a photocopy of a land title. This document was proved as forged during the Supreme Court trial several years later. In fact, there never were any strata units in our names, yet he showed negative gearing in our tax return. Nor did we receive any rent. We were told that the rents were credited to our loan account to speed up repayment. By now the alarm bells should have been ringing, but I continued paying the instalments. I still believed the units really existed and were registered in the name of our family trust.

"I want you, not your money"

As time went by, my accountant's work became noticeably shoddy in other areas. My wife and I were forced to change accountants in 1989. Things came to a head when he refused to transfer our files to our new accountant. I took him by surprise when I confronted him at his office to get all the files. When asked about the investment he retorted: "What are you talking about? Neither of us have anything in this property which had been auctioned off by the bank!" Only then did I realise that those copies of land titles sent to us were forged. I was shocked to hear those words, and stood up angrily after realising I had been cheated. My blood was boiling—I was ready to knock the man down—when I clearly heard the melodious voice of our Beloved Swami whisper inside my head: "***I want you, not your money.***" His deliberate, sweet Voice miraculously put out the fire blazing within me. I quietly collected the files and made my exit. While driving home on the freeway, still trying to digest all that had happened; I recalled the words of Jesus: "***The harvest is plenty but the workers are few.***"

When I told my wife about this disaster, she was very upset, the more so for my carelessness. We accepted the enormous loss as "meant to be". According to our calculations most of the loan should have been cleared by then and we should have been owners of couple of commercial units worth \$600,000 with an annual rental of \$50,000. Without investing in our name the accountant had siphoned all our money into his Swiss bank account. In real terms, we had, in fact, lost a million! Although, in worldly terms, the money belonged to our family trust, in spirit we realised that it belonged to God. It was, after all, intended for future charity work. We were mere custodians. Nevertheless we felt anger and frustration. We had been, denied the opportunity to fulfil this heart-felt wish with the monies now lost to us.

I did not know what to do. My solicitor commented that if I reported the matter to the police, it would become a criminal case. We might succeed in sending the accountant to jail, but not get our money back. Furthermore, the matter would be out of our hands. With the hope of recovering at least some money, we instituted civil action against the accountant. We realised later, that it would take more than three years to come up for hearing in the Supreme Court, let alone the mounting costs—lawyers and so on-- in the interim. In July 1992 I received the 'call' from Swami, through dreams, as well as a personal message through Sri V. K. Narasimhan and his son, Sri Prahalad, to start working at the Super Speciality Hospital in Prasanthigram. Three years on, the case was still nowhere near the hearing stage in the Supreme Court. I went to see Swami in October 1992. I told Him during an interview that I wanted to start work in His hospital without any delay, preferring to abandon the case altogether. Winning the case was one thing, but recovering the money was another. **Swami said, "No, he has money. You fight the case. I will help."** So we delayed our move to Prasanthi until the Supreme Court hearing was over. At the end of the trial in August 1993 my Senior Counsel told me, "I have won the case for you, good luck if you can recover your money." It took two months for the judgement to be delivered. My accountant got off scot-free; only his company was made liable. This was another big shock to us. He escaped from charges of fraud and failure in fiduciary responsibilities. I even had to pay his legal costs as well as mine because he did not defend his bankrupt company.

“Only a million? You should have lost more”

Swami asked me about the case as soon as we reached Prasanthi in November 1993. When I told Swami that the judgement was not favourable, He told me that our lawyers were interested only in the money and had not done their job properly. Bhagavan asked me to appeal against the decision, adding that the judge had erred badly in his judgement. He said the appeal would be heard by a bench of three judges and He would take care of everything. We left our appeal in the hands of an eminent Queen's Counsel and continued to stay in Prasanthi Nilayam. It took two more years for the case to come up for hearing. One judge wanted to overturn the earlier judgement in my favour while the other two stuck to procedure and technicalities. These were also the most testing times for us. Swami too seemed to have abandoned me. In March, 1996 interview I mentioned to Him that our appeal was unsuccessful; we had lost over a million dollars. Swami retorted: **“Only a million? You should have lost more.”**

This “testing time” seemed never ending. My wife and I kept praying to Swami that we should at least understand why we had to go through all this upset. We fully believed that a cause exists for every effect. What was behind all this? I became totally convinced about the Law of Karma. Within months we came across an ancient palm leaf *Naadi* reader. He gave us an extraordinary reading, telling us I had been a Nambodari priest from Kerala in my past life. My name had been Ramakrishna; I had pilfered enormous sums of temple trust money, causing much suffering to many. He also added that because of some good deeds I had done later in that life, my sins were atoned and I was fortunate to have the love and proximity of a great Spiritual Master at present. That Master, he added, was named Sai Baba! This reading gave us comfort and a broader understanding of the hidden forces at work behind our current difficulties. For every effect, there is a cause. I now felt Swami was the inner motivator for me to put aside the trust fund money; it was meant to repay what was due to God. Once that money was well and truly gone, Swami conveyed to me that He wanted ME-- not my money!

The *Karmic* Burden and the Way Out

Yes, we have to bear our *karma*. Swami will not interfere with *karmic* processes if such experiences are essential for our spiritual progress. Why did He want me to proceed with the case, even though He knew the final outcome? Probably because my level of awareness and surrender at the time was shallow. Had I not gone through every possible avenue to recover the money I could have regretted my premature move to India. Surrender, then, would have merely remained an intellectual concept. Swami stood by my side while an enormous *karma* was packaged up and disposed of. He alone knows our past and future, and He alone can help us clear our *karmic* backlog. Without His grace we cannot transmute such enormous karma—the karma of not one but many, many lifetimes. It is only when the heat is turned on that our level of surrender can strengthen. Swami stands by us and helps us. Our faith in Him must be unshakeable.

I believe *karma* is not a cast-iron entity; nor is it absolutely rigid. There are circumstances in which *karma* can be negated, if not transcended. At lower levels of consciousness an individual can be vulnerable to the malefic forces

of *karma*. Consider what happened at Pearl Harbour during World War II, when grounded U.S. fighter planes became sitting targets for the Japanese. Had these planes been airborne the damage to them would have been minimal. High-flying aircraft are hard targets for any anti-aircraft missiles. Likewise, there is a point in our level of consciousness beyond which no *karma* can act. Unfortunately, we are grounded at the plane of illusion and delusion. So much bondage to this unreal world! Through sustained effort in our *sadhana*, together with Bhagavan's grace, we too can reach that point where no *karma* can trouble us. During this trying time I happened to read a chapter on 'Forgiveness' in a book titled '*The Light Shall Set You Free.*' It touched the core of my being; I prayed to Baba to help me completely clear the hurts within. In one swipe I felt all my ill-feeling towards others disappear. Confirming this, a few days later I was blessed with a dream where my accountant and I embraced each other and laughed over the entire episode, as just a game.

The Highest Law of the Universe

Love of law versus law of love—that was the grandstand lesson for me in "losing" so much money. How determined I was that the law should punish my accountant and find in my favour. Little did I realise that a greater Law was at work behind the scenes of this apparent "disaster"—the Law of Divine Love. There are checks and balances in the universe that are hidden from us and which take account of many unseen factors. Divine Justice works from a much deeper perspective. It is perfect and yet we fail to recognise the existence of such vast, deeply-rooted inner causes behind our so-called "disasters". Emotional reaction to such situations only prolongs our suffering. Acceptance is also not so easy.

What possibilities have we for the future when we face an adversity arising from a past misdeed? If we react without knowledge, discrimination or control, the response will be unconscious. We are merely responding according to thought patterns currently existing in our mental storehouse. These are repetitive patterns which have become reinforced over a long period of time, perhaps many life times. They in turn perpetuate further reactions and bondage. Thus fresh *karma* is created, which will have to be cleared sometime in the future.

However, when we respond consciously, we can choose to act in a particular way, free from the existing subconscious patterns. A conscious response is possible only when we become aware of the pitfalls of reacting emotionally. When we learn and understand the mechanics of *Karmic* Law, Providence gives us opportunities to face past *karma*. The Lord can manipulate our *karmic* warehouse; bringing forth suitable experiences. We can deal with these in a positive manner, thereby disposing of them. Even if we possess such knowledge, we need to be very vigilant, as old habits are hard to bypass. We are doubly blessed because we have the guidance and grace of Sai Baba, the Sadguru and Spiritual Master, the Avatar of our age by our side. The All-Knowing Lord Sai, though aware of the extent of our past *karma*, may, in appropriate circumstances, intercede or modify its effect in the present. By His infinite compassion and grace He enables us to overcome the *karma* appropriately, without incurring fresh *karma*. Sathya Sai, our loving God, is

vested with powers beyond human understanding to intercede or write off any *karma*, just as the World Bank has from time to time written off bad debts from some developing nations, satisfied with changes in their fiscal management and economic reforms. Of course, there must be a demonstrable will on our part to receive such grace. Our spiritual reforms must be on a firm footing through our personal transformation. Swami says: "If you have My *anugraha* (grace), I shall remove all your *agraha* (maleficent forces), and even the *grahas* (planets) cannot have adverse effects upon you."

How to Deal with Past *Karma*?

What options do we have when dealing with past *karma*? We may have one of three options - acceptance, transmutation or transcendence. In accepting payback for our past karmas we will experience pain and suffering - the 'door-mat' principle. Since the Universe has a perfect accounting system no debt can go unpaid, unless Divine Grace writes it off for us. When we transmute, we have the possibility of transforming our *karma* into a more desirable experience. By this process we learn from the experience - Why is this happening? What lesson is being taught to us by the Universe? How can we make such lessons useful? How can we help others as a result? In this way, the adversity can be turned into an opportunity; our *karma* gets transmuted into a learning experience. Finally, by remaining independent of the event, we can transcend the effects of *karma*. We cannot escape it. By constant awareness of our True Self we can build a mental barrier, like a break-water. We can witness the events as the adverse forces of *karma* lash against this barrier. Those forces will finally dissipate: "passing clouds", as Bhagavan often reminds us. All the while we simply stay with the "I" thought, *Atma Vichara* or Self-inquiry. I am the Eternal Witness.

The Ultimate Solution

The subconscious state of a human being is a mental warehouse of good and bad *karma*. The Lord chooses from this warehouse what will best suit the individual for his spiritual progress. The goal is to surrender, to throw all responsibility onto God and not endure the burden. What can destiny do then? If one surrenders to God, there will be no cause for anxiety. When one realizes that all actions are the actions of God, then the sense of 'I' and 'mine' is lost. This is what 'doing the will of God' means. Having lost the 'I'-ness and 'my'-ness (ego) you experience oneness with God. You are a *jnani*, a realized soul. This is the Vedantic viewpoint on surrender.

Complete surrender is impossible in the beginning. Partial surrender is certainly possible for everyone and will lead eventually to total surrender—"Thy Will be done." Lasting inner peace can be achieved only through total surrender. How fortunate are we to be devotees of Bhagavan Baba, who loves us more than a million mothers!

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 7

...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 our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories of Mrs. Priya Davis, Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani, Mr. Karthik Ramesh, Mr. Amar Vivek and Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam.

In this issue, we carry the gripping account by Mr. Hiten Morarji, a young adult who candidly shares the hard choices that confronted him when he first experienced the freedom of living on campus at university. Caught up in the social whirl of college life, his priorities changed and he deluded himself into believing that he could have it all. He seemed to have lost everything: good grades slipped away, he lost touch with his parents, and then began to lose even his self-respect. What brought him out of these doldrums, and how? Read on to find out.

Choices... and Why I Made Them

By Mr. Hiten Morarji

Twenty-four year old Hiten Morarji was born and raised in Luton, UK. After his graduation in Pharmaceutical Sciences, he is currently pursuing a career with an international pharmaceutical company. An enthusiastic Sai Youth, he has a keen interest in developing the Sathya Sai Human Values Network to promote the message of human values in the community.

Going to a university is not only about getting a degree or qualification, but also about learning skills and experiencing an independent life that provides us with life long lessons which we carry with us and can use to help us on the long road ahead! How strange it is when I look back and reflect upon that 18-year-old boy who embarked upon three years of university education? Six years on, what lessons were learnt?

Leaving home was my first step into the unknown and I was deeply nervous at the prospect of this new phase in my life. In spite of my parents' worried words of wisdom "Be careful, remember why you are going to the university, don't waste time and this opportunity....." any sense of caution was quickly lost in the fog of my new found activities. I remember very clearly how quickly

I had agreed and nodded to their measured advice, just for the sake of appeasing them.

In the 'In Crowd'

The novelty of having my own space, doing my own things and enjoying the attention from people was exciting; I was easily persuaded to join the "crowd" who appeared to take a personal interest in me with such enticing words as *"You are one of us, let's go and have a good time, we'll show you how to live life,"* humorously ignoring my passive refusals. They met my need to be in their company. This 'comfort of strangers' became an integral part of my life. However, it was this attention and attachment that led to a dilemma, one that inevitably changed my life.

"Attachment is the great fabricator of illusions; reality can be attained only by someone who is detached." Simone Weil (1910-1943) French Philosopher

This attachment to 'friends' initially began as many friendships do, fairly slowly. However, as time grew on, from my first year into my second year of university, the friendships grew stronger and eventually we all moved together in one house. Gradually I was totally absorbed with the social life at the university and doing things with my friends became my only priority. After all, I felt good, important and popular. This association with my fellow students, whom I considered to be my friends, became my sole purpose of being at the university, which no doubt, affected my studies.

Parents Cold Shouldered

So blinded was I in my new company that without knowing why, I was unable to spend even a little time with my parents on one occasion, when they drove 70 miles to come and see me.

Meeting them was not my highest priority, especially when my friends would say "What's the rush, you can see them later or when you go home....". A fleeting thought would come now and again that I should go and see them, but was easily dissolved in my social climate. It was as if my conscience, my inner voice was attempting to break through my wall of ignorance, however, I brushed it aside and even managed to contrive a plausible reason of studying in the library as an excuse for not being able to meet them occasionally. I was too busy revelling in the company of my peers.

My parents began to convey to me their concerns and offered guidance and advice, (which I did not seek) and I further resorted to making decisions that meant sacrificing my time with my family, and paying little heed to their counsel. I was afraid to lose my new found independence, one that nurtured my happiness. "There is nothing wrong in enjoying life to the full"...I told myself. I thought I could handle and get the best of both worlds – i.e. get an education and have a successful social life.

Inevitably the consequences of my lifestyle came back to me. I failed my second year education, was on the verge of being thrown off my course and had missed out on my 12 month student work placement with a prestigious company.

All my 'friends' though, had passed their exams and were successful in securing their placements. I was truly happy for them. However, I had no idea what to do and how to get myself out of the situation I found myself in. I assumed they would always be there! I realised gradually that my parents had always had my well-being in their hearts, and that I had abused the independence I had gained. I needed to change, but my dilemma was 'how'?

Realising the Need to Change

I had to adjust my mind to this reality of failure that stared me in my face. In my mind, there was no prospect of my failing the exams, I had to accept the extent to which I must have been self deluded so as to believe that I would pass without any difficulty. My wake up call had finally arrived. Like Shakespeare's Macbeth, "Beware the Ides of March" I too had ignored all the warnings of the impending doom.

I was faced with the burden of making a choice: to continue on the path that my social life was taking me, or to walk away against peer pressure which by now was deeply rooted within me, to the extent that I had lost sight of my purpose and my own values. My judgement and decision making was somewhat clouded and I was clearly distracted from developing myself and my career.

I cried "Oh My God, what have I done, how have I ended up like this? I had not earned marks, I had earned remarks." Not knowing how to fix this situation, I prayed to Swami for guidance.

It was time for me to step back, re-assess and analyse what had happened over the last two years - it was crucial for me to find out how all this had happened. Despite my parents' warnings about choosing true friends, I was very sad that I had been ignoring my parents' advice; I felt I had let them and myself down. I realised that amongst many things, I had taken life's opportunities for granted. It dawned on me that I had paid the price for it and needed to recover the cost somehow, to re-build my life, my education, my confidence and to strengthen my character. I needed to rediscover the good values and principles I had been brought up with. I had thought I had friends with whom I could share my life, my good moments and bad times.

Vulnerable as I was, I chose to walk away and to cut the ties from these 'friends'. In the depths of my soul I knew I was suffering as a result of the choices I had made. Now the time had come for me to take responsibility for making the right choice. I knew that I would be ridiculed by my peers, but now I had to resist all the temptations and concentrate on getting myself out of this dire predicament. For example, on occasions when I decided to be by myself, three or four people would come together and say "*Come on then, do*

something worthwhile, don't be so boring..." I would then give a string of excuses such as "I have to catch up on my work and other things..." , feeling intimidated and unable to say "No" with confidence. This gave me determination to face whatever comes from this process of breaking free and being at one with my conscience. In the depths of my despair, I found this salvation.

My decisions didn't go down too well and I had to stand up and be strong. I believed that they were not to blame for my predicament and I had to do this for myself. My 'friends' were not going to pick up the pieces, sit my exams and pass for me. I wanted to achieve something with my life, be successful in my career and make my parents proud.

The Challenge of Re-educating Oneself

I took courage and faced my lecturers to find out where I had gone wrong in my exams, especially when I was under the impression that I had passed! I knew now that I had lived in a "gambler's paradise." This is the notion of a gambler who convinces himself that he cannot lose. I was like a blind man gambling with my future, totally unaware of the consequences of my actions.

I began to reconnect with Swami as I battled on for a second chance with my university to allow me back on the course and to re-sit my exams. With much self discipline, I needed to re-focus and overcome the initial struggle of getting back on the course, and having to study at home, preparing for my exams. I was rebuilding my life and growing up. It was during this time I realised where I'd gone wrong and learnt many hard lessons. I worked hard with my studies, rebuilt my relationship with my parents and regained their trust and earned their respect.

My fair weathered friends had distanced themselves because of my predicament and their occasional words of consolation gave me no comfort. My only solace came from my parents "What is done is done, we will work together to get you back on track; we have confidence that you will turn this round". I realised that they too had felt my pain.

Keeping to the Straight and Narrow

Having passed my second year exams, I faced another test: "Do I re-unite with some of my previous acquaintances?" I made a conscious decision not to be part of "the crowd". I was humbled by this second chance of redemption. My life had drastically changed with a new found purpose. The final year was by no means easy! I was determined to row this life boat through the stormy seas and reach the lighthouse of hope.

When assignment deadlines loomed, I was often tempted by colleagues to go out and socialise; however, I was able to step back and learnt to say "No". With my conscience as my guide, I was able to focus my energies on my real goals and expectations to achieve the highest standard both for my degree and for my personal well-being.

This was an incredible test of faith, determination, hard work and discipline.

I learnt an invaluable lesson that everything happens for a reason, that this was all God's divine play! He taught me the lessons I needed to learn for which I will always remain grateful. In time, I realised what friendship is and what it is not. *"When nine hundred and ninety nine friends have failed you, the Thousandth friend will stand by your side to the gallows-foot -- and there after!..."* (from Kipling's 'The Thousandth Man'). And that "friend" was God.

Why was this God's divine play?

The day of my results came, the waiting and the tension was almost unbearable! I learnt I had successfully passed and graduated from university. I was ecstatic! At this point I cried and fell at Bhagavan's Feet in our temple at home, all I could say was 'thank you'!

I then stumbled upon a small photo of Swami, which my mother had brought home from a function. I had noticed this photo a while ago and used to look at it regularly, but had never taken it out of its little envelope. For some reason on the day I passed my exams, I decided to open the envelope and read the message at the bottom.

"Your destiny does not depend upon examination marks; it depends more on character, will-power and the Grace of God."

How appropriate this message was, it really hit home in ways that I just couldn't explain. I had learnt such a valuable lesson, which I could now positively use and apply in my future endeavours in life.

Lessons Learnt

When we are separated from our conscience, we find ourselves in the sea of troubles. With hindsight, the one thing I would possibly do differently is to avoid the hurt and pain caused to my parents and to myself. This experience taught me a lot about the importance of family values and self-respect.

"The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action." John Dewey (1859 – 1952)

I do not regret the final choice I made, as I am grateful for the outcomes and the opportunity to learn valuable lessons. I have developed confidence and reclaimed my integrity. I believe it is important for us, young people, to have sound principles and positive values to overcome life's great challenges.

I hope this sharing of my experience will help those who are at similar cross roads in their lives.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part - 42

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT XVI - SCENE 1

Rama Raju's house

RAMA RAJU: Seshama Raju, we are indeed very happy that you brought your brother Sathyam to our town.

SESHAMA: It was our pleasure to receive your kind hospitality.

RAMA RAJU: Places visited by the pious become holy and sacred. In such places, even the grains of sand contemplate on the Divine!Seshama Raju, please accept this token of our affection.

SESHAMA: Oh no! Why all this! Your love and affection alone are more than enough.

RAMA RAJU: It is our tradition to honour our respected guests; please take this..... That one is for Sathyam..... The collar pin will look very beautiful on You. Please accept.

SATHYA: This is made of gold. Gold lies beneath our feet as ore inside the earth. The ore is first taken out, put in fire and then refined. Only then it becomes the precious metal that everyone admires. Just as objects gain beauty with processing, man develops Divinity with culture and refinement.

MAN: How nicely put!

SATHYA: I have no attachment for such things, but since you have given it with love, I am accepting it.

RAMA RAJU: We hope you will come again and give us happiness.

SESHAMA: Most certainly! We can never forget your hospitality. We now take your leave.

ALL: Thank you!

SCENE 2

Seshama Raju's house

RAMESH: Raju, Raju!

SATHYA: Hello Ramesh, how are you?

RAMESH: I am fine, and how about you, Raju?

SATHYA: I am OK.

MAHESH: We heard that You had returned, and immediately rushed here. Raju, without You, the School seemed lifeless.

RAMESH: Raju, when will You start coming back to School?

SATHYA: I am thinking of coming from tomorrow.

RAMESH: You must come without fail. If You sing the prayer song, it is so nice. Right now, there is no one who can sing like You.

MAHESH: The Telugu Teacher also said the same thing.

RAMESH: The Principal too!

MAHESH: Raju, You must definitely come tomorrow and sing the Prayer.

SATHYA: I'll certainly come. I like you both, and you two will always be there, wherever I am!

RAMESH: OK Raju, we will now go.

MAHESH: From tomorrow, You must definitely come to School.

SCENE 3

Boys walking near tree

RAMESH: Raju, You are back in School, just like You said. It is wonderful!

MAHESH: The classes are going on fine.

GAFUR KHAN: Raju, I'm happy You are back again.

RAMESH: Raju, this is interesting. What's this dazzling object?

SATHYA: It is a collar pin.

MAHESH: Is it made of gold?

SATHYA: Yes, it is a gold pin.

GAFUR: Great Raju! Did You buy it?

SATHYA: No. When I went to Hampi, Rama Raju gave it to me as a token of love. He would not listen to My refusal. So, in order not to hurt him, I accepted the pin.

RAMESH: The collar pin looks very nice on You, Raju.

SATHYA: More than the body, the mind ought to be beautiful. More than the dress, behaviour ought to be beautiful. More than ornaments, feelings must be beautiful. Only then would the world be filled with spirituality, and life would become sanctified.

GAFUR: Raju, Your words sound just like the holy Quran!

BOY: Raju, Your words are too big for our small minds!

MAHESH: There goes the bell!

ALL: Come on, let's go!

BOY: Come, Raju!

Boys run. Collar pin lost.

SCENE 4

Seshama's house

SESHAMA: I say, what kind of impertinence and arrogance is this?

SATHYA: I am not yours. Illusion has left and My devotees are calling Me. The time has arrived for Me to start the work for which I have come. I will not stay here any longer, not even for one more moment. I am going.

SESHAMA: Sathyam, stop! Sathyam, stop!..... Where are You going?

SATHYA: To the inevitable goal!

SESHAMA: What kind of meaningless words are these?

SATHYA: You cannot understand the words of those seeking higher realms. Don't stop Me. Let Me go My way!

SUSEELA: Sathyam, don't slight the words of elders. Listen to the words of Your elder brother.

SATHYA: Old, young, rich, poor, male, female – all these are the same to Me! For those who have given up all these, the world is the home!

SESHAMA: Sathyam!...Sathyam,.....Sathyam, stop! Are You going to listen to my words or not?

SATHYA: The word “**MY**” is the form of ego! Ego is an invisible poison whereas the Knowledge of the Atma is ambrosia. It is the stepping stone to the path of Liberation.

SESHAMA: Cut out all this foolish philosophy! Let me see how you will defy this brother of yours and go!

SATHYA: Give up this effort to stop Me. No power can stop Me. Move out of the way!

SESHAMA: Sathyam, our parents have entrusted You and the responsibility of bringing You up to me. I have to discharge that responsibility. Listen to me. Stay at home till they come. Don't go anywhere.

SATHYA: No!

SESHAMA: If You refuse, do you know I will use force to drag You inside?

SATHYA: Stop! Do you know who I am?

SESHAMA: You may believe Yourself to be anything, but to me, You are my brother Sathyam.

SATHYA: You are referring to mere worldly relationship, but for Me, there are now no bonds or attachments.

Sathya walks away

SCENE 5

Sathya on rock. Sings Manasa Bhajare. People come. Aarathi

ANJANEYULU: I am not wise enough to speak to You, but let me anyway mention some thoughts that come to my mind. Don't go against Your brother's words. By all means, perform Bhajans here and give Darshan to devotees here, but don't stay away from home.

LADY: Your elder brother is like Your father. He should not feel pain. So, please go back home.

SATHYA: To one who is liberated from all bondage, everything is the same. The work for which I have come, is just beginning. None must try to stop Me. It is impossible for anyone to do so!

END OF SCENE 5

MUSINGS ON AVATARS - Part 4
(Continued from the previous issue)

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

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

Krishna Outwits Kamsa's Demons

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. As I told you last time, Kamsa, scared to death that the eighth-born of Devaki was still alive, began to try every possible means to kill all new born babies in his kingdom, using the help of demons. One of these agents was a female named Putana, and seeking young babies to kill, she wandered into Gokulam. There, her attention was attracted by the sight of a steady stream of people, particularly women, going in and coming out of Nanda's house. Investigating the matter, she discovered that it was all due to the presence of a most charming baby in that house. Promptly Putana assumed the form of a beautiful young lady (she had the power to assume any form she desired), entered Nanda's house and requested Yasoda to give her baby Krishna so that she may fondle the child. Yasoda gladly agreed to do this and having some work to attend to, disappeared inside feeling that the baby was safe with the visitor.

What Putana had planned was to feed Krishna; not with milk but a deadly poison; but Krishna quietly sucked away the poison and Putana's life as well. When Putana fell dead she reverted to her natural grotesque form. Shortly after this, Yasoda returned and swooned to see the carcass of a huge demoness and her baby playing nonchalantly by its side. The entire village was mystified by the event, and especially the death of the demoness but none could associate Krishna with her destruction. When Yasoda regained her consciousness, she rushed to the altar to offer her grateful thanks to Narayana for saving her child.

Putana's death was a setback for Kamsa, but he was not ready to give up. A steady procession of demons were despatched to Gokulam as executioners, but as it happened, it was they who got executed. In every case, Krishna managed things so adroitly that the villagers, Yasoda in particular, were led to believe that it was an unseen Divine Hand that was protecting the baby!

Back in Mathura, Vasudeva, who knew the secret about the two boys growing up in Gokulam, constantly thought of them. Anxious that all religious rites meant for protecting children must be gone through in their case also, he summoned his family priest Garga and asked him to drop in at Nanda's house as if casually and perform all due ceremonies. Garga called on Nanda as instructed, whereupon Nanda requested the priest to formally name the two boys. This Garga readily did, naming the son of Rohini as Balarama and that of Yasoda as Krishna. He, then, said to Nanda: "In an earlier birth, this Krishna of yours was born as a son to your relative Vasudeva (in his earlier birth too). For that reason, your son will also be known as Vaasudeva, but right now I would advise you to keep quiet about this other name, lest Kamsa gets funny ideas!"

The Boyhood Pranks of Lord Krishna

If the baby marvels of Krishna were a source of wonder, His childhood *Leelas* became a source of delight to many and a "headache" to some. Stealing butter from the houses of the various *Gopis* or cowherd girls, of course in the company of other boys, became a daily ritual and there was no end to the complaints that Yasoda constantly received. (Fresh butter is known as *Navaneetam*; hence amongst His friends, Krishna was also known as Navaneeta Krishna.)

One day, when all the children were playing in the courtyard, Balarama ran excitedly to Yasoda and said, "Auntie, Krishna is eating mud by the handful". Perplexed, annoyed and worried, Yasoda rushed to Krishna, and asked Him whether He was eating mud as was being alleged. Krishna, His eyes wide and innocent, shook His head as if to deny. Not believing Him, Yasoda ordered Krishna to open His mouth so that she could check. Obediently Krishna opened His mouth and what did Yasoda see in it? The entire Universe, including herself and her darling Krishna! Totally dazed, she muttered to herself: "Is this real or is it all a part of the *Maya* (illusion) of the Lord?"

Incidentally, I might mention that speaking at Prasanthi Nilayam a couple of days before the Birthday in 1994, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister of India, described the remarkable changes in the village of Puttaparthi by quoting those very words of Yasoda!

To get back to the story, the vision that Yasoda saw passed, and soon she was back to her role as a happy but tormented mother, while Krishna reverted to being the naughty but adorable son.

On another occasion, Krishna was particularly "difficult" and Yasoda became thoroughly exasperated. Wanting to keep Him under check, she tied a rope around His waist and anchored it to a heavy stone mortar. Feeling secure, Yasoda then went about her work. In the beginning, Krishna passed time watching the birds and the monkeys in the courtyard but getting bored, He began to crawl on all fours, dragging effortlessly behind Him the huge mortar

intended by Yasoda to be an anchor. In the courtyard there were two tall trees growing close to each other. Krishna went right between them but the mortar got stuck. When Krishna pulled forward, the trees snapped and fell to the ground. Instantly, they both were transformed into two beings. Falling at Krishna's feet they said: "O Lord, we are the sons of Kubera, the deity of wealth. We became trees on account of a curse, but by Your Grace, we have received redemption." So saying, they vanished. It all happened on account of the rope tied around His waist (of course, He had willed it be that way) and for this reason Krishna is sometimes referred to as Damodara.

Krishna Moves to Beautiful Brindavan

The inhabitants of Gokulam became concerned that mishaps to Krishna were occurring in a never-ending sequence. True, by God's Grace, no evil had befallen the young one but maybe there was something evil about the very place. Why not therefore move over to some other spot, like the beautiful Brindavan, nestling under the Govardhan Hill (Govardhanagiri) and close to the River Yamuna? And thus it was that Krishna and His Gopala (cowherd) friends soon found themselves frolicking in Brindavan and its neighbourhood.

By now, Krishna was a bit older and He used to join the other boys of the village in taking the cows out everyday for grazing. Kamsa, disturbed as ever that his mortal enemy was still out there somewhere, continued to send his agents on the prowl. One such demon by name Vatsa, disguised himself as a calf and mixed with the bunch of cows and calves taken out by the cowherd boys, waiting for an opportunity to attack Krishna. But Krishna easily saw through the disguise and made short work of the demon. Another demon by name, Baka, met the same fate, and after Baka, came Agha, the brother of Putana and Baka. Agha assumed the form of a mountainous python and lay in wait for Krishna with his enormous mouth wide open. The Gopalas straying into the neighbourhood mistook the wide-open mouth to be a cavern and entered it in order to explore. The cows and the calves followed the boys but Krishna stayed outside, quietly watching the proceedings. Just as the python was about to close his mouth, Krishna too entered and allowed Himself to be trapped along with the others. When the jaw snapped shut, Krishna began to grow bigger and bigger. Agha tried his best to spit out Krishna but Krishna stayed put till the demon choked to death.

Most of the boys were about five years old (which was also roughly Krishna's age at that time) when this incident took place. Young they might have been but amazed they certainly were by the constant display by Krishna of His extraordinary powers. However, through His shroud of *Yogamaya* (illusion), Krishna soon made them forget these remarkable incidents, after which Krishna was just like one them!

Brahma Tests Krishna

Meanwhile, Brahma, the Creator, was watching all these events from heaven. He did not know who Krishna really was, and decided to test the limit of Krishna's powers. Brahma then came down from heaven while Krishna was

dozing under a tree, collected the boys, the cows and the calves and hid them in a cavern. When Krishna woke up, He found that He was all alone. Exercising His Yogic vision, He immediately understood Brahma's game, and smiling to Himself He decided to teach Brahma a lesson. Accordingly, with a mere wave of His hand, He created an exact replica of all the missing boys, cows and calves; and with this duplicate party, He returned in the evening to the village. On reaching the village, the party dispersed as usual, the boys and the animals going to their respective homes. The villagers did not realise that the boys and animals were duplicates, but they did notice that they felt an unusual love towards them - not surprising, since these boys and animals were nothing but a direct projection of Krishna Himself! As a part of His Divine *Leela* (sport), the One had become many.

For almost a year, this replica of cows, calves and boys went accompanying Balarama and Krishna everyday to the grazing grounds, returning at sundown; no one suspected that anything was amiss. Meanwhile, Brahma watching from above became puzzled. He had carefully hidden the boys and the animals but here was Krishna taking them out everyday. How could that be? Suddenly it dawned on him that it was Krishna who had duplicated Himself into various forms, and that He was none other than the Supreme Cosmic Reality, now masquerading as a cowherd boy. Ashamed and repentant, Brahma prostrated before Krishna and begged for forgiveness. The boys and animals originally concealed were duly set free, upon which Krishna made His projections disappear. As he withdrew, Brahma said to himself: "How lucky are these Gopas to have the Lord constantly in their midst, to move with Him on equal terms, to play with Him, eat with Him and share various experiences with Him! But little do they know who their companion really is." The Lord continues to play the same trick for how easily do we forget who Swami really is!

Dancing on Serpent Kaliya's Head

Once while grazing the animals, some of the boys felt thirsty and went to a nearby lake to quench their thirst; Krishna did not go with them. Unfortunately, the waters of the lake were poisoned by a huge and deadly snake named Kaliya that lived in it. Therefore, the moment the boys drank the water, they fell dead. After a while, Krishna, finding that the boys who had gone for a drink had not returned, went in search of them along with His other companions and soon came across a pile of corpses by the lakeside. Instantly He knew what had happened and He angrily entered the lake. The moment He did so, Kaliya attacked Him fiercely and seeing this Krishna's surviving companions raised a mighty hue and cry. Their wail was so loud that it could be heard in the village, and the people there rushed to the lakeside. And the sight that greeted them was shocking beyond words, for there was their darling Krishna being overwhelmed by the deadly snake Kaliya.

It was of course a part of the drama, and Krishna merely wanted to give the impression that the snake was getting the better of Him. After appearing to struggle for a while, Krishna suddenly turned the tables and soon He was dancing over the spread hood of the subdued snake. (Swami has explained

the symbolic meaning - the five-hooded snake represents the five senses. When the senses have no control, the effect is poisonous but when they surrender to the Lord, they become subdued.)

The Darling of the Gopis

Right from the moment of His birth, Krishna was a darling to the Gopis of the village, first as a charming baby and later as a naughty prankster who often stole butter. Much has been written about Krishna's relationship with the Gopis, a good bit of it with a romantic slant (sometimes, sensuously overdone). Such literature might tend to give the impression that Krishna was something of a playboy. Nothing could be farther from the truth, and Swami has severely condemned all such erroneous portrayals. As He points out, two things go against this romantic image; firstly, Krishna was barely about five or six years old then and it is therefore patently absurd to attribute romantic motives to His relationships with the Gopis. Secondly, and this is an even more important consideration, Krishna was the Lord descended on earth, and surely one would not expect the Master of the senses to go gallivanting around or acting like a Casanova! Would He, the Ultimate *Guru* who had come to teach the *Gita*, set such an example? Obvious though these points are, strangely they have not found expression prior to Swami's comments.

Curing Spiritual Blindness

Another time, once again while out grazing the cows, the boys felt hungry and on the advice of Krishna approached a group of Brahmins for food. The Brahmins who were in the midst of an important ritual would not brook the interference and chased the boys away. Hungry and angry, they returned to Krishna for a new solution to their problem. Krishna smiled and said, "Go again to the Ashram of the Brahmins, but this time you ask the wives of those performing the *Yajnas* (*Yajna-patnis*) for food". And when the Gopas went to the women and asked them for food in Krishna's name, what a difference it was! Instantly the *Yajna-patnis* collected all the special food made for the sacrificial offering and rushed to where Krishna was. These women were not versed in the *Vedas* nor in the performance of Vedic rituals, but their hearts were full of love for Krishna. They knew who He was, and seeing Him they shed tears of joy - and Krishna obliged them with a glorious Darshan. Later, when the Brahmins heard about the Divine Darshan that their wives had received but which they missed, they repented their folly. The story has a moral which is that love for the Lord is more important than mere scholarship or adherence to rituals; the latter could, as it did in this case, lead to spiritual "blindness".

Teaching Indra a Lesson

Once, when He was about seven years old, Krishna saw everyone in Brindavan preparing for a big *Yajna*. Curious, He asked Nanda what the excitement was all about. Nanda replied that the village was getting ready to perform a *Yajna* to propitiate Indra, the King of the angels. Sounding innocent, Krishna asked, "Father, is it not true that the Kingship of the Heaven comes to

one who himself performs a hundred sacrifices? So isn't there someone who confers this Kingship?" When Nanda replied in the affirmative, Krishna then asked, "In that case Father, why don't we worship that Ultimate God, rather than a mere underling of His?" Deeply alarmed, Nanda said, "Sshhh Krishna, don't say such things loud! If Indra hears, then we would all be in trouble." But Krishna would not be quietened so easily, and He continued to insist that the Supreme One alone should be worshipped.

Indra, who did not know who Krishna really was, (a *faux pas* committed earlier by Brahma), mistook Him for a spoilt brat, and decided to teach the villagers a fitting lesson for not training their children to respect the King of the Heaven. Summoning Varuna (the god of the waters), Indra ordered him to cause a deluge, and duly the rains came with unprecedented fury. Everyone was petrified, and Nanda reproached Krishna for having aroused the wrath of the gods. Krishna merely smiled as if to say "Why fear when I am here!" and casually lifting the Govardhan Hill, as if it were a mere pebble, held it aloft over the drenched village as a gigantic umbrella. Thwarted in his designs, Indra realised that Krishna was no mere brat, but the Cosmic One in human form; deeply repentant, he fell at Krishna's Feet seeking pardon.

Kamsa's End Approaches

The time for Kamsa's extermination was fast approaching, and as if to set the wheels in motion, Sage Narada informed Kamsa that Devaki's eighth son was actually growing up in Brindavan in the house of Nanda and explained how the transfer of Krishna was stage-managed. Given this firm tip, Kamsa initiated fresh steps to trap Krishna; this time, no effort would be spared but first, Krishna would have to be lured to Mathura. For this purpose, Kamsa organised a grand festival and sent his lieutenant Akrura to specially invite Nanda and his family. As Akrura's chariot bearing Krishna and the others was about to leave Brindavan for Mathura, the Gopis who had gathered there realised that Krishna would not return and this was a stunning blow. They cried, wept, pleaded and used every trick known to detain Him, but the artful dodger made a neat getaway as there was a job waiting - Kamsa had to be killed, and his parents (Vasudeva and Devaki) had to be freed.

As Krishna and Balarama arrived at the special stadium created for staging the sporting events, it was already packed to capacity. Just then, Kamsa arrived and took his seat amidst loud cheering by his henchmen. On a signal from him, the evil plan to do away with Krishna was set in motion. A mad elephant named Kuvalayapida was let loose upon Krishna, but the eight-year old made short work of it, stunning the entire gathering.

A rather bad start for Kamsa who, becoming furious, tried even more wicked methods of extermination; however, every one of them failed. Having slowly worked Kamsa up to the height of fury, Krishna finally tackled him direct and killed him.

With Kamsa removed, the reign of terror that prevailed in Mathura was over. While the public rejoiced and danced in the streets, Krishna and Balarama

rushed to release Vasudeva and Devaki from captivity; and at long last, the tormented parents were reunited with their Divine offspring. Although at birth Krishna had revealed His Divinity to Vasudeva and Devaki, He now made sure that they both came under the spell of His *Maya* so that they could enjoy Him as their son! Thus it was that Vasudeva, worrying about Krishna's education, entered Him and Balarama into the *Gurukula* of Sage Sandipani, where the brothers excelled as model students.

The Lord Meets His 'Family'

Completing the charade of receiving education, Krishna returned to His parents in Mathura where at long last He learnt all about His relatives. He discovered that His father had a sister named Kunti who had three sons named Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna. Later, I shall give more details about Kunti and her sons, for that is important to our narrative.

To get on with my story, a chance for Krishna to meet Kunti soon arose on account of a total solar eclipse. On such occasions, the pious always gathered at a holy spot and took a cleansing bath on conclusion of the event. Krishna and Balarama went with their parents to a place called Samantapanchaka, close to Kurukshetra, later to become famous. Gathered at the holy spot were men and women, sages and kings, the rich and the poor, and the old and the young. Nanda and Yasoda were there too, and there was an emotional reunion between Krishna and His foster parents. Meanwhile, Kunti spotted Vasudeva and bitterly complained to her brother for having ignored her so long whereupon Vasudava had to narrate the sad story of how most of his time was spent in prison. The sages who had come there were overjoyed about Krishna's presence. They rushed to fall at His Lotus Feet, but with a mischievous wink He held them in check. Instead, like an ordinary boy, He prostrated before them and sought their blessings, much to the embarrassment of the holy ones.

Spotting the sages, Vasudeva approached and asked them about the best path to follow in order to achieve purification. With deep feeling, the sages said: "The constant and incessant worship of Narayana is the path to follow. Not only is it the best, but it is also the easiest." A delighted Vasudeva turned to Krishna and said, "Heard that? What a wonderful advice! You too must remember to follow that". Wearing a supremely obedient look, Krishna replied, "Yes, of course father, I shall always remember that constant worship of Narayana is the only path."

That's all for now, meanwhile, please rejoice that we are so fortunate to have that very same Krishna amidst us right now. All of us must use every means we can command to make the best use of this incomparable opportunity not only to elevate ourselves spiritually, but also to experience true bliss by being one with the Lord in body mind and soul.

Jai Sai Ram.

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

'SAI ANANDAM' A Garden of Divine Blossoms

By Mr. B. K. Misra

A post graduate in Arts from Ravenshaw College, Orissa, India, Mr. B K Misra taught English literature for 13 years in various universities including 7 years in his alma mater. In 1966, he came into Bhagavan's fold under amazing circumstances, and since then longed to serve at His Lotus Feet in Prasanthi Nilayam. His dream was fulfilled in 1980 when he joined the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, where he serves till date even after retirement.

It is not often in today's world that we have reason to cheer about positive developments in society. There seems to be so much chaos and selfishness around. Partly this is, in fact, the case, and partly the fault of a sensationalist and negative media, which refuses to give its readers 'good news'. We, in H2H, are passionate about bringing to you such stories which inspire our minds and strengthen our souls. And if only we look around to see what Sai devotees, especially Sai students, are engaged in - many silently, but solidly – such tales of celebration of the true human spirit are plenty. One such brilliant example is 'Sai Anandam'. Read this touching tale to find out how one spirited soul, guided by his beloved Sai and aided by other Sai students and well-wishers, has created a home where buds, who would otherwise have dried, devastated or decomposed, are today blooming into beautiful blossoms, all because of their love for Him and His Love for them.

"Sai Anandam", (meaning 'Sai Bliss') is the apposite name for a home for destitute children, set up by former students of Sathya Sai Baba in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, near Barang, 12 km from Cuttack, and 20 km from Bhubaneswar, the capital of the State.

"Why such a name?" I asked Mr. Lala Susant, a young man in his early thirties, who holds the reins of management of this orphanage and lives nearby. Susant completed his Bachelors of Arts from the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1994, and his Masters from the prestigious Delhi School of Economics.

"Well, it is a small effort at recreating the happiness we felt when we lived in the physical presence of Bhagavan at Prashanti Nilayam. The virus of loneliness, born of alienation from God is destroying the world. Some of us, students of Bhagavan, wanted to share our Godly joy with the world, by trying to create an oasis of love and service - for that is what happiness is all about - in a desert of lovelessness. Thus with the inspiration of Swami was born "Sai Anandam".

"Why did you choose to set up a home for destitute children? You could have worked on any other project", I queried again.

Twelve year old Naresh is studying in VI grade in the nearby Jhunjhunwala High School, like every other child in Sai Anandam. He came to Sai Anandam 9 months ago from Baanra, near Banki. He had lost his father and was being raised in very difficult circumstances by his mother, who is mostly bedridden. Though he is so young, he knows the responsibility that he is going to shoulder soon. He wants to become capable enough and take up a job a few years from now and take care of his mother. As he talked, his eyes inadvertently would find their way to the life size photo of Swami whom he had known only a few months ago. While gazing at the picture, he would delight in affirming, "He is God and He has created this beautiful Universe including me." His eyes were eloquent enough to narrate this wonderful love story between him and the Lord.

Rescuing the Ravaged and Neglected

"We thought this is the best way to create an environment of love and service. Children are the best gifts of God to humanity, and we were shocked to see how so many kids receive so little care in our 'civilized' society. So we made inquiries and found some children who were disadvantaged by having only a single parent, or had no parents, or due to utter poverty, were living almost on the streets. If they were allowed to grow with this emptiness in their lives, with no remedial action taken, they may either remain as a burden on society, or turn into criminals. We wanted to bring to them Bhagavan's Love and show them the light of happiness that guides our lives." Susant looked joyful; satisfied with himself for having made a good decision.

I remembered a Vedic hymn where the *rishi* (sage) declares at the top of his voice, "Beyond all this darkness, I have seen the Light of God, which is a thousand times brighter than the sun...." (...*vedahametat purusham mahantam, adityvarnam tamasah parastat...*) I knew in my heart that the Light of God alone can transform our lives. *Ananda* (bliss) is the only food that can restructure man into God, and who can do that better than Bhagavan's students, who have experienced so much at the Feet of the Lord? Doesn't Swami often reiterate '*Ananda* is My *ahara*' (Bliss is My food)?

We enter the unassuming campus of Sai Anandam. A small arched gate, a courtyard flanked on both sides by two blocks of very modest halls divided into two or three rooms each, an asbestos roof covered with hay for fighting the terrible summer heat, and ten pairs of tiny feet, eager to tread the path to love and happiness they had missed all their lives. Guiding them with great affection are a few young men in their twenties and thirties. This is Sai Anandam. They don't have an office, no furniture except a few plastic chairs

for guests. But what they do have is - big hearts, the passion to build men of virtue out of homeless urchins.

Hari hails from Barkoli Khada in Jagatsinghpur district. A bright student of class V, he loves reading literature. He joined the home nine months ago and since then has shown promise in playing tabla and other percussion instruments. His tender heart cherishes many dreams. He wants to grow up and join the Indian Police force as he wants to fulfill his late father's wish. A quiet child, Hari finds more joy in gardening and nurturing plants than in playing games. There is a perpetual joy dancing on his face. If one asks him, what is it that makes him so happy, quick comes the reply: "When I think of Swami, I feel very happy. I want to have His darshan one day and see Him. I will say 'Swami, I want only You. For, if we have You, we have everything else in the world.'

It is salutary to recollect the innumerable instances when Swami would come and ask the tiny tots of Primary School in Prashanti the same question and hear the same answer. At that moment, His heart would swell with pride and a smile would slowly find its way to His face.

Replicating Prashanti School

Of the two blocks, one contains the kitchen and a room for the older inmates. The other block is divided into two rooms, 15 by 12 feet, and 20 by 12 feet. The smaller room serves as the *pūja* room, where the inmates say the *suprabhatam* (morning prayer) and other prayers. In the other larger room, they study and sleep. Mats spread on the floor are their beds, and they share and care for each other in every way. They clean the campus - their home, and wash their own clothes too. To study, they go to a nearby school, and in the evenings, play together indoors. Everyday, on the onset of dusk, they sing *bhajans*, and listen to stories of Swami's life. As they are starting almost from scratch in formal education, a retired teacher voluntarily coaches them to remedy the long years of neglect. They rise at five in the morning, and slip into sleep at ten every night.

"We wanted to give them the schedule we lived at Puttaparthi", explained Satyaswarup Patnaik, another former Sai student involved in this noble project. Satyaswarup did his XI and XII grade from the Higher Secondary School at Prashanti Nilayam in 1998, and went on to study medicine. A medical graduate (MBBS) now, he is currently pursuing his Masters (MD). "Early to bed and early to rise, keeps a man healthy and wise, Bhagavan used to tell us", he continued, "besides, it gives one enough time for a planned life. So, we introduced the same schedule. They start the day with prayer, and end it too with His Name on their lips. We want to recreate here our life with Bhagavan at Prashanti, for what can be better than that?" he said, his large eyes looking even larger.

.....

Experiments with Love

We are led to the bigger enclosure which is the 'boys' room'. Here they live and laugh, study and sleep. It was a wonderful feeling. We felt closer to deprived humanity, and our well-pressed clothes humbler. A couple of older inmates sat around us, while others went to oversee the lunch session. A funny idea struck me and I wanted to find out the level of understanding of these boys. After the boys sat down, face to face, in two rows, for their lunch, I asked one of the young men there to tie a foot long stick to their right hands in such a way they can not bend it at the elbow (which is needed if you want to eat). Six boys were chosen for the experiment.

Susanth and his sister were bereft of the affectionate touch of their mother and father for a long time, having lost both of them while babies. As little children, they had locked shut their hearts, and with this, any fragrance of hope. They could only watch, while any possibilities of respite dissolved in the harsh reality that surrounded them. Fortunately, fate smiled and Susanth was taken into Sai Anadam 9 months back, while his little sister now stays with her maternal aunt. If he had continued to live in that situation where no sprouts of parental love germinated, it is likely he would have grown up embittered, out of touch with a society which had abandoned him in the gloom of loneliness.

But all those clouds of despair and desolation have given way to a brighter future and aspiring dreams. Susanth grooms a strong ambition to become a doctor just like his mentor and inspiration Satya Swarup Pattnaik. He wants to help everyone who is distressed not to undergo the same suffering he had undergone for many years.

After it was done, I asked them to start eating. Suddenly a tiny hand outside this group shot up with a cry of joy, "I know, I know what to do!" Our eyes turned with excitement and expectation. Someone asked him, "So, what is the idea?" He simply said, "Feed each other". Thrilled, I looked at him. A ten year old cherubic face, his eyes bubbling with enthusiasm. You would never believe if somebody said this boy had lived in very depressing conditions, before being picked up by Sai Anadam team a few months ago. I continued to carry out the lesson and asked them, "What does this teach you?" Now, many voices spoke of words and concepts that we, elders, have forgotten, busy with pushing the world to the brink of a precipice: "friendship, helping each other, love, sharing..."

I felt chastened, and appreciated the effort of the youth guides there, but they simply said, "It is all Bhagavan's work. The boys are learning very fast". It must be true. The presence of love was palpable in the campus. He is the head of the family, looking after their physical and spiritual needs.

.....

"What else do you teach the boys?" I asked Lala Susant. He pointed at another exemplary student of Swami, and says, "Manas comes here every Saturday from Bhubaneswar and teaches them *tabla* (percussion)." A young man in his early twenties, Manas Das did his tenth from the Higher Secondary School at Prashanti Nilayam in 1999, and is currently doing his Masters at ICFAI (Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India) in Bhubaneswar. I asked Manas, "Why do you take the trouble of traveling more than 15 km every Saturday to come here? **Softly, he said, "I like to come here and do something for the boys. I always feel Swami's Presence here. I think this is the best way to remember Bhagavan."** "We teach them the *Bal vikas* course too," Susant added.

Niranjan Das is blind and begs for a living. This is the only way he was taking care of his wife who is suffering from tuberculosis and his son Nigam. Their tribulations were going beyond the point of human endurance, when something happened. Then, as Nigam says – "God brought me to Sai Anandam". He had heard of a person by name Sathya Sai Baba and the bhajans from the local Sai centre of Pareswarpur village. But it was only after he joined Sai Anandam that he felt the cool breeze of Divine love soothing his mind and spirit. It was the turning point in his 12 years of life. One can clearly see how Nigam's spirit is soaring and taking flight with the wings of carefree abandon and love in this environment. Nigam shows lot of promise in his academics and loves English literature. He speaks the language fluently, his skill surpassing even an English medium educated urban child. If one asks him now what is the secret of happiness, the prompt reply is "Sai". How true! Life with Sai is endless hope, and life bereft of Him, a hopeless end. His parents' life too began showing changes, and it started with their eating habits. Having lived mostly on a non-vegetarian diet all their lives, suddenly they became complete vegetarians.

Yes. The best way to remember God is to do what is closest to God's Heart. And what could be closer to His heart than loving service? A small story of Jesus popped up in my mind. Once Jesus asked his disciples, "A father had two sons. The elder one always stayed with his father, [and] followed him wherever he went. The younger one, came to his father in the morning, took instructions for the day's work, and went away. He came again to his father in the evening to report about work. Who do you think was dearer to father? The one, who said 'Father, Father' all the time, and did not do his bidding, or his brother, who called him once or twice a day, but did his bidding?" And Jesus answered his own question, "Obviously the younger one". Bhagavan says, He is as far away from us, as we are from His words.

Sai – The Support and Soul of Sai Anandam

"How do you meet the daily expenses of the *ashram*?" I asked Susant. They call it an *ashram*. Swami says an *ashram* is a place where one does not feel

the burden of *shrama*, or work. Swami has identified three types of work: work without love; work with love; and love without work. "When you come to the last type of work, the burden of work ceases, and what remains is sheer love. That alone is selfless service", Swami explains. I was sure I felt the aroma of this 'love-without-work' at Sai Anandam. "Do you have any source of steady funds?" I continued. "Yes, we have a very steady source on which we depend entirely, and it has never failed us", he said with a twinkle in his eyes. I was attracted by the smile which lit up his entire face, and asked, "What is it?"

Sri Dharjadhara Sahoo and his wife, are much beloved at Sai Anandam as without their benevolence, Sai Anandam would not exist in its present form. The project actually runs in the house they donated. Initially, he was approached to find a rented house for Sai Anandam. After a few days, he said that he had an outhouse which the Sai students could use on rent. After a week, when they went to see the house, out of the blue, he offered his own house - free of rent. The Sai alumni were surprised, but he explained that a few months ago, a holy man had foretold that his house would, one day, be used for a noble cause. "I think Sai Anandam fulfils that role; my family concurs with me," he said. They happily moved out to the smaller outhouse and left Sai Anandam, their main house, to start the noble endeavour. The couple is never tired of stating how they have never known such happiness as watching the children being taken care of in their house.

"Bhagavan Himself!" he answered. "What do you mean? Does He send you money every month to run it?" "From the inception of the ashram, it has been Swami's project. We have felt His guiding Hands at every stage. He is the Doer, we are the deed", Susant whispered aloud with great reverence. I was determined not to be taken by this sort of sentiment. To run a place like this needs more than devotional sentiment. You need money, and things that money alone can buy. So I continued, "Well, to depend on God is good, but how do you convert devotion into money?"

"You don't have to. It is done at the Bank of God, and we receive currency notes for His work. We were only one month old, and one evening I discovered our cash box was empty. We didn't have a rupee to buy our next meal for the boys. I went to our *puja* room, and told Swami about it. I told Him it was His job now to feed us. Next morning, I received a phone call from a Sai brother to come and collect five thousand rupees for the boys. You never know the power of surrender until you practice it," Susant assured me. I had no words to contradict him.

"We started Sai Anandam on August 2007. Till now, we haven't run into a blind corner. We have never felt the need for asking anyone for donations. All that we need comes unasked. Doesn't a mother know the need of her child?" The joy in the eyes of Susant was infectious.

.....

"However, some of our fellow students contribute some amount on a monthly basis. One of them saves from his Ph. D scholarship for us, another from his pocket allowance his father gives him, for he is still a student. A third has a small job, but remembers her monthly offerings. One more student pays the salary of one employed worker. Of the six alumni who regularly contribute for the cause, one lives in Prashanti Nilayam. There are some Sai devotees too who help us on a regular basis. We never forget Bhagavan, and He never forgets us", Susant concluded.

Growing Saplings in a Field of Love

I shifted to another area. "You are completing a year of Sai Anandam this August, and as I understand it, the boys have come here at various stages. Do you see any perceptible improvement in them?" I asked him.

Niranjan Das is blind and begs for a living. This is the only way he was taking care of his wife who is suffering from tuberculosis and his son Nigam. It was going beyond the point of human endurance and struggle for a meaningful existence when something happened. Then, as Nigam says – "God brought me to Sai Anandam". He had heard of a person by name Sathya Sai Baba and the bhajans from the local Sai centre of Pareswarpur village. But it was only after he joined Sai Anandam that he felt the cool breeze of Divine love soothing his mind and spirit. It was the turning point in his 12 years of life. One can clearly see how Nigam's spirit is soaring and taking flight with the wings of carefree abandon and love in this environment. Nigam shows lot of promise in his academics and loves English literature. He speaks the language fluently, his skill surpassing even an English medium educated urban child. If one asks him now what is the secret of happiness, the prompt reply is "Sai". How true! Life with Sai is endless hope, and life bereft of Him, a hopeless end. His parents' life too began showing changes, and it started with their eating habits. Having lived mostly on a non-vegetarian diet all their lives, suddenly they became complete vegetarians.

"Yes. There is an appreciable improvement in their conduct. They have been picked up almost from the streets, so they came here with that culture. But now they are very decent in their behaviour. What gives us great satisfaction is that they have grown to love and depend on Swami. One of them tells us that he prays to Swami even to solve difficult mathematical problems - and He does that for him!"

.....

I wanted to verify his statement, and called a tall boy from among them.

"What is your name?"

"Susanta Behera" he answered politely.

"Do you like this place?"

"Yes".

"Why?"

"Sai Baba is my Father and Mother. These brothers love us. They give us good food and send us to school. They have given us a nice house to live in. I am very happy here". This boy has lost both his parents.

"What do you want to do when you grow up?"

"I want to be a Doctor, so I can serve poor patients, like these brothers are doing for us."

I was pleased to find that the idea of service had already made an impression on his 12 year old mind.

I picked up another boy.

"What is your name?"

"Munaram Behera".

"What profession would you like to join when you grow up?"

"Any profession I am found suitable for. But I would join the Sathya Sai Organisation to serve people."

"If you meet Swami, what will you ask Him?"

"Swami is already in my heart. He knows what I need, and He will give me whatever is good for me. I need not ask for anything in particular."

I was pleasantly surprised.

Then there was this Naresh Beura, an 11 year old. He has no father, and his mother works as a daily labourer. He wants to take a job soon to look after his mother.

Prashant Behera is a ten year old, whose father has deserted his mother, leaving her with chronic mental ill-health. He also wants to grow up fast to care for his mother.

Manoranjan Moharana's father is serving a life sentence. His mother is supporting another son and a daughter by daily labour, but is very happy that Sai Baba is looking after at least one child. Manoranjan would ask for *Sadbuddhi* (Good intellect) if he meets Swami.

Nigam's father is a blind beggar, and his mother suffers from Tuberculosis. They have given up even occasional non-veg eating after their only child joined Sai Anandam. Nigam was a terribly depressed child before he joined this place, but not now.

Saiprasad Khatua is a Vibhuti child. His parents are Sai devotees, and early in life when he was on his death bed, Vibhuti saved his life. He is the youngest of the group, at 8 years old. This is the boy for whom Swami solves even mathematical problems.

Ten year old Prashant Behera from Baranga is an avid swimmer. He belongs to the fishermen community. Swimming in the river and playing with his friends were his favorite pastimes. And then life took an ugly turn when his father abandoned his family for another woman. Since then, his mother lost her mental balance and became a recluse – roaming on the streets and living on handouts. Only a dilapidated hut saved them from the ravages of the seasons. When the Sai Anandam team found the entire family in such a condition, they immediately placed Prashant under the loving care of the Lord of Prashanti Nilayam. They also provided the mother with blankets, clothes and occasionally food. She thinks that her son is with Sai Baba, and is therefore, content. How true! Prashant plays tabla for the evening bhajans and has an eye and flair for stage decoration.

Manoranjan Moharana, is ten years old, and just like the other children, his childhood has been haunted. His father is languishing in jail with a life imprisonment sentence. His mother has been able to make ends meet and raise her other two children by working as a daily labourer on a construction site. They live in a hut which the local youth from the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization built for them. Life is difficult and her other children (a younger son and daughter) do not have much of an opportunity to learn the meaning of such far off words like – 'choices' or 'preferences'. Her mother is happy, at least her elder son, Manoranjan is able to lead a better life in Sai Anandam.

The Future is in His Hands

There are 12 boys in this divine home. "What are your future plans for these boys? How long would you support them?" I asked Susant. "We generally think of supporting them up to X or XII grade. Then we will give them vocational training, and set them up in a job. But if we find anyone really worthy of pursuing a higher course, and Swami enables us to support him, we will gladly do so".

"Aren't you thinking of expanding this little place, and giving them more space to grow up?"

"Of course we would very much like to. This place does not belong to us. A benevolent Sai brother has allowed us to use this house of his rent-free, until we build our own campus. We need at least 5/6 acres of land to build our own house to serve around 25 children. All this would cost us 40 to 50 lakhs. But all in its good time. When Swami wills it, He would help us expand."

Silently listening with us to this beautiful story of love and service, was Dr. Mohapatra, a self made artist and sculptor, a senior Reader in Commerce at Ravenshaw College, a deemed University in Cuttack. He immediately offered to come to the *ashram* at regular intervals to teach the boys art and artistic values, and help them in some handicraft projects. We were very glad. Bhagavan's Hands were visible.

They felt the unseen Presence of the Lord even more when, all of a sudden, the All India President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Mr. V Srinivasan, paid a visit to this Sai home of service on January 18 this year (2008). It was a memorable day for Sai Anandam. The distinguished instrument of the Lord spent about 45 minutes with the inmates, and even delivered a short address to the inmates and the people gathered there. Before he left, He generously contributed to their resource-pool and also distributed T-shirts to the boys.

Hand in Hand with Love and Service

"You said you have a paid employee at the *ashram*. What does he do, and how much do you pay him?" I asked Lala Susant. "Is he single or married?"

"He is married, with a daughter who is six years old, and we cannot pay him more than Rs. 2,000 a month. He looks after the boys, stays with them the whole day, eats with them, and returns at night. Sometimes his wife also comes to help with the boys."

"But this is very meagre. How does he manage with such a small amount?"

"We know this, but he insists on coming. Both of them say, 'You give us less than what we need. But we get great satisfaction in working for God's children'."

I met the young man. Dukhishyam has done his XII grade, gave up his earlier job in an iron and steel company to join Sai Anandam. A tall youth, with a well defined face, always eager to learn how to be more useful in moulding the boys into useful citizens. This is the only way he could serve Swami, and hopefully get closer to Him, he says. I met three other local young men who help with the boys in various ways. One of them is doing a Bachelors in Computer Applications, who teaches them *bhajans* and mathematics. Kalindi is a graduate, associated with the Home from the beginning. He is paid Rs.1,500 per month, stays most of the time in the *ashram*, and does any odd jobs. He is happy to be associated with this home of love and service. He says he has improved spiritually to a great extent after joining the *ashram*. Rakesh is doing his graduation, and pursues videography as a profession, but

spends all his spare time with the boys, teaching, and looking after them. **A happy and carefree young man, he is grateful to Swami for his association with the Sai students, which saved him from the usual evil ways of the modern youth.** It is a great love story, I thought.

Sai - The Eternal Inspirer

Mr. Vivekanda Sahoo, an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, who too visited this nest of love, reflecting later on this ennobling experience, said, "These children, like tender saplings, need a protective fence. What they need, more than food, clothing and shelter (though they need these too, desperately) is to feel wanted. It is their label 'outcast' that imposes upon them the most agonizing frame of mind. Denied of love by the world around, these saplings perish. A few who live through all harsh reality, bearing the deep scars which are the gift of their cruel home, are often deemed misfits in society. Who is to be blamed: The tender saplings or the merciless world around them? Are we a part of this cruel world or can we make a difference for these less fortunate blossoms?

"On a cold winter night, it seems, a man saw a child shivering on the road. She was hungry and her clothes were in tatters. The man was very angry with God for letting this happen to an innocent child; why isn't He doing anything about it? That night He came in his dream and quietly said, 'I certainly did something for it. I made you!'

"The Sai Avatar has taken three vows:

- 1) ***To foster all mankind and ensure for all of them lives full of Ananda (bliss).***
- 2) ***To lead all who stray away from the straight path, again into goodness and save them.***
- 3) ***To remove the sufferings of the poor and grant them what they lack.***

" Eighty years and more, and He has never sat down and slackened His Work to fulfill these three vows. The more I look and read these promises, the more it dawns upon my heart the purpose of our lives and the reason why Sai Anandam was born. We are the miracles of Life here to make a difference in the world! That is our Mission! To make His life our message, the above vows are ours too. And as I left the compound of Sai Anandam, I knew He was smiling at us. His children were emulating Him and walking in His footsteps. The Journey had begun and this is far more wonderful than the reaching of the destination."

As I pondered over what I saw and experienced, and the reflections of another inspired Sai student, I realized why the world doesn't end with a bang, though it is said to have started with one. It is because such love stories, amazingly designed and developed by the Divine, never end. The good and kind Lord lives in His devotees, who live for Him.

PRASHANTI DIARY

April 25-27, 2008 – Swami in Brindavan

'Brindavan', Bhagavan's ashram in Bangalore, had longed for the touch of the Lotus Feet of the Lord for the last two years. Sai Krishna had visited His Brindavan only in 2006 summer. The next year (2007), even though it looked like Swami would return from Kodai Kanal to Brindavan, the Lord decided to go to Puttaparthi in a last minute change of Divine Plan. Sai Geeta (Swami's late pet elephant) must have prayed fervently for *darshan* and so, the Lord granted her the boon of His Presence when He landed in Prashanti Nilayam on May 18, 2007... that was to be Sai Geeta's last glimpse of the Lord; she shed her mortal coil on May 22. And then, there was the construction of the over bridge which did nothing to bridge the distance between the Lord and the devotees at Brindavan, what with the additional noise and dust with which it surrounded the ashram.

Finally, there were indications that Swami was going to Brindavan..... the mischievous Sai Krishna even asked a teacher from the Brindavan campus "*inka polleda*" (You haven't still gone?). This was April 21, 2008; that evening Swami arrived for *darshan* at 3.15 p.m. So there was a scramble to reach Brindavan. But April 22, 23, 24 and 25 passed with no sign of the Lord leaving Puttaparthi. Finally, on April 26 there were strong indications that Swami was indeed going... It was Trayee Brindavan Day, Swami's abode in Brindavan, had been inaugurated by Him on this very day in 1984. The entire Mandir was beautifully decorated with festoons and coloured lights. There were floral arches inviting the Lord at many places in the Brindavan ashram; every thing was spick and span. From the morning, all the teachers, students and devotees waited with baited breath. Swami did not leave for Brindavan even after the morning *darshan* in Puttaparthi! Finally, at 2.30 p.m. Swami did leave for His Bangalore ashram.

The scene in Brindavan was one of joy. Bal Vikas children stood with flowers in their hands to offer as Swami arrived. *Nadaswaram* music filled the air with sweet notes, and the Sun reluctantly had to sign off for the day. When the Lord arrived, it was 6 p.m. And one teacher from Brindavan said, "It was as we stood awaiting His arrival that we understood why He had not arrived in the morning or afternoon. The beautifully lit up Trayee was a splendorous sight at night! Trayee had got its birthday gift and the Lord entered, lithe and lovely, like a fresh lily flower."

On April 27, it being a Sunday, and the news having spread that Swami had arrived, there were long lines of devotees extending up to the Gokulam (where the canteen is located) on the ladies side, and the railway gate on the gents side as early as 7.30 a.m. The Sai Ramesh Krishnan Hall was tastefully decorated with fresh flowers. Swami came out at 9 a.m. and the members of the Brindavan *bhajan* group sang their heart out. After giving *darshan* for about forty minutes, Swami returned to Trayee. The *bhajans* continued through the day till evening *darshan*. This has been the tradition on Sundays whenever Swami is in Brindavan for the last four decades!

In the afternoon, at 4.45 p.m. Swami was there in the Sai Ramesh Hall, seated serenely and listening to *bhajans*. He asked for *arathi* at 5.25 p.m. and then blessing the student and the sevadal member who offered Him roses, Swami retired to Trayee.

April 28, 2008 – Beautiful Darshan in Sai Ramesh Hall

On April 28, 2008 the boys in the *bhajan* group had received instructions that as Bhagavan arrived, *darshan* music would be played, and only when Swami signals, *bhajans* are to be started. Bhagavan arrived at 9.50 a.m. A soothing instrumental music on the newly installed sound system filled the air. As Bhagavan sat there listening to the beautiful music and keeping time, time truly stood still... there was pin-drop silence in the Hall, filled to capacity, as all eyes eagerly drunk in the Divine Form and were lost in that sublime experience. Swami looked around at everyone who was there and you could see that each one was in ecstasy. To some elderly devotees, it felt like it was '*Dakshinamoorthy Darshan*' where no words were uttered and all communication by the Lord was through His Silence, His mere Presence. After *aarathi*, at 10.15 a.m., Swami returned to Trayee.

April 29, 2008 – Special Blessing for Students in Brindavan

On April 29, 2008, the devotees assembled in Sai Ramesh Hall waited for *darshan* till 11 a.m. and then dispersed. About 15 minutes later, Swami came out for a drive and went towards the main gate towards Hoskote, a nearby town. The devotees were all taken by surprise and lined up along the drive way. About 20 minutes later, Swami returned through the new road which had been prepared for His use inside the Institute campus. Devotees and students lined on either side had a wonderful *darshan* – every act of the Divine has a meaning and is, in fact, meant to give us a boon, though we may not realise it at that moment. The weariness of waiting for long in the morning melted and morphed into Divine euphoria when the devotees had an up close *darshan* of the Lord inside the car that morning.

In the afternoon, when the students sat in the Sai Ramesh Hall at 4 p.m., there was a special message for them from Swami's residence. They were all to assemble inside the Trayee Mandir; Swami had called for them. As per His instruction, paper plates were handed out to all of them, and then, they were served snacks. As they ate, sitting in two concentric circles in the central hall, Swami arrived and spent time going amidst them - talking to them, enquiring with one about his parents, the other about his class, and so on. The students, obviously, were thrilled at this bounty from Bhagavan, who spent as much as 75 minutes with them. He then asked them to go over to the Sai Ramesh Hall and start *bhajans*. Swami too arrived and listened to *bhajans* for about 40 minutes. At 6 p.m., Swami finally accepted *aarathi* and retired to Trayee.

May 1, 2008 - Divine Discourse in Sai Ramesh Hall

May 1, 2008 being holiday (Labour Day), there was a huge gathering of devotees. Swami came out at 9.15 a.m. and listened to the Brindavan *bhajan* group singing soulfully for nearly 45 minutes before He accepted *aarthi* and retired to Trayee.

In the evening, Swami arrived at 4.15 p.m. Even as the *bhajans* were going on, Swami called a research scholar, Mr. Sanjay Mahalingam and asked him to speak. For the next 20 minutes, Sanjay spoke on Vedanta. After this, Swami asked for the mike and then gave a surprise discourse! In the hour-long discourse, Swami said:

"The Vedas taught one to revere ones parents – *Maatrudevobhava*, *Pitrudevobhava*, *Achaarya devobhava*. But today all these are not to be seen or practiced. Every one seems to be running after money and desires have become limitless. Today, even as all the foreigners themselves are speaking of control of senses and ceiling on desires, Indians are not doing this. There is nothing wrong in having desires, but they must be in limit. Everything is getting polluted - the five elements themselves are being polluted. When the basic five elements responsible for man's sustenance are polluted, how can we expect man to be good?

Nowadays, people look good outwardly, while inwardly they have fully poisoned minds. This is not good. Who is man? He is nothing, but the embodiment of Divinity. When a person is traversing in wickedness, how can you call him a man? Nowadays people are proud of their children getting high degrees. What is the use of degrees? They are only leading to money-mindedness, devoid of love and truth. Everyone is learning to put a smile on the face, where as inside they are fully poisoned. When you practice truth and learn to love everyone, then alone peace will descend. If you want peace, develop love. People resort to untruth for even small things. They get angry over silly matters. All this leads to violence. True humanness is nothing, but desirelessness.

In today's generation, we do not love our parents, who gave us birth and toiled their lives to make us what we are. But we readily love some outsider, who comes into our life, more than our parents. Is this true love? No... Nopeople are searching for peace outside, whereas it is present within us. Rituals do not confer peace. First, we should see to it that there is no conflict or turbulence in our heart. All the conflicts that we see today are because of wickedness in the human heart. We do not find a true friend today. Even best friends fight with each other. People are behind money and amassing wealth. What's all this finally for? You have come empty handed into this world, and you will go back the same way. Money comes and goes, where as morality comes and grows. Devoid of morality man is nothing but a demon. Everyone is seen in terms of money, while the Values like gratitude and respect are dying day by day. For all these problems, there is only one remedy. That is God's name. When you think of Him, all miseries will melt away. God is the

One who punishes, He is the One who praises, protects, loves ...He is every thing. Difficulties, pleasures, pain - everything is God's gift. If you think of God constantly, all the miseries will turn into happiness. Pleasure is nothing, but an interval between two pains. The cause of all is the mind. Mind is nothing, but a bundle of thoughts. Do not hurt anyone; try to love everyone because *Vishvam Vishnu Swaroopam* (The world is but a form of God).

Results of hurting or helping some will come only later. As you eat, so is the belch. If you eat a cucumber, will you get a belch that of a mango? No! In the same way, because of desires alone, all suffering comes. The results of your actions will depend on what you do. The whole creation works on cause and effect. As you sow, so you reap. When you ask anyone 'who are you?' they say, 'I am so and so'. But if you ask God the same question, He will say 'I am I' - *Aham brahmasmi*. Whomever you ridicule, it reaches God. If we control our thoughts, everything will be in place. Either good or bad - all depends on our thoughts. If you believe everything is God, then can love criticize love? No, it cannot. Even as animals love each other, cannot men love one another?

Keep love and truth as the two main principles of your life. God is the only Saviour and true love can be obtained only from Him. That is why He is called as *apathbhandava* (A friend in times of distress). Look at a young married couple: When they are newly married and walking on the road, if husband happens to see a thorn, he will quickly go and remove it. After a few years, the same husband will say, 'Look and walk. There is a thorn.' After some more time, he will say, 'Are you blind? Can't you see the thorn there?'

This is what worldly love is all about - temporary in nature. Love of the heart is what is important, not of body. Here so many people are assembled and were participating in *bhajans*. Will everybody's prayer reach God? No...No...Only one or two prayers would reach him. And that one or two prayers is/are enough to protect everyone. This is what Guru Nanak said when he was asked about the efficacy of *bhajans*. The arrival of politics is creating divisions everywhere. Every home has four parties. Participate in *bhajans* with whole heartedness."

Swami started to sing *Hari Bhajana Bina Sukha Shanti Nahin*. Then, after He repeated *Japa Dhyana Bina Samyoga Nahin*, He asked, "What is true meditation?" Answering it Himself, He said, "Merging your heart with God - that is true meditation. Bodies are many, but there is only one *atma* (spirit). God is like the Sun who provides light to everyone. Peace is nothing, but the union of love and truth. Don't run after passing thoughts. Hold onto the eternal God; kill the 'I', the ego, within you. This is what is symbolized by the cross."

Swami then sang *Rama Rama Rama Sita* and then signalled for the students to sing. A couple of *bhajans* later, before accepting *aarathi*, when *Loka Samastha...* was being chanted, one could see Swami indicating the *lokas* (different worlds) by a circular motion with His hands and blessing them!

May 2, 2008 – Swami Returns to Puttaparthi

Inscrutable are the ways of the Lord. When Swami gave His Discourse on May 1, 2008, nobody in Brindavan imagined that Swami would leave for Puttaparthi the next day! Yet on May 2, as early as 6.45 a.m. Swami left Brindavan for Prasanthi Nilayam. Who knows whose prayer pulled Him to Puttaparthi! Swami's short and sweet trip to Brindavan ended, and Puttaparthi was alive again! The summer of 2008, for the devotees, in Puttaparthi was rare and most blessed. With Swami back in their midst and showering on them blessings in bounty, the heat of the summer did not seem to bother.

May 6, 2008 – Easwaramma Day Celebrations

It was a very special occasion in Puttaparthi for more than one reason. Foremost of all was the fact that Swami was physically present in Puttaparthi for Easwaramma Day after a gap of more than 20 years. Swami had been to Brindavan for about a week and had returned to Puttaparthi on May 2. The question doing rounds was, "Why did Swami go suddenly to Brindavan for such a short break?" As the sun rose to usher in a beautiful morning on May 6, it became evident that the question should have been, "Why did Swami leave Brindavan so suddenly?" for which the answer seemed to be, "To be at Puttaparthi for the day commemorating His beloved Divine Mother."

The past few days saw a lot of activity gearing up for Easwaramma Day which is also celebrated as Mother's Day in Sai families the world over. Swami had expressed His wish to Grace the *Samadhi* (holy mausoleum) of Mother Easwaramma on the occasion. The narrow alley leading up to the *Samadhi* had been cleaned and paved on either side with decorations by Sevadal volunteers. All the shops were closed as the owners all lined up along the lane to glimpse their beloved Lord who would be gracing their lane after such a long gap. The *Samadhi* too wore a festive look with festoons and buntings suspended everywhere. A huge portrait of the blessed Mother adorned the wall in the *Samadhi* and there were multicoloured flowers everywhere.

At about 9am Swami set out to the *Samadhi*. Swami was received at the beginning of the *Samadhi* road by a procession consisting of students chanting the Vedas and ladies carrying holy items of worship. Swami drove gently into the *Samadhi* premises and then came out of the car. The path leading into the *Samadhi* had been filled with flowers on a red carpet. The students' *bhajan* group had assembled and they continuously sang *bhajans* which highlighted the grandeur of mothering the Avatar of the age. Swami alighted from the car and went inside the *Samadhi* in the chair. Once inside, He first told the priest to light the lamps that had been placed there. As they were lit, Swami, moved to the gents side of the *Samadhi*, as all the ladies moved on to the side where Mother Easwaramma's *Samadhi* lay. Swami, then, handed over a silk *dhoti* and a silk sari to be placed on the *Samadhi*. All the elders and seniors then paid their respects to the Divine Parents. Swami sat watching as one by one, the elders, came forward and placed garlands and silk clothes. As per tradition, the priest also placed a leaf with sweetened

rice and tamarind rice and *laddoos* (a sweet) on the Samadhi. Swami kept watching all the proceedings with a glister in His eyes and once in a while, He seemed to be overwhelmed with the sweet emotion of maternal love and affection. There were kids who were four to five generations down the line from the Divine Mother prancing about the Samadhi. In their childlike innocence, they were blissfully unaware of the gravity of the proceedings going on. A smile flowered on His face as He saw them. Their parents tried to restrain them and that made Him smile even more. As time passed, Swami sat there, the diamond of the Ratnakara clan, non-chalantly watching everything that was going on. He was like the calm in the centre of a storm. Some members of the family came up to Him and sought blessings which He liberally showered. The proceedings inside went on for about 15-20 minutes. The priest then brought sweet *pongal*, tamarind rice and *laddoos* for Swami to bless as *prasadam* to be distributed to all.

He looked at the photographer who had been shooting pictures and told Him to cover photos of the ladies assembled too! He guided the priest on what had to be done to the last detail. Swami was personally so involved in everything that went on. Finally, He told the priest to take *Aarthi*. After that, He came out and the procession began once again from the Samadhi to the Mandir. Swami entered the Sai Kulwant Hall to the joyful salutes of everyone present. The visit to the Samadhi had been made into a private affair for obvious reasons as it would be unable to hold the crowds surging in it. And so everyone was assembled in the Mandir thirsting for His *darshan*. Swami did not disappoint anyone. On arrival, He took a complete round and granted *darshan* to all. He then came to the stage which had been aptly decorated for the occasion. There was a huge portrait of Mother Easwaramma and Swami sat on the ladies side of the stage. There was a distribution scheduled.

Swami went into the Bhajan Hall briefly to oversee the saris and other clothes coming in. He gave instructions as to how the distribution should go on. Then going on to the stage once again, He asked for the *prasadam* to be brought. In His Presence, everyone was served tasty *pongal*, tamarind rice and *laddoos*. Swami specially instructed that two leaves must be given to all as the food would slip through if only one leaf was given. As soon as the food was served, Swami kept gazing intently at the leaves of the Primary school students. When an Institute student in the front row tried adjusting his leaf, Swami signaled to him saying, "Food is coming- be patient", much to the mirth and merriment of all there!

He told the children to begin eating and the primary school children, obedient as ever, immediately put His command into action. As they ate mouthfuls, Swami seemed overcome with motherly Love. When a lady from the security group came up to the children to ask them for a second helping, it looked just like a mother feeding her children. Seeing this, Swami was overcome with emotion. It was such a beautiful scene, made more poignant with Swami adding His 'emotion' if we may be allowed that usage. The distribution went on smoothly and there was joy and satisfaction everywhere. All the while, as Swami sat outside, *bhajans* related to the Divine Mother were on. Whenever the word, 'Easwaramma' came up in the *bhajans*, Swami would be touched -

an ideal for children the world over. How many are there that feel so much even at the mere mention of one's mother's name? The Lord is an ideal in every aspect of life and it was so touching and inspiring to see the demonstration of His Love and Reverence for the Mother. Swami then received *Aarthi* and left for Yajur Mandir. It was then announced that there would be a public meeting at 4 pm.

In the afternoon, Swami arrived shortly after 4 pm. He came onstage as the Vedam chanting went on. He sat for a few minutes listening to the chanting. Then, He began to call students who had letters with them, one by one to the stage. He accepted their letters and spoke to a few of them. He called one primary school student who hailed from Iran and asked him if he knew the Vedic hymn being chanted. With utmost confidence, the boy chanted and Swami was very pleased. He told out loud, "That boy is from Iran and he chants so well."

After a few minutes, Swami called Prof. G. Venkataraman and asked him to speak. The ways of the Lord are indeed mysterious and inscrutable. No one knew that Swami had instructed the dynamic professor, currently the director of Radio Sai Global Harmony, to speak in Telugu. In his inimitable frankness and direct style, Prof. Venkataraman started his speech in Telugu. After a short while and six sweet sentences later, he requested Swami for permission to speak in English as he was better equipped with it. Swami smiled sweetly and allowed him to do so. He dilated on length on how Swami was educating the modern youth with the eternal message of *Mathru Devo Bhava*, meaning, 'to revere the mother as God'. After a 20 minute speech, he took leave. Swami then looked around and seemed to ask, "Who will speak next?" The students in the front said, "Swami, you must speak." A sweet smile almost like a blush came on His Face and He then asked for the mike.

As the mike was placed before Him, He sat silent for about half a minute. That was such a beautiful period of complete silence. It was followed by an even more beautiful period where there was a honey-like flow of His Words. He began by asking "What can I speak of the mother? Where can I begin?" Then He said, "Venkataraman spoke nicely on Easwaramma. He is a very accomplished person and an intellectual." After this, He spoke on the last days of mother Easwaramma and emphasised that though the bodies may come and go, love is eternal. The mother is always with the child, for love is immortal and permanent. He exhorted the students to serve their parents as they would serve God. He told all as to how one can serve and please the parents. He also spoke at length on how it is the same God resides in all. One must always speak softly and sweetly. He talked about the universality and greatness of the Vedas. Everyone, irrespective of caste, religion, nationality or gender can learn and chant it. He called out the primary school boy from Iran, Sathya, a Muslim by birth, and asked him to chant different mantras. The boy did so with élan and correctness of elucidation. Swami was very pleased with his chanting and created a gold chain with a Ganesha pendant for him. Swami continued saying that it was God and God alone who can give peace and happiness, and that one must always sing His Name and Glory.

Swami has said many times, "My boys are my voice!" That evening, it was literally given shape as Swami started to sing the *bhajan*, *Bhajan bina sukh shanti nahi* and told the boys to lead the entire *bhajan*. Swami joined in the lead once in a while! At the end of the wonderful evening, Swami blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed, received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

May 18, 2008 – Drama by Bangalore Bal Vikas Children

A drama by the Bal Vikas children of Bangalore had been scheduled for the evening session on May 18, 2008. Swami came out for darshan around 4.20 pm. The marble block was all set for the enactment with attractive sets. After spending a brief time in the interview room, Swami had come on to the stage for watching the drama.

The drama was titled "Devarishi Narada" and most of the episodes were taken from Swami's "Chinna Kathas". Completing the initial formalities of blessing the leading actors Swami had indicated for the play to begin. The first scene was in Vaikunta with Lord Narayana advising Narada to spread *Jnana* around the three worlds, and thus converting his curse to be an eternal wanderer into a boon of eternal messenger of wisdom. The play then went on to depict the key role played by Narada in helping Ganesha to win the well known competition, initiating sage Valmiki to compose Ramayana, and advising sage Vyasa to compile Bhagavatha. It also showed as to how Lord uses Narada as an instrument to teach the world the meaning of true devotion through various episodes. The whole play enacted in the language Kannada was a blend of thoughtful creativity and admirable enactment. In the end, Swami posed for a photograph with all the actors and blessed the Bal Vikas student who played the role of Narada with a beautiful gold chain.

All that an apparent eye could see was only a mere play but the Lord alone knew how those children toiled for months together to stand in their beloved Sai's Presence. He alone knew the depth of their innocent patience which held them for two long years to put up this play. He alone seemed to understand as to how disappointed they went away six months ago when in His Omniscient Grace, He declined them a chance to put up the show. If one peeped underneath the canvas of those visible sets, dialogues and actions, one would definitely notice an inexpressible beauty of a sweet relationship and sincere yearning of a devotee to meet the Lord.

May 19, 2008 – Buddha Poornima Celebrations

Hundreds of devotees from Sri Lanka, Singapore and many other East Asian countries had gathered in Prasanthi Nilayam to celebrate the day that marks the birth, enlightenment and nirvana of their Master, The Buddha. Dressed in white and red, the large number of devotees, ladies and gents in separate groups, were seated in the centre of Sai Kulwant Hall as the Darshan music and Vedam started in the evening of May 19, 2008. It was 5 pm and Swami went around the devotees in His Chair, blessing everyone. Looking at the blissful Lord in His ochre robe, on the day of Buddha Poornima, was a great blessing, and one could see the deep sense of gratitude that clearly showed

in the faces of every devotee, especially the Buddhists, who were seated right in front of the dais.

After the Darshan round, Swami took to the dais and signaled for the programme to commence. The Buddhist Sai devotees then started their soulful rendering. Though the language was not familiar to most of the people in the audience, they could easily relate to every song they sang, as the tune was based on popular Sai Bhajans. The Lord intently listened to their every bhajan, which went on for about 25 minutes. Later, the audience got more involved with the programme as the East Asian devotees now sang the regular Sai Bhajans in their original form. Swami too enjoyed watching the overseas devotees sing Sai bhajans with so much enthusiasm and joy.

After about 15 minutes, Swami now called for the 'veterans' of Prasanthi Mandir Bhajans – His boys who comprise the Prashanthi Nilayam bhajan group and asked them to continue the bhajans. The boys sang the Bhajans with alap and as the Buddhist devotees sat glued to His Lovely Form, Swami suddenly called for the conductor of that evening's programme. A sweet glance, a beautiful smile, a few words and then He waved His Hand and out came a golden chain for the conductor. The lucky devotee was overwhelmed, and bowed down in gratitude and love. Swami tied the chain round his neck and blessed him profusely. All the Buddhist devotees too were touched with the outpouring of Lord's Love on a member of their group. After having blessed all, Swami moved into the interview room. He came out after half an hour, around half past six, and accepted arathi before retiring for the day. Thus, it was a simple, short and sweet Buddha Poornima celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam.

SWAMI AND ME

NEAR AND DEAR FOREVER

By Mrs. Dipali Arun

An alumna of the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University from 1982-1987, Dipali Arun graduated with a degree in B. A (Political Science). She hails from a family that has looked up to Swami as an Avatar since 1950's. She got married right after completion of her Bachelors Degree, and in 1991 she moved to Ottawa, Canada. She is actively involved in the activities of the Sai Centre there, currently serving as the President of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center of Ottawa-Carleton in Canada.

It was on January 19, 1970, that I first put my little feet on the holy sands of Prashanti Nilayam in Puttaparthi, India. This is where the abode of my Mother Sai is located. My parents and I had traveled from Shillong (northeast India) by car and were on our way to Bangalore where my grandparents lived. My maternal grandparents were Swami's devotees from a long time, but it was my father's father that had recently come into the Sai fold. My grandfather had requested my father to visit Puttaparthi on the way. My mother had told herself that until her husband took her to Bhagavan, she would not have His *Darshan*. That dream was to be fulfilled soon.

I do not remember much of that wonderful morning, in 1970, when I was only four and half years old, but it is clear in my memory due to my parents' constant recollection. Early next morning, my mother was packing and father was loading the car. Sai Geeta, Swami's pet elephant, was tied to one of the trees near the Mandir and I was running around her in total fascination as she frolicked on the fine sands. It was at that time Kasturi uncle (Mr. N. Kasturi) came running to my parents and requested us to go to the verandah of the old Mandir as Swami had asked for us. My father was surprised at this, but left the packing and we ran to the verandah. On the advice on Kasturi uncle, my father quickly ran outside the Nilayam and brought a slate and chalk. My parents and I sat patiently waiting for the Call.

Coming Near to the Lord

Soon enough, Swami ushered us into the interview room along with a few Italian devotees. As we settled down, He caught my father off guard when He asked him to stand up and translate. Swami spoke in Kannada, my mother tongue, while my father translated it into English for the rest of the group to understand. Swami spoke about many things of a spiritual nature. **But the key point He made and wanted us all to understand was: Swami's Grace is always there. It is for us to open our hearts to Him so that He can reside there. If we keep our pot facing upwards we can collect His Grace, but if it is left overturned, how can we expect the pot to get full? He also mentioned that 'near is not important, dear is more important'.**

It was at this point that my father understood why he had been asked to translate even if Swami did know to speak in English. We had come a long

way to Puttaparthi from the North-eastern part of India. Swami stresses that it is not important to be close to Him physically, but to love Him and follow His teachings and hence be close to Him by keeping Him in our heart. Even if we are thousands of miles away from Puttaparthi, we constantly feel the presence of Swami. After some time Swami took us to the inner room. We were with Swami for about an hour. He graciously went into depths of many subjects with my parents, answering all their questions and giving spiritual solace to their souls.

In the meanwhile I must have been exhausted and so, fell asleep. When I woke up, Swami made me sit beside Him on the chair, put His Hands around me and holding my hand made me write ॐ many times on the slate. **Speaking in Kannada to my parents, Swami said, “How many people get this opportunity? She is a fish that is caught in the hook. She has no escape.”**

He then materialized a locket with the face of Shirdi Baba on one side with the inscription: “You look to me, I look to you”, and on the other side, it had the face of Swami in *Abhaya Hasta* (blessing) pose with the words “Why fear when I am here”. Today, as I recollect what my parents have told me, I wish I had been older to have remembered this precious moment.

I learned three important lessons from that memorable day: “Have faith in Him”, “Be free from fear, anxiety and agitation” and “Surrender to God; His Grace can save you, His Wisdom can enlighten you and His Power can overcome all obstacles”. Faith and surrender are the manifestations of devotion.

I have been associated with the Sai Organization since my childhood. I regularly attended Bal Vikas and took an active part in the center's *Narayan Seva*. The best part of helping out in the kitchen was the special bowl of *kheer* (sweet rice pudding) that would always be saved for me by one of the aunts or uncles working in the kitchen as they knew it was my favorite. Many years went by and in the course of time, we moved to Bangalore. I had just completed my grade 10 and was awaiting my results to apply to Pre-University (grade 11 and 12 as it is known in North America).

Chosen to be His Student

One morning, I woke up and questioned my father as to where Anantapur was. He was surprised and wondered where I came across that place. I mentioned that I had a dream in which Swami had asked me to come to Anantapur. That was the first time I came to know that He had a college just for women. I knew then and there that it was the place for me. Next day, my maternal grandmother, father and I packed up and left to Puttaparthi to see how I could get admission into Anantapur. We had only planned to be away for a few days, but eventually we stayed for more than a week. I had a letter for Swami, but I was not allowed to sit in the front because I was young and in a *salwar kameez*. I was quite disappointed. So one

morning, I borrowed my grandmother's sari and blouse and using a great number of safety pins, was able to hold up the sari in place. My excitement knew no bounds when the sevadal (volunteers) allowed me to sit in the very first row. And I was elated when Swami came and took my letter. I knew my Divine Mother would take care of me and was also confident about going to Anantapur soon. During my stay in Puttaparthi, I was able to meet our Principal and Warden and I picked up the application forms for admission. I was also introduced to a family friend whose daughter was studying in Anantapur at that time. Little did I know that she would be my mentor for the next few years during my stay in Anantapur.

After returning to Bangalore, I decided to apply to all three programs (Science, Arts and Commerce). It did not matter to me what I studied as long as I was in Swami's college. I waited anxiously every day to hear some good news. It seemed like eternity. By now, my mother was a bit restless, in case I did not make it because it was too late to apply in Bangalore. Finally, one morning there was exciting news; a postcard had arrived from the college. I had made it into the Arts program but had not received hostel placement. This did not seem to deter any of us as we came with the car loaded with all my personal items, clothes and bedding. If Swami has called me here He will take care of the details. Soon I had the interview with the Principal Hemalata Madam, Warden Jayamma Madam and Pushpa Madam. I was told to wait till the end of the day to know if I could have a hostel seat. We went out into the college lounge and were deciding what we should do for the rest of the day, when I was called again inside the principal's room. I was asked if I could handle the rigors and the discipline of the hostel life. **My joy knew no bounds. I never questioned whether I could endure hostel life; all that mattered was to be in Swami's college and close to Him.**

"See my girls, how they float on wheels" - Baba

During my stay at Anantapur, every year I participated in the annual sports day. Swami would come and watch us compete in various races. He would give out the shields to the teams that had won in various team sports we had like basketball, volleyball, badminton and other games. One such sports day, I had participated in the sack race, and to my happiness, I came first. The first and second place winners were allowed to stand on the podium to receive Swami's blessings.

By my fourth year at Anantapur, a couple of us wanted to try something different for our daily sports activity. We bought roller skates and would skate around the corridors of the college after hours. It was a lot of fun! One day, as we were skating around the corridors, we had this grand idea of presenting a musical program in front of Swami, incorporating our newly acquired skill. The thought made us very excited and we presented our idea to our sports teacher. She wanted further information regarding the proposed program before she could present it to the principal.

We gathered more girls who were also interested in learning how to skate. The ten of us planned the music and the steps to go with it. When we were ready, we had the sports teacher and the principal see our skate program. We

were elated when we received approval. We girls spent a lot of time practicing together. Finally, the big day arrived when Swami visited our campus. That special day was January 18, 1986. It was our annual sports day at Anantapur.

Special arrangements had been made in the library for this program. We performed before the Almighty Lord. We were excited beyond words to get this very special opportunity to perform for Him. **The proximity with the Lord was thrilling. At the end of the short dance on skates He came amongst us and appeared to be amazed at our dexterity, and He kept mentioning to all around Him "See my girls, how they float on wheels". His innocence and astonishment were obvious and contagious. I was overwhelmed with joy.**

So far that was the happiest day of my life! Just when I thought that was the ultimate experience of our life, Swami confirmed that He would like us to perform the same program during our annual sports day festivities at the Hill View Stadium at Puttaparthi the coming year. I am sure you can imagine our happiness. We were busy wiping the tears of joy as fast as possible so as to not cloud our vision to behold the Lord. We did not want this moment to end. Finally, He posed for pictures and blessed us all. Each of us took our time to take *padanamaskaram*. We did not want to get up after placing our head on His Lotus Feet. They were as soft as rose petals. It felt as though nothing else in the world seemed important anymore. Before we realized, our special day with Swami had ended and our thoughts started racing in preparation and anticipation of the sports day to come.

Soon we were preoccupied with exams and the college closed for the summer holidays. Back to Anantapur the following school year, we were busy with practice and deciding the costumes. Everything had to be perfect in order to be a worthy offering, befitting our Mother Sai. The day finally came on January 11, 1987 when we were able to perform our program. We had a march by the girls and we skated on the basketball court in the Hill View Stadium. **By Swami's Grace and Blessings all went very well and He kept talking about our achievement to the boys. He boasted like a proud mother, how His girls were able to skate and were so graceful.** This, of course, I heard later from my cousin who was also a student and was around Swami at that time. This was my last year in Swami's college. He made it so memorable!

Unforgettable Anantapur Memories

I never realized how the five years had gone by. Every festival or holiday would be spent at Puttaparthi. In fact, my parents had to come to Puttaparthi to see me at those times. During my stay there, many would ask how tough the hostel life was. What can I say, everyone has different experiences. As for me, my years there have taught me to adjust with different kinds of people, and brought me closer to My Swami. The numerous trips to Puttaparthi made my relationship with God, My Divine Mother even stronger. Every day, every moment of my stay in Anantapur had been memorable. The late nights I spent studying for exams with my classmates, the bus trips to Puttaparthi, the midnight snacks and even the evening snack time sitting in the hostel

corridors shooing away the bold black crows are days I will never forget. In fact, we lost our snacks to the crows many times as they would literally chase us till we gave it up. Unbelievable! They even stole hair oil bottles from my hostel room window. Amazing! Furthermore, memories of sleeping in the dormitory at Puttaparthi and waking up in the wee hours of the morning for **ice-cold water baths to beat the rush in the morning are still so fresh in my mind. The midnight baths were only to make sure I was among the first few when we form the lineup in the morning and that would give me the chance to sit in the first couple of rows at *darshan* time. No day was ordinary; each was attached to special memories.**

'He is My Friend and Guide'

It was during my final year of studies that I was engaged to be married. As every Anantapur girl's dream, I too was praying to Swami that He should bless me with a husband who believed in Him. During our interview with Swami (to the graduating students), He said that as women we had various duties to perform. We should be a good daughter, a good daughter-in-law, a good wife and a good mother. Only then is Swami happy with us. We have to remember and practice all that we have learnt over the years at Anantapur. Before I left Puttaparthi, I offered Swami my wedding card. Even without looking inside, He spoke to me in Hindi saying, "The boy is from Delhi; he is a good boy". Well, at that time my husband was working in Delhi and hence that was a way of Swami telling me that He knew everything. He knew I would not get married without His approval.

On my husband's first visit to Puttaparthi, Swami created vibhuti and gave it to both him and my father. I was happy as Swami had given His Blessings. I will not say that my life has been a bed of roses after that, but my gratitude to Swami and of course to my husband who has never questioned my faith or belief, and has made it possible for me to pass on my love and faith in Swami to my children. Swami has been and will ever be my life force. In various ways, He shows me He is with me all the time. He has protected me and my family many times and I wonder how I would ever survive without Him and His Love. As He told me **"Why Fear When I Am Here, You Look To Me I Look To You"**, He has never left my side.

In early 1989, I had just returned to Delhi with my three month old daughter. I was sitting on the scooter behind my husband with my daughter on my lap. We were on our way to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. **All of a sudden as we were getting onto the ramp I was thrown off the scooter, and all I can remember was screaming "Sai Ram" and holding tightly to my baby. I was totally shaken with the fall and for having fallen on her. I slowly stood up and checked on my daughter. It was amazing that there was not a single scratch on any of us!** By Swami's grace we were able to drive home safely. He holds out His Hand in protection and gives us the courage to face life.

A few years later we moved to Ottawa, Canada. My daughter was in third grade and I wanted her to learn Indian classical vocal music. I was relatively new in Ottawa and did not know too many people. Someone had given me a

name of a music teacher. My husband, my daughter and I went to meet the teacher. Just as we walked into the house, who did I see? A beautiful picture of Swami in *abhayahasta* (blessing posture) was right in front of the door. This was definitely not a coincidence! This is how Swami shows us everyday how He is a part of our lives no matter where we live. He is my Divine Mother and I am His daughter. He knows my inner most thoughts.

What I am today is because of Him. He has been taking care of me ever since I can remember. He has held my hand when I was going astray and brought me back to the right path. He is my friend and guide. So many years later and being so many miles away from the physical presence of the avatar, it is hard to pinpoint any one instance or another illustrating His Omnipresence or His Love. My very existence and who I am is because of Him. Every day in some way or the other He shows me He is with me and taking care of me and my family. These signs come in the form of what I see, hear or read. As Swami told my parents, His Love and Grace are always there, but it is up to us to collect it. Have we kept our vessel (our heart and mind) facing up and open to collect His Grace?

Becoming His Instrument

As Jesus said, "To whom much is given, much shall be expected of him". My Divine Mother has been giving me more than I ever asked for. He has said, "Once His student, always His student". He is always testing me, checking to see to see if I will rise to His expectations. He pushes me to strive for the best. My biggest test came last year when I was nominated to be the President of the Ottawa Sai Center. I was taken aback and thought I did not have the expertise or confidence to carry out this task. But this is not what He expects from His students. He expects us to be prepared for any situation and rise to the occasion. Hence I began my new role as the President praying to the Almighty to always be His instrument and carry out His task. I pray to Him to mold me and make me His instrument so that I may fulfill His Mission with all love, humility and confidence.

It is not waiting for the big events to happen in my life that I need to know He is there. It is in all the little things that happen every day that He shows His presence and His infinite Love. He sends messages in very simple ways. If you are not in tune with Him you could easily miss it out. All we have to do is to tune to His frequency and we can see Him, hear Him and experience His Grace and Bliss. I love you Swami, thank you for everything.

THE SWAMI I GREW UP WITH – Part 2

By Mrs. Geeta Mohan Ram

Mrs. Geeta Ram comes from a family that has been associated with Swami for the last four generations. She is the daughter of Dr. Padmanabhan, an ardent devotee and a familiar figure in Brindavan, Swami's ashram in Bangalore. Her great grandfather, Mr. Seshagiri Rao, came to Swami in 1943 and was the temple priest of Prasanthi Nilayam for many years. Having come to Swami at a very tender age, Mrs. Geeta Ram's life is full of wonderful Sai experiences and amazing anecdotes which are both interesting and illuminating. Currently, she lives in Washington, DC in the USA.

This is the second part of the transcript of a talk aired on Radio Sai a few weeks ago. Unfortunately, we do not know the venue and date of this talk, but we are sure it was in the USA and maybe five or six years ago.

Test of Faith

Remember the condition I said during my marriage, that I wanted to be in Bangalore. And so I got married and I was in Bangalore for 10 years! I had my children in Bangalore. They were born there. Swami gave them their names and everything.

And then suddenly, out of the blue - when you are all very nice and comfortable - Swami will throw a little bombshell at you! You know, when you want to put Swami's picture, you hammer a nail or something into the wall, and before you put the picture, you shake it first to see whether it is strong enough to hold that picture. That is what Swami does! Once in a while, He'll shake that faith, you know, to see if you are strong enough to take the test that He is going to throw your way! He is going to throw a test! And the tests have to come!

And once when I asked Him: "How many tests Swami?" He said: "Well, if you have to keep passing and going forward, you have to keep taking those tests otherwise you will be in the same first standard all the time! If you want to go second standard, third standard, college, you have to have the tests, there's no way out of it!"

So, that was my test. In 1988, He suddenly called us one day and said to my husband: "You resign your job and go to the United States!"

We were settled. We were doing Swami's work - I was an EHV Bal Vikas teacher then, my husband was the center president - we were doing as much as we could for Swami, with two young children in the house.

I kept saying: "No Swami! Swami, you promised me!" And He said: "I promised you when you get married, you would be in Bangalore. Now ten years are over!"

But He was very sweet - you know He sort of pampers our ego also! I said: "I don't want to go and stay in somebody's house with no job!" My husband's brother lives in California. So Swami was very sweet. He said: "Let Mohan go...and then after three months, you go."

So my husband went and he found a job. He was in California, but he got a job on the East coast - in Gaithersburg. He called me and said: "There were two or three offers for jobs. There's one in Gaithersburg. You ask Swami if that's the one I should take!"

Now, when I was speaking to him on the phone, the line connection wasn't very good and I heard it as Gettysburg! So I went to Brindavan and Swami comes to me from the *Darshan* line and asked me: "What? Mohan got a job?" I said: "Yes Swami. He said it is in Gettysburg!" Swami then laughed and said: "No, No! Not Gettysburg! That is 100 miles away from where he got the job! Go and ask him!"

So I come back and I called my husband and he said: "I didn't say Gettysburg! I said Gaithersburg!" So I went back again in the afternoon. He said: "See, Gettysburg is where Abraham Lincoln spoke! That's not where he got the job!" So He taught me a little bit of U.S history there! And He said: "Ask him to take that job." And so he took the job.

And so, now comes the real thing, right? I have to leave now. It's time for me to go. And He said: "You know, you are leaving on this day, so come the previous day. I won't leave for Puttaparthi. After I speak to you, I will go." So He stayed actually till the day I left...and left the following day! See, the Mother that He is!

Lessons from a Distance

He called me in for an interview and said some of the most wonderful things to me. I was just crying; I said: "I don't want to go! Why are You sending me away from You?"

It seemed as though He was giving me a punishment for a mistake that I didn't know I had made! I didn't know what I had done to deserve this punishment - to be thrown away so far away from Him! Not to be able to see Him, not to be able to run to Him for my silly problems!

He said: "You have seen Me since you were a child - only as this little Form. And you have only seen this Swami, and you love this Swami! That was wonderful; that was a Blessing and the Grace you got! But you have to see My Glory in other places! You have to see with what devotion and dedication other people do their work when they hear My Name! How are you going to enjoy that Glory if you are here all the time under My shadow? When a child

grows up, the child has to leave the mother, and go out and prove to the mother that whatever she has taught, the child has learnt. If you are always with the mother, how will the mother ever know?"

But that's what Swami said to me: "If you are always with the mother, how will the mother know if you have learnt the lessons that she has taught? You have to go; it's time for you to go. But you will see Me there in a different way."

I have seen Him more in all of you. Just because I know that you have not had the fortune that I have had - maybe in physical terms - and you have come to Him when you have become adults. You have come to Him with shaky faith maybe - by reading books written by others - but you have been able to conquer all those doubts to sit here for three days and spend your precious time, talking about Him and hearing about Him. And your devotion is far greater because you have done it without that physical proximity that I was so fortunate to have! And that's what He wanted me to see, I guess! So He sent me away.

Sai Never Lets Us Go

And then He said a beautiful sentence. He said: "You are not really going far away! You know, when the mother takes the child to the market and there are a lot of people milling around the child, the mother holds on tightly to the child's hand because she doesn't want the child to get lost! So the mother holds even more tightly when you are far away - away from home - in a strange place!"

In the old days, Swami used to take all the old devotees to the Chitravati in the afternoon. And I used to go too as a child. But sometimes, when He would take them, they would climb up the hill to that Kalpavriksha tree. And out of that tree Swami would get them things that you couldn't imagine - sweets, and fruits and whatever it was! And when you went up to that tree there would be a big crevice that you had to jump over to get to the tree! Swami would go and all the old people would follow Him very slowly, and then the younger people would try as fast as possible to catch up with Him. And then, Swami would reach that big opening in the hill and He would jump across, stand on the other side and very patiently hold out His Hand to make every person jump across!

The women - He would take the children from the women, and then help them across. And my aunt would always say: "Swami! You're easily making us cross this crevice! Make us cross the *bhavasagara* - this worldly ocean - in the same way! That is more difficult!" But if we keep these little wants and desires low, I am sure; it will be easy for Him to do that also!

Swami Takes Care of Every Case

So this is the Swami! He will keep His Word no matter what! If He says He is going to be there to help with the suitcases, He is going to be there! You know, Swami has been very busy doing this kind of stuff for my family! We are

quite bad at learning, I assume! Because my father who had spent all his life with Swami, had a very similar experience in 1970 when he came to the U.S.

Swami had asked him to come to the U.S and meet with some of the professors that my brother Jagadish would be studying under. Swami sent him two years ahead of time and told him: "Go and meet this professor, because they will be the people who will be teaching Jagadish."

My father had come and Swami had asked him to visit two old devotees in Holland - two Dutch ladies who were very old and were devotees of Swami. And Swami had sent a letter with them for my father. So my father had to break journey, and see them and come. And he missed the flight that he had to take - the interconnecting flight within Holland - because his previous flight from India came in late!

And he was wondering what to do because he knew that these two ladies would have driven to the airport and they were pretty elderly. So he was wondering what to do, and he was talking to them in the airport, when they suggested that he take a taxi to the next place (it was only about eighty kilometers) and they said you could probably make it to your flight if you drive!

So he got into the car and drove to the next place, and he could get the connecting flight. When he got off there, he met a person dressed in the uniform of a pilot! And he came and said: "Are you Dr. Padmanaban? Come on! Come on! We are waiting for you!"

Some gentleman! And he just took my father's suitcase, and put him on the flight! They didn't even look at his tickets and he got on the flight! And in the hurry, my father went into the airplane and didn't even turn around to say anything - because he was so stressed out with the whole thing and he left!

When my father came back to Bangalore, after his whole visit, Swami said: "You even forgot to say thank you to Me!"

So, this is the Swami, you know. When we do Swami's work; He is always besides you - taking care of you. That is the key! When we want to do Swami's work - whether it is your service activity, whether it is your Bal Vikas work, your SSE work - He is always there! If you have ever felt: "How can I take on all of this work that the center is asking me? Can I do it?" Please never doubt! Because Swami will somehow give you the strength to do it! And He will take care of your other things while you take care of His Work! That is the way I look at it.

An Educative Training

I'll tell you an incident that happened to me where work is concerned. Somebody asked me this question - which is why I want to tell you this. Somebody said: "It must have been so very wonderful to have Swami like that with you all the time!" Of course, it was wonderful! But you don't realize it when you are young though! It was wonderful, but when I was young, I

thought it was a big pain! Because I got caught, whatever I did! I mean, there was no escape! I could fool my parents if I wanted to, but I couldn't fool Him!

And it was a very difficult childhood in that sense! Because all my friends would do all sorts of things; and as human beings, we are tempted to do it! You want to do it, but you know you are going to get caught! So there's no fun in it!

When I was 15 years old - when Swami decided to start this whole SSE thing - I was just in 9th grade I think; I wasn't even 15! He came to our house and He asked my mother to take over the SSE program in the whole state of Karnataka; to become the coordinator! They had just started at that time - what they called the Bal Vihar. And Swami said: "Gather up the children in your neighborhood, teach them *bhajans*, and tell them stories". That was the beginning of the Bal-Vikas!

She had started to do that and had a few children - including me and my friends in the class. And we had all started to do the Bal Vikas and would attend classes in a very informal fashion when Swami wanted to make it happen all over the State, and so asked her to become the coordinator.

She said: "Swami, I have about 15-20 children in the class! Who is going to teach them?" Because, there were no teachers at that time! Everybody was just Sai devotees – coming, sitting, having *Darshan* and going!

So Swami said: "Here she is!" And pointed to me! And I was in 9th grade! And I said: "Me?" He said: "Yes!" I said: "The people who attend the Bal Vikas classes are my friends! They are not going to listen to me if I sit there and start telling them stories!" He said: "No! You start doing the Bal Vikas classes yourself!"

So suddenly, from being a student at age 15, I became this Guru in the Bal Vikas! And outside I would play and chat with all of these people, but was a teacher inside the class. Swami said: "If you dress appropriately, and come and sit in the class, they will respect you as a teacher." So suddenly I had to learn how to wear a sari and sit in the class - and all that!

Anyway, I did that! And I had done this for a few years. I entered college when Swami started the EHV program. And in that EHV program, He selected a few teachers who had had some experience to start going out to the general schools where the teachers who were not devotees - who teach in the schools - would start getting some EHV training so that they could start that in their school.

So there were about 9 or 10 elderly people - who were teachers by profession - who had been given this job. And Swami suddenly asked the lady who was coordinating this - a lady called Ms. Kalyani Sundaram – "Where is Padmanaban's daughter?"

She said: "Swami. She is only 17 years old, you know! And the people who are going to go and train are non-devotees, who are school teachers, and who are older than her. So I haven't chosen her for the EHV program." (Even though I had been doing Bal Vikas for a while now.)

He said: "No! No! When they see that young people are doing this, the older people get motivated! So you take her." So this lady comes home and she calls me and says: "From tomorrow onwards, Swami said you have to be in the EHV training."

And I put up the biggest fight of my life! "I am not going to go to any EHV program!" Because this meant traveling all over Karnataka with this group of 9 teachers; training unknown people - non-devotee teachers - and I had to go with these elderly women – who were all teachers - everywhere! You know, that was my problem!

So I told my mother: "I am not doing this! Why is Swami asking me to do this EHV?" So my mother told Swami: "She doesn't want to do it Swami!" He said: "Tell her that won't work! She just has to go!" All my life, this is how He is!

So, I became this EHV person. And I started to go and do the training. But anyway, it wasn't too difficult because they would give me a topic, so I would prepare. And whenever it was in Bangalore city, I would go, do the training, give the talks and return.

Untruthful Trip to Tunkoor

Sometimes I had to go out of station - and that would happen only when my college was closed because I couldn't skip school! And then, one day, there was a training program in a place called Tunkoor - which is about 40-50 kilometers from Bangalore. The training program that was going on there was from Monday through Friday, and it was during the Dasara vacation. So I couldn't get out of it because I had no college!

So, the one thing that Swami told this lady - the coordinator Ms. Kalyani Sundaram – is this: "Geetha is young. When you go out of town and all that, make sure you take her with you. Let her not travel alone."

So this became a major problem! Wherever I went, these people took it so seriously! They wouldn't even let me go to the restroom! They would take me there to the restroom! They said: "Swami will scold us! He said to accompany you wherever you went; so we are coming with you!"

So wherever I went, I had these two women following me! And if I wanted to read a book or something in the bus; I had to make sure it was a "Sathya Sai Speaks" or something - because there were these teachers! They followed me everywhere! And I would come home and grumble to my mother! I used to just grumble so much!

Anyway, I had to go to Tunkoor. Kalyani Aunty called me the previous day, and said: "Make sure you're at the bus station at 7 o'clock in the morning because the program begins at 10 o'clock and it takes one and a half hour to get there."

My talk was at 2 o'clock in the afternoon! So I said: "Kalyani Aunty, why don't you all go because I'll just take the 11 o'clock bus or whatever..." She said: "No! No! You're coming with us! You know what Swami said!"

So, first day – Monday – I went with them. And I sat and sat while all the lectures happened and then my turn was at 2 o'clock, and I had to give my talk. Now on Tuesday - the second day - I knew where the place was; it was in a junior college in Tunkoor. I knew how to get there and I was pretty confident. So, on the second day, I came up with this idea! I Forgot this Omnipresent Lord - that He was Omnipresent!

So, I left the house very obediently at 7:30 am. I told my mother goodbye and I went very nicely. But I didn't go to the bus station! I went to my friend's house! I knew these people had to take the 8 o'clock bus - because their lectures were there at 10. They couldn't skip. And you know how upset Swami gets if we are not on time! So they had to take that bus and I knew they couldn't keep waiting for me. So I went to my friend's house.

My friend said: "What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to go to Tunkoor?" And I said: "Yeah! But you know, my lecture is at 2 o'clock! So I can just spend some time with you."

So I happily chatted with her, drank coffee; had breakfast in the house and made a whole bunch of remarks on these women who "followed me everywhere and were such a pain. They keep coming with me, and all they do is keep talking about their husband and children - and it's just so boring!"

Anyway, I said all this to my friend and then I went to the bus station. (You know, I am setting myself up so nicely! Swami must be just laughing every time He sees me: "Here she is again!")

So, at 11 o'clock I go to the bus stand and I buy my ticket. And those people in the mean time have frantically called my mother and all that; and I have no idea about all this!

I take the 11 o'clock bus, and I get into the bus. Now the first thought that comes is that - "it may not go as smoothly as I thought!" Because when I get into the bus, I find that I am the only woman in the bus! It is filled with men and they are all men from the villages and they are all looking at me because even then, you know in the mid-seventies girls in India didn't go about in the buses, especially on the village buses by themselves!

I get in and they are looking! I say to myself: "Well, there is a whole bus full of people, you know; what can they do!" I sit there and nobody sits next to me in the bus! So I am sitting there occupying one seat; and then the bus starts.

And we go about maybe ten kilometers, when we hear all kind of weird sounds and the bus stops! So we all have to get up! And now of course the second thought - you know – “there's something going on here!” And I am looking at my watch and then I say: “Well, I had given myself 45 minutes margin. And the bus driver tells me they can fix it. So I am still all right! Calm down!”

But when I get down, there are a few old men in the bus who look at me and say: “What kind of family do you come from? Your parents are sending you alone like this in a village bus!” My poor parents! So I say: “No. I had some work”. And they said: “Why are they sending young women these days in the bus!” And you know these old elderly gentlemen sort of start saying: “Look what the world has come to...” and all this stuff!

And I am standing there feeling very embarrassed with the whole thing. Then, of course, the bus starts and I say: “Fine! Swami is not really testing me!” Because I didn't really do anything wrong; you know - I am getting there, hanging there in the bus!

So the bus goes; we travel, I come. It stops right in front of the junior college where the program is. That is the boys' college. So I go there to the venue, where it is in some hall that we had the program yesterday! I've been there! I go there and they are all painting the whole place! There is nobody there!

I say: “Where is the program?” And they all look and say: “What program?” I said: “The one that happened here yesterday was supposed to be here for the whole week!” And a few people there, they said: “No, No! We are painting today and they have all moved to the other building at the other end of town!” And then I come out and now I am really scared. I don't know how to get there and in the mean time it's a boy's college and they are all whistling and calling out names and I am getting shakier and shakier as I come out, and some of them are saying: “Oh, who are you?” And inviting me to lunch and what not! I am getting really scared now.

I come out and start asking people, “Where is the place?” Because my lecture is at 2 o'clock and it's almost 1:15 or something! Then the guy who is painting says: “I can take you there if you want.”

I started crying! And now I know - this is Swami shaking that nail there! I am petrified! I have disobeyed Him! I have deceived my parents! I deceived the women who waited for me at the bus stop and these are like major crimes in Swami's book!

And here I am, and I don't know how to get to the venue and I am going to miss my talk! I am going to be hauled over the red-hot coals is what I am thinking! And I am crying by this time! I come out of the gate and at this time you know; that is when in Kannada they say: “*Sankata Vandarey, Venkata Ramana*” “When you are in trouble, you call out to Venkataramana!”

I am saying: "Sai Ram! Sai Ram! Please help me, Swami! I will never do this again! I will go with the most boring women again in my life! I will never do this again! Help me, Help me!"

Rescued by Swami's Relation

And I come out and I stand there and a car passes me by, goes a few feet, stops and backs up. And the window comes down and who should be sitting in the car - Swami's sister Venkamma! She looks and says: "Aren't you Padmanabh's daughter Geetha?" I say: "Yes." She has seen me since I was a baby! She says: "What are you doing here standing in front of this boy's college all by yourself? Are you by yourself?" I said: "Well, I came for the EHV." She said: "Get in. Get in!"

And I get into the car - her son-in-law was driving. I say: "I came to the EHV program aunty, and the venue has been shifted." So she said: "What is this Swami? He's making all these young girls go like this for EHV programs with nobody to chaperone them! I must talk to Him!"

And of course I am not telling her that I missed the bus or anything! She says: "Why didn't you go with Kalyani Aunty and everyone?" I said: "I missed the bus." One more lie! Missed the bus! She said: "Oh! Okay. Alright, we will drop you there - wherever the venue is. Where is the place?"

Her son-in-law goes and finds out and then I ask her in the car: "Aunty, what are you doing here?" She says: "We are on our way to Shimoga," which is another four hours drive! "And I suddenly developed a really bad headache! So we came into Tunkoor to buy some medication for my headache. That's why we drove here and then we saw you standing here." They were very sweet. They took me and got me some orange juice and dropped me off at the venue.

And of course, by that time poor frantic Kalyani Aunty! She is looking at the clock - it's almost 2 o'clock! And I arrive with five minutes to spare. And I go up and do my talk and I don't tell them anything that happened.

In reply to Kalyani Aunty's questions, I just remarked that I missed the bus. She said: "Okay, now next time, come on time! You know, we were all so worried and we were so afraid! Because Swami has said that you should always come with us."

And then we came back. Swami is in Puttaparthi; so why volunteer this information to my parents! I didn't tell them all that went on! I said: "Everything went on very nicely. I missed the bus, but you know Venkamma aunty came and dropped me." I simplified the whole thing; you know! "And then she gave me a ride to the place, and everything went okay." My mother said: "Oh, okay. That's very nice. I am glad you got help," and that was it.

Four months later, after birthday celebrations, Swami returns to Bangalore and usually whenever He came, we all had to give Him a report of the EHV

work. Kalyani Aunty and all the 10 teachers sat in front. And Swami came in the *darshan* line and asked her: "How did the program go?" And she said we did so many programs; it all went well and gave Him the report.

Taken to Task Over Tunkoor

He came to each teacher in turn and I am the last person - but I am not worried! Four months have gone by after all! And Swami comes to me and stands there and says: "Hmmm...you want Me to tell these women how you missed that bus?" I say: "No Swami! No Swami! Please Swami!"

"You want Me to tell them what you thought about them and why you didn't go with them?" I say: "No Swami! Please!" Because you know, they actually think I am a good girl! I don't want to disillusion them! I say: "Swami! Please Swami! I won't do it again! I won't do it again!"

He says: "When I tell you something, obey without questions! There is a reason when I tell you something!" And then He said - the tone changed from the father to the mother; and not even a mother really, a friend! He said: "Because of you, I had to give that poor Venkamma such a bad headache!"

He walked away! He was so sweet you know, He never told my mother. He never told those teachers. But I was so scared that at some point I told them myself!

But, that's the wonderful Swami! He can be a Friend, He can be a Mother, He can be a Father and He can be anything that you want Him to be! It's all in your own heart and in your mind. And of course Venkamma never, ever forgave me for that till the day she died! She said: "Because of you, I had to get a headache!"

But, it was difficult to have Him there all the time! A little bit difficult - but after all, what is that difficulty compared to all the love that I have received! But it's only as I have grown older that I have valued it more. Only because when you're a child you take things for granted. You think that parents are there to do every thing for you - that's their job. But then, even with your own parents, as you grow older, you realize how much they do!

When we become parents ourselves, we realize actually the value of our own parents who have done so much for us! And Swami! I am not a scholarly person to give you any great lessons that I have learnt; I have learnt very simple lessons. And even those I find difficult to follow sometimes.

So, coming back to parents, we are all so fortunate to have such wonderful parents that we have. For me, I am so fortunate that I've had parents who showed me the Lord from the day I was born! And gave me this opportunity to enjoy His Love, just because I was born in their home. And they brought me up with just one focus – Sai, and that everything else was just very trivial compared to this. And I was fortunate for that – though I didn't realize it then.

Impure Offering

In fact, to tell you an incident that happened with my mother and me – and I am sure many young girls will relate to this. Every week we used to go to Brindavan and I used to take the roses from my garden in a bouquet for Swami. Swami would always come to me and take it from me. One day, I didn't want to go because I wanted to attend a music concert in Bangalore. So I said: "I don't want to come to see Swami today."

And my mother said: "Well, you haven't come to see Swami in the past three days and Swami has been asking for you! Everyday He comes to me and says: "Where is Geetha? So if you don't come today - it's a Saturday – He will really ask! Especially since you don't have school or college, so you should come!"

So I told my mother: "You know, every weekend this is the only thing you want to do! I don't want to come." See, Swami was so easily available that I took Him for granted. So I said: "I see Swami everyday. But M.S. Subbalakshmi comes only once in two years. And there is a concert of M.S. Subbalakshmi and I want to attend the concert. I am not going to come."

My mother was very upset with me. She said: "No, you have to come! If you want to go to the concert, after you come back, you go and attend the concert a little late. But you have to come!"

So, very angrily, you know - with no love in my heart, I must say – I went to the garden and started to cut the roses. Because it was a habit with me to take roses for Swami, so I took it any way - whether I did it with love or not - I went and cut all these roses and came and dumped it on the dining table and went to get ready. And my mother put it together in a nice bouquet for me. And when I came back, I looked at it and I said to her: "Oh! This bouquet looks terrible! I don't want to give it. You give it if you want!"

And my mother said: "Why are you acting like a small child? You put it together anyway you want to! I just did it because I thought we'll get late!" So I took it apart and put it back together again! It didn't look any different! But this was my argument with my mother. Everything she did that day was not the right thing. So I put it together - just because I wanted to be mean to her for forcing me to go - I put it together, and we went to Brindavan. And we sat there. And I went there walking very nicely with these roses!

And a few people there said: "Geetha, can you sit beside us? You know, Swami always comes near you when you have the roses!" Don't ever do that! You're setting yourself up! So I said: "Sure, sure! Come along! Have a seat!" I was so sure that He's going to come for my roses! "Oh! Come and sit beside me! Sit behind me!" And we all sat there and Swami came out for darshan.

Swami can do this so beautifully! He walked in front of me and looked at everybody on the other side; made a big U around me, and walked away! And completely ignored me! So beautifully! And these poor people who sat next to

me were like: "Oh! Goodness! I was sitting there and we went there and now all because of you; you know, we lost our chance by sitting next to you!"

And here I am sitting with my big bouquet of roses and Swami has walked away! And I am still quite self-confident that He'll come! He'll finish those rounds and He will come! So He finished and He is coming back and I am all set again with my roses ready to hand it to Him; like I always did.

He came, made a bigger U around me. And now at this point, I am totally embarrassed! I am sitting there with my roses in front of me - everyone is looking at me! And they all know, there is something wrong because He usually came to me and took the roses! At that moment, you want to disappear with the roses and everything under ground somewhere!

And not so much - I must be honest with you - because, Swami didn't come to me! It was more my ego! Because everyone was looking at me! And I was embarrassed about it! And here I had bragged to all these people beside me, to sit down with me and I am just completely embarrassed! And then He starts to walk away very slowly towards the gate.

Speaking in the Language of Fragrance

And at that point, I suddenly start thinking: "What am I so embarrassed about? I am losing His *darshan*! I am losing His loving gesture when He comes and takes these; and I am worried about all these people!" And immediately I think: "What did I do? Why did He do that?"

Of course, the answer came in one second! "I have been so rude to my mother who has given me this body, who had shown Him to me, who has given me everything that I have in my life! How can the Cosmic Mother look at me? He cannot! I have hurt my mother!"

So, I just sit there and I say: "I am so sorry Swami! I am so sorry! I will not speak to her like this!" Then I think: "At least in the afternoon He should look at me! He shouldn't ignore me like this!" And He is walking away. And that loving, forgiving Swami! He just stopped at the gate, turned around, came all the way back into the *darshan* line. He comes to me, takes the roses and says: "Aren't the roses beautiful?" "Yes Swami!" I had tears in my eyes. He says: "But, learn to speak fragrantly - in the language of the roses!"

It is not enough to offer Him those flowers - if you cannot speak like those flowers! If you cannot be beautiful and give joy to others like those flowers do; what is the point in offering it to Him? It just becomes a picture - just a very robotic habitual gesture!

So, those were the lessons I have learnt. And I hope I have learnt them! I am sure my mother may or may not agree with me, but I have tried as much as I can - as I got older and of course, now that I am a mother myself - to appreciate what our parents do for us!

H2H SPECIAL

MESMERIZING MOMENTS WITH THE DIVINE MASTER

Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 3

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

We devotees used to come from *patha-mandiram* (Old Mandir) to Prashanti Nilayam everyday till the quarters were built (inside the ashram) and we used to help with the sweeping and everything. So, during the construction, Swami 'needed' help with planting trees and other matters, and we used to serve. He Himself would allot the duties: "you do this; you do that..."

So we used to be in and out of Puttaparthi, and also attend *bhajans* in Prashanti Nilayam in the hall and then return – till the quarters were ready. Later, people started shifting here. Some brought houses permanently; they could stay here, and others would come and stay and return. So, we were given rooms only whenever we came – because we were not staying here permanently. Those who stayed always had a permanent place.

Swami used to be in charge of accommodation. So as soon as we arrived, He would see who was coming. He would be standing on the balcony where they have fixed that silver door - there was no door then just an open veranda. So, when we would arrive, He would say from the balcony: "Oh! You have come! Very good! You can go and stay in this room." They didn't have enough quarters for everybody. So, He would put us with some family. And we mainly stayed with Kasturi *Mama* (uncle) – because He would say: "Go and stay with Kasturi." We had the same food habits; we were from the same background (Iyers) and we could relate to the same type of food and everything. So, we became very close to Kasturi uncle.

One day, we were coming to Prashanti Nilayam and the Prashanti buildings were not ready yet. This incident happened before the building of the New Mandir. We just came to help with various things and we had to do *bhajans* too everyday. So, we were always in and out of Prashanti Nilayam. The foundation had been laid, and Swami was sitting on the sand – there were no chairs. And we three sisters came - my fourth sister wasn't there with us then; she came much later.

Bestower of *Bhakti* and *Mukti*

As we were coming along, He called us: "Come here!" and He made us sit there with Him on the sand! We sat down. Then He looked at my elder sister, Kamala Sarathi – she was so blessed by Swami – and asked her: **"What do you want? I will give you whatever you want!"** She looked at us; it was a sudden surprise! She said: **"Swami, I want *bhakti*, and *mukti* (devotion and liberation)."** Then He looked at her and asked: **"Are you sure you want that? It is difficult; do you want it? *Bhakti* and *mukti*?"** She said: **"Yes."** He said: **"Don't say that because I am asking you!"** How could she say: **"I want a beautiful house" or "I want some more money" or "I want my children to do well in life?"** We have so many desires!

He said: **"You be honest! Just because I have asked you, you don't have to ask for *bhakti* and *mukti*. If you want something in the world, be honest and ask; I will give it to you."** Then she said: **"No Swami; I have everything; I don't think I want anything; I want *bhakti* and *mukti*."** He said: **"Given! I have given you!"**

Then, He asked my other sister, **"What do you want?"** And she also said the same thing. And He told her too: **"You think before you give Me an answer! Be honest!"** And she too said: **"Swami, I also want *bhakti* and *mukti*."** Then He asked me: **"What do you want?"** I said: **"Swami, I also want the same thing."** Then, I don't know, why He repeated in my case: **"Rani Maa, it will be difficult! Are you sure you want it?"** I said: **"Yes Swami, I want it."** He said: **"Okay, I will give it to you!"**

Then He spoke to us about – He always used to tell us something from the scriptures; either the Ramayana or the Bhagavatha – something spiritual; He never talked much about family or any other thing. And after that, we went out.

Attainment Through Trials

Then, after this incident, He came in my dream and said: **"Rani Maa, do you know what you are going to pass through? You have asked for *bhakti* and *mukti*! I am going to treat you like a wet towel! Just like one rinses the towel to take out the water, I will squeeze you out. Will you be able to take it?"** I said: **"Yes, Swami!"** He said: **"Okay, but you are in for great tests!"**

You see, I felt He didn't tell all that to them in a dream; so I was just thinking to myself: 'Why did He tell me that?' Rightly, or wrongly, I came to the conclusion that for some people, their *prarabha* (accumulated merits) is favourable. With a few tests, they can probably attain it or maybe, when He says: **"I will give it,"** He may not mean this birth! He may give it in the next birth, because for Him, death and birth have no significance! Life is continuous; the same soul comes and goes.

We read in the Bhagavad Geetha too that death does not signify the end of a personality; the journey continues after death too. So, with what reason He gave that to me, I don't know yet! But in the dream, He did say: "Are you prepared? I will squeeze you like a wet towel! You can change your mind now too! You can say: 'No, I am happy and comfortable in the world; I don't think I want *mukti* yet.'"

More than *bhakti*, *mukti* is more difficult – complete freedom from the mind; it's like the role of a renunciant. I said: "No Swami, I want both *bhakti* and *mukti*. You can squeeze me!" After that, I passed through a lot of tests and trials - all sorts of suffering. I guess, because I had asked for it, I had to be prepared for any tests! Though I do suffer during the tests – not that I am above it – but, something gives me the courage to face it! I don't go down with it; I keep on chanting His Name, and praying more. Swami says that's the only way to keep up the equanimity of the mind - you pray all the time.

Swami says: "When a problem comes, don't think of the problem. Just think: 'All this is *anityam* (not true); it belongs to the *nityaloka* (worldly plane); I am going to transcend all this.' And keep on chanting My Name, and I will give you the strength to face it."

Affirming the Dream

Once, He called me for an interview in Prashanti Nilayam – alone – usually, He would call us in a group, but sometimes He would call us alone too. He asked me: "**Rani Maa, do you have domestic problems?**" I said: "**Yes, Swami.**" He asked: "**Do you know how to transcend those problems?**" I said: "**No Swami, I don't know; You will have to tell me.**" He asked me: "**When you have a dream, when do you realize you are dreaming?**" I said: "**Swami, when I wake up, I realize that I was dreaming.**" He said: "**Until you wake up, do you not identify with the dream as yourself?**" I said: "**Yes.**"

You see, what He meant was that when we are sleeping, we are not aware that we are having a dream. In the dream, you feel that you are real; you are not aware that there's another 'I' sleeping on the bed and dreaming! There's no two 'I' – only one! He said: "Similarly, now you are dreaming. All these problems come under the realm of dream. So do you know what you must tell yourself? 'Swami, it's all a day-dream!' If you say that, it will not touch you! But if you identify yourself with whatever is happening, you will suffer. So, you just have to play your role."

That's how He said we should detach ourselves from the identification. He said: "You see, you are all only playing a role! Role is like *jeeva* – the soul – 'I am so and so!' that is the ego – the false identification. That is not the real you. You have to tell yourself: 'I am playing a role; but my real nature is *atma*. I am above all this, Swami.' Constantly, you must meditate on that thought! Otherwise you will go down with your problems; you will suffer; you will be anxious; you will be worried. But you have to help yourself – like an antidote – and keep saying: 'This is

all a dream, Swami!' If in spite of saying that, you don't get that awareness, then ask Me: 'Swami, please give me that awareness!' I am always ready to give you whatever you ask! But you have to ask! I will not give it to you by Myself!"

He said: "If you ask for the right things, I will surely help you. If you ask for worldly things, I will give it to you too; but again, you will be caught up in *maya* (illusion); in delusion. But if you ask, I will give you the experience that it is all a dream, and it will not touch you."

So, right from the beginning, Swami has been only giving us spiritual instructions.

Making Fast Progress

Once, after many years had passed, He called my sister and me for an interview. He said: "You see, you people have done a lot of *sadhana* (spiritual practice)! And for all the *sadhana* that you have done, you must have reached a very high stage! Your days were packed with spiritual activities - chanting, doing *bhajans*, and reading. But, in spite of all that, you have not reached the stage that you should have reached. Why? Do you know?" We said: "No, Swami. We thought that *sadhana* would take us there."

He said: "*Sadhana* by itself cannot take you there. It should be a combination of self-analysis and *sadhana* – spiritual practices must be combined with self-analysis; because only self-analysis will tell you, as a human being, where you are going wrong."

We are not acting from an *atma* level (the level of the spirit); I am now acting in the world as a human being – I am somebody's mother, somebody's wife, somebody's sister, etc.

He said: "Self-analysis will help you to point out your mistakes and will tell you where you have failed spiritually. Unless you do self-analysis, you will not be able to progress. Now, you must cut your *sadhana* down to 1/4th; your self-analysis should be 3/4th! Then, your progress will be very fast!"

"How you talk, what you hear, what you do, what you eat, you must analyze everything – every walk of life! 'Am I doing the right thing? Is it spiritually alright? Am I thinking the right way? Am I talking the right way? Am I doing the right thing?"

Even regarding the possessions, He told me and my sister: "Simplicity is a must for this path! Make your journey comfortable with light luggage! Too many possessions are not needed; make them minimum. Don't add more and more to your life because it is like an obstacle to your spiritual path. Keep it to minimum so that you don't give your mind to various things."

So, after that, we started doing more self-analysis - because earlier, we used to have many sittings and made time to do *japa*, meditation, and *bhajans*, etc.

Finding the Right Priority

Then, another incident happened when I was staying here in Prashanti Nilayam, which is very interesting. One day, He sent for me in the morning, at 7 o'clock. My younger sister was in personal service during those days – she is a *brahmacharini*; she never married. He sent word through her: "Go and get Rani Maa." She came down and said: "Swami wants you to come up." I went upstairs. He welcomed me very nicely. "Please sit down!" He said. I was wondering why He sent for me and was feeling nervous. I thought maybe I made a mistake and maybe He was going to chastise and correct me.

He said: "Rani Maa, I have to tell you something about a gentleman, who is a businessman." I was wondering why He should tell me about some businessman! But I didn't ask Him anything. He said: "One businessman came to Me and I gave him an interview. Once, in the interview, he told Me he had a lot of problems and was under great tension and stress because of those business problems. I told him I would give him some spiritual practices to do and to come and see Me after sometime.

"He came after sometime, and again I called him for an interview, and I asked him how his business problems were. 'It must be less, isn't it?' He said, 'No Swami! It is just the same!' I asked him, 'How can it be just the same? No! It cannot be! Did you do what I had asked you to do?' I had given him some instructions...'do this in the morning and that in the evening'...etc.

"He said: 'Swami! What can I say! I was so busy and so caught up in my own problems, I could hardly find time to do Your practice that You advised.'" Then Swami asked him a question: "Okay, you were very busy and didn't have time to do your spiritual practices. But at that time, when you were so busy, did you give up your morning coffee?" He said: "No, I didn't." "What about your breakfast? Did you give that up? Even if you didn't have it at the right time, you must have had it later? Is it not?" He said: "Yes, Swami; I didn't miss my breakfast." "Did you miss your lunch?" He said: "No." "Your tea?" "No." "Your dinner?" He said: "No."

Then He told him: "**How many sittings you had for *deha (the body)*; *shareer ahara (food for the body)* – coffee, breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner! 5 sittings for the body! Which you have to drop any day! But, your *atma* (spirit), which is your true nature, which is really going to bless you, and keep you peaceful and happy - *atma* level alone can give you that; *shareera* (body) level will not give you that – but for that you didn't give even one sitting? And you want My Grace? How can I give you Grace?"**

Swami told me: "See, people want My Grace, but they don't obey My instructions." He told him: "*Atma ahaara* (food for the spirit) is more important than *shareera ahara* (food for the body)." I don't know what He told him to do,

but if He told him to do Gayatri for an hour, then he should have given that a priority. That's what Swami told me: "You people should give priority to My instructions and not to what you want to do."

He said: "Give up *shareera ahaara*; but not *atma ahaara* - unless you feed the *atma* (spirit), it will not awaken. That is your spirit; which is *Bhagavan* (God); which will not be available if you are feeding your *shareera* (body) all the time, when your *atma* has been starving!" He told the businessman: "By not following Swami's instruction, your *atma* will starve. **You have given priority to food for the body and no importance to the soul; how can I help you? If you want My help, you have to do what I tell you. That should be your priority.**"

You see, in a way, it was a general thing; but He also wanted me to realize that. Instead of calling me and telling me directly do this and do that regularly; He quoted that gentleman like an example. That's all. I told my sister it was a teaching for all of us.

Suppose a Guru told you to read the Bhagavad Geetha; or to do *japa*, or to meditate, then what if you say: 'I have got too much work today, so I won't read the Bhagavad Geetha'? If you didn't have time to read the Bhagavad Geetha in the morning, do it in the evening! God doesn't say 'Do it at this time!' If it elevates you, why are you not reading it? That is giving you help. Are other people giving you help? Going shopping or going to see someone here and there - that's not going to help you! If we are on the spiritual path, but are giving priority to the wrong thing, yes, His Grace will always be there, because we are all His children; but it will depend on the percentage of our performance. Just like, if you are a student, you will get 40% or 80% or 100% - according to your performance; so it is the same with Bhagavan!

SAI WORLD NEWS

RAILWAY MINISTER LALU YADAV LAUDS THE SAI CHILDREN IN NEW DELHI

- A one-of-its-kind celebration of Easwaramma Day at the Sri Sathya Sai International Centre in the heart of Delhi, India's capital city

Celebrating Mother Easwaramma

The celebration of the blessed life of Mother Easwaramma, the one who gave to the world the Avatar of the age, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, in the most significant city of India - its capital, New Delhi, was, truly, a spectacle. Among other dignitaries who had congregated on this holy day of May 6, 2008 at the Sri Sathya Sai International Centre on Lodhi Road, was the ineffable and charismatic Union Railway Minister, Mr. Lalu Prasad Yadav. In the course of his touching keynote address, he said, "Baba is truly God! By celebrating the anniversary of His mother, you are doing a great and pious act...I am lucky to be here...from the whole family of Railways, I thank you." The audience were greatly touched by the sincere outpouring of emotion by the national leader, according to whom "Sai Baba is no ordinary 'Baba' (saint), but Bhagavan (God)", as he stated during the Chennai Citizens Conclave in January 2007.

Though the venue was filled with eminent personalities and Sai devotees, the most happy and privileged to be there, were the Bal Vikas children - the fortunate recipients of the character-building Education in Human Values program. Many of the tiny-tots and young adults had worked for months on a special play, *Vande Mataram* (Victory to the Mother), depicting the five principal mothers akin to all mankind who deserve our respect and adoration. Some of these shining little ones, after the programme, mentioned how they would sorely miss the unity and devotion, and the joy of working together. The tireless work by teachers and children, the hectic schedule and relentless effort to stage the play successfully as an offering to Swami had brought all the participants together in harmony and dedication to their Lord.

Mature Words from Those So Young

The young compeer for the evening, Parth, was quite overwhelmed by his participation in an event this inspiring. He later said, "I felt honoured, and I, truly, mean it. I felt blessed!" A student of XII grade, he continued, "Bal Vikas helps me to remain at peace, no matter what my surrounding. It has empowered me to cope with all kinds of stress, including academics."

The day was not only a commemoration of Mother Easwaramma's life, but also of the Bal Vikas movement which the Divine Mother was so fond of. Priyanka, from grade 10 at Bloom School, who enacted the role of Mother Earth, said,

"I feel delighted as a Bal Vikas student, as it adds to my confidence. It also gives me scope to display my extra curricular abilities. Being a dance student of Bharath Nathyam, it is here I got a chance to perform. So many more dimensions that we practice here, in Bal Vikas, enhance my concentration. I am exposed to higher values, and I try to incorporate them in my life. It is, after all, Swami, whose blessings I feel at every stage of my life. I believe, if you are putting in the best of your efforts, the rest is taken care of by Swami Himself."

Priyanka's father, Mr. Ravi Shankar, who works as a Vice President in Reliance Energy, appreciated the concept of the play which revolved on the five dimensions of the concept of Motherhood. He also gladly shared his daughter's progress under Bal Vikas. "She is involved in every kind of activity of Bal Vikas. This has a sobering influence on her; she is more balanced and understanding now, when it came to resolving issues among her friends."

It is to witness the performance of these budding blossoms of human excellence that were present many esteemed individuals, including the **Honourable Minister for Railways, Sri Lalu Prasad Yadav, and Mr. Jai Prakash Narayan Yadav, the Honorable Minister of State for Water Resources.**

Vibrations of Love

From the moment, the doors of the spacious and inviting auditorium were opened at 5.30 in the evening, it reverberated with melodious *bhajans* rendered by sisters Nandini Bhattacharya, Sai Bhawani, and Shivani Anand; the audience participated with great enthusiasm and joy. Everyone who entered the hall could feel the holy vibrations of the sacred occasion.

When the Chief Guest, Mr. Lalu Prasad Yadav arrived, he first saluted all with folded hands and then lit the lamp to mark the auspicious beginning of the programme. He was then presented a bouquet of flowers by the National Bal Vikas Coordinator, Mrs. Nimmi Kanwar.

State President Exhorts the Blossoming of Bal Vikas

Then followed a speech by Mr. Jatinder Cheema, the State President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, New Delhi, who delineated on the philosophy and purpose, genesis and growth of the Bal Vikas movement and also extended a warm welcome to the honourable Mr. Lalu Prasad, the chief guest of the evening. In part, he said,

"Bal Vikas teaches elements most important in this age of global terrorism and cultural degradation. Today, the Bal Vikas movement is the beacon of hope to turn around the world for the better. It is in this spirit the children of the Delhi Bal Vikas are today presenting the programme *Vande Mataram*....

I would like to take this opportunity to exhort all our sisters and brothers engaged in Bal Vikas, to take this movement forward with greater vigour,

because it has an important task for bringing semblance of a new civil society, and for the future generation of Indians. While we make strides in science and technology, it is also our abundant duty to make leaps in preserving our ancient Indian heritage and culture of universalism, brotherhood of mankind, and most importantly, the spirit to love all and to serve all."

Mr. Cheema then introduced the chief guest in glowing terms, mentioning at length how the railways have prospered under his benign governance, and how the "Railway fares are on a downward spiral and the services provided by them are on an upward curve."

Enthralling Speech by the Chief Guest - Mr. Lalu Prasad Yadav

Next, was the moment of the day – the most memorable and moving address by Mr. Lalu Prasad Yadav, the chief guest. He said,

"I salute the mother of Sri Sathya Sai Baba in whose memory the day is being celebrated as Easwaramma Day. In Indian culture, mother is given a high pedestal. In today's cultural programme, the Bal Vikas children are going to project the five aspects of Motherhood which convey motherly affection. The mere mention of the word 'mother' should be enough for us to bow our head in reverence, because we can never repay her love and affection. The mother, may herself go without food, but feeds her kids; the mother who provides shade for her children herself being exposed to the sun...we are duty bound to serve her.

"But, unfortunately nowadays, people are shirking from serving their mothers, and this is a matter of great concern. I believe, service to mother is service to God. I hope those who are engaged in Bal Vikas will help in inculcating in the public mind the ideal of serving the mother...

"I was told that the Bal Vikas children are spread all over the country and are taught how to be good human beings. I extend my good wishes to the Bal Vikas children who are profitably using their time and study for nine years. I hope you will all spread Sai Baba's message of service far and wide...

"I am fortunate I could have *Darshan* of Swami on two occasions. I did not believe in Him first, but when I learnt more about Him, I could realize what a Great Soul He is. He is also very simple. When I went to Puttaparthi, Swami was waiting at the Mandir, despite the discomfiture with His leg. I was greatly impressed by this. He took me into the interview room, and said, 'Whether you come here or not, I observe you from here, and you are doing a good job. Problems come; pain and pleasure are common in an individual's life. They come and go.' Then, He blessed me profusely.

"I also saw the Hospital in Puttaparthi. Baba ensures that poor people get excellent treatment in His Hospitals. Outstanding doctors come to the Hospital for rendering Seva.

"The second time I met Him was in Chennai. Water is a serious problem today. On the issue of water, there are conflicts in different parts of the country. He provided drinking water (to the city). He is truly God. He says Bhagavan is there in the Mandir, *Masjid* (mosque), Church, and Gurudwar (Sikh place of worship) - and in you and me.

"I went and saw the place where the holy Mother gave birth to Baba; now a temple for Lord Shiva stands there. The Mother of Baba, Easwaramma, is immortal. We should not forget the Divine Mother.

"Baba's entire life is decided to serve. Saints, Bhagavan and great souls come and uplift people through their Message. Let us use our lives for serving the disadvantaged and suffering humanity. This is what Baba says. He calls upon the people to become good human beings and to keep our hearts clean.

"He also performs miracles! He asked me which deity I worship. I said 'Maa' (mother). I was looking intently if He was taking anything from out from His pocket. He gave me a Sheravaali Maa's (Goddess Durga) pendent with a chain. People from all over the world - rich, middle class and poor - go to Him. He is truly God! By celebrating the anniversary of Baba's Mother, you are doing a great and pious act. Your Bal Vikas children are enacting a play, and I am lucky to participate in the function. From the whole family of Railways I thank you all!"

There was a moment of silence, and then the whole auditorium exploded into a thunderous applause. The chief guest again saluted the audience, and then left the stage for the Bal Vikas children to takeover.

The Drama *Vande Mantaram* Gives Much Food for Thought

The musical drama *Vande Mantaram* depicted the five facets of the 'Mother' common to the life of every human being. The first Mother portrayed was 'Veda Mata', or the Vedic Mother - the giver of knowledge, since time immemorial. They depicted how the Vedas and the ancient scriptures are the very foundation of Indian culture and spirituality. The universal appeal of the Vedas, lies in the fact that, in them are embedded and espoused the true principles of not only the Hindu religion, but also other world faiths. Ideas such as *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* ('the whole world is one family') eloquently express the uniqueness of *Sanathana Dharma*, the ancient belief-system of India.

Next, was 'Go Mata' or 'the Cow as Mother'. The children brought to life how the cow is the symbol of purity and prosperity, and has always been held as the supreme example of sacrifice. She is accorded a special position in Indian culture, and no holy ritual is complete without her gifts. Most interestingly, the cow has an unforgettably sweet and loving relationship with the Lord, who is also called 'Gopal Krishna' (he protector of the cow).

The children then demonstrated the third Mother - 'Bhoomata', or 'Mother Earth' - the Mother who sustains and nourishes all forms of our planet's

bountiful Nature. Despite all the wrong doing of man, she continues to exemplify compassion. Her tolerance is extreme, but there comes a time when even she expresses her sorrow and dissatisfaction in the form of natural calamities. The *drama* exhorted all to listen to her message, which for every inhabitant of the planet is the same: to recognise the extent to which Man's selfishness has grown and beware of the tragic consequences of this recklessness.

The next universal Mother, the kids performed, was 'Deha mata', or 'the Physical Mother' whose love, sacrifice and nurturing is vital to the wholesome development of the child. She lays the foundation of a stable and civilised society, as the seeds of goodness and righteousness are sown in the home itself. She is the very first teacher and the lessons learnt in the lap of the mother remain ingrained forever in the psyche of the child.

Finally, the most glorious, was 'Desha mata' or the 'Motherland' - the giver of our national identity and culture, who is worthy of the most supreme sacrifice. The names of those who surrendered their mind, body and soul for the wellbeing and protection of their country are engraved in gold in the hearts of men forever. The glory of the motherland should be the end of all our endeavours and efforts, was the teaching of this last portion. When the play concluded, the audience cheered heartily for the noble theme and splendid performance.

By way of this play, the Bal Vikas children had successfully reminded the audience that we are eternally indebted to each of these Mothers to whom we owe our very existence, and to fulfil our debts to them is our supreme duty. The deep-seated impact of the play was obvious in the faces that filled the auditorium.

More Tributes to Bal Vikas

At the close, Etnsa, who was also a dance participant, expressed her confidence that Swami will always be there to guide her. Her mother, Mrs. Sunita said, "I am lost for words. This year's programme was so well organized and disciplined with a moving storyline. Bal Vikas works miraculous improvements on my children. I can see their positive change in academics and attitude."

Prachi, studying in grade V at Queens Mary's School, who danced in the play said, "I thoroughly enjoyed the practice sessions. I felt Swami's Love continuously." Her mother, Mrs. Kiran, who is an associate guru, delivered a fitting testimonial to Bal Vikas, when she said, "It is Prachi whose conduct at home inspired me to join Bal Vikas, and get the Blessings of Swami. She is so loving, so caring and so devoted to Bhagavan - and at this age!"

Another Bal Vikas guru present there, summarising her feelings, said,

"The most powerful gifts of Bal Vikas are a focused awareness and the beauty of a life suffused with values. Bal Vikas is like a protective ring around the

child, which enables a life of harmony within and with others. The child gains experiential understanding of the power of value-based living through the Nine Point Code of Conduct, Ten Fold Path to Divinity, practising compassion and talking sweetly. Bal Vikas activities deepen the child's connectivity with divinity. All the children find they are more joyful and at peace; they naturally wish to share this with others, and so, without trying, they live out Swami's teaching: Love All Serve All."

The wonderful day of May 6, 2008 in Delhi left an indelible imprint in the hearts of everyone present that sacred evening. It was a befitting celebration of Mother Easwaramma and the Divine Mother Sai, the eternal guardian, guide and the goal of all. It demonstrated what proper care and nurturing, in an environment of love and harmony, can do to blossom young hearts. It gave hope, joy and a glimpse of the Golden Age, which is sure to come, when children learn to live for others more and themselves less, as they grow into adulthood – into mature personalities and responsible citizens.

Today, several generations of men and women are able to live fuller, more meaningful lives, thanks to the values education that the Bal Vikas movement has conferred upon them, infusing them with confidence and calm. The program has its source in the wisdom and the vision of the greatest teacher of all times, the perfect exemplar of the five values himself, a life coach to millions – Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. To the noble mother who bestowed the gift of His sacred presence on the planet, the Bal Vikas movement everywhere is eternally beholden. *Vande Matram!*

GET INSPIRED

THE LITTLE GIRL'S WISH

As Amy Hagadorn rounded the corner across the hall from her classroom, she collided with a tall boy from the fifth grade running in the opposite direction.

"Watch it, squirt," the boy yelled, as he dodged around the little third grader. Then, with a smirk on his face, the boy took hold of his right leg and mimicked the way Amy limped when she walked.

Amy closed her eyes for a moment. Ignore him, she told herself as she headed for her classroom. But at the end of the day, Amy was still thinking about the tall boy's mean teasing. It wasn't as if he were the only one. It seemed that ever since Amy started the third grade, someone teased her every single day. Kids teased her about her speech or her limping. Amy was tired of it. Sometimes, even in a classroom full of other students, the teasing made her feel all alone.

Back home at the dinner table that evening Amy was quiet. Her mother knew that things were not going well at school. That's why Patti Hagadorn was happy to have some exciting news to share with her daughter.

"There's a Christmas Wish Contest on the radio station," Amy's mom announced. *"Write a letter to Santa and you might win a prize. I think someone at this table with blond curly hair should enter."*

Amy giggled. The contest sounded like fun. She started thinking about what she wanted most for Christmas. A smile took hold of Amy when the idea first came to her. Out came pencil and paper and Amy went to work on her letter. *"Dear Santa Claus,"* she began.

While Amy worked away at her best printing, the rest of the family tried to guess what she might ask from Santa. Amy's sister, Jamie, and Amy's mom, both thought a 3-foot Barbie Doll would top Amy's wish list. Amy's dad guessed a picture book. But Amy wasn't ready to reveal her secret Christmas wish just then. Here is Amy's letter to Santa, just as she wrote it that night:

Dear Santa Claus,

My name is Amy. I am 9 years old. I have a problem at school. Can you help me, Santa? Kids laugh at me because of the way I walk and run and talk. I have cerebral palsy. I just want one day where no one laughs at me or makes fun of me.

Love, Amy

At radio station WJLT in Fort Wayne, Indiana, letters poured in for the Christmas Wish Contest. The workers had fun reading about all the different presents that boys and girls from across the city wanted for Christmas.

When Amy's letter arrived at the radio station, manager Lee Tobin read it carefully. He knew cerebral palsy was a muscle disorder that might confuse the schoolmates of Amy who didn't understand her disability. He thought it would be good for the people in Fort Wayne to hear about this special third grader and her unusual wish. Mr. Tobin called up the local newspaper.

The next day, a picture of Amy and her letter to Santa made the front page of The News Sentinel. The story spread quickly. All across the country, newspapers and radio and television stations reported the story of the little girl in Fort Wayne, Indiana, who asked for such a simple, yet remarkable, Christmas gift - just one day without teasing.

Suddenly the postman was a regular at the Hagadorn house. Envelopes of all sizes addressed to Amy arrived daily from children and adults all across the nation. They came filled with holiday greetings and words of encouragement.

During that unforgettable Christmas season, over two thousand people from all over the world sent Amy letters of friendship and support. Amy and her family read every single one. Some of the writers had disabilities; some had been teased as children. Each writer had a special message for Amy. Through the cards and letters from strangers, Amy glimpsed a world full of people who truly cared about each other. She realized that no amount or form of teasing could ever make her feel lonely again.

Many people thanked Amy for being brave enough to speak up. Others encouraged her to ignore teasing and to carry her head high. Lynn, a sixth grader from Texas, sent this message:

"I would like to be your friend," she wrote, "and if you want to visit me, we could have fun. No one would make fun of us, cause, if they do, we will not even hear them."

Amy did get her wish of a special day without teasing at South Wayne Elementary School. Additionally, everyone at school got an added bonus. Teachers and students talked together about how bad teasing can make others feel.

That year, the Fort Wayne mayor officially proclaimed December 21st as *Amy Jo Hagadorn Day* throughout the city. The mayor explained that by daring to make such a simple wish, Amy taught a universal lesson.

"Everyone," said the mayor, "wants and deserves to be treated with respect, dignity and warmth."

By Alan D. Shultz

THE RED MAHOGANY PIANO

Many years ago, when I was a young man in my twenties, I worked as a salesman for a St. Louis piano company. We sold our pianos all over the state by advertising in small town newspapers and then, when we had received sufficient replies, we would load our little trucks, drive into the area and sell the pianos to those who had replied.

Every time we would advertise in the cotton country of Southeast Missouri, we would receive a reply on a postcard which said, in effect, "Please bring me a new piano for my little granddaughter. It must be red mahogany. I can pay \$10 a month with my egg money."

The old lady scrawled on and on and on that postcard until she filled it up, then turned it over and even wrote on the front — around and around the edges until there was barely room for the address. Of course, we could not sell a new piano for \$10 a month. No finance company would carry a contract with payments that small, so we ignored her postcards.

One day, however, I happened to be in that area calling on other replies, and out of curiosity I decided to look the old lady up. I found pretty much what I expected: The old lady lived in a one room sharecroppers cabin in the middle of a cotton field. The cabin had a dirt floor and there were chickens in the house.

Obviously, the old lady could not have qualified to purchase anything on credit — no car, no phone, no real job, nothing but a roof over her head and not a very good one at that. I could see daylight through it in several places. Her little granddaughter was about 10, barefoot and wearing a feedsack dress.

I explained to the old lady that we could not sell a new piano for \$10 a month and that she should stop writing to us every time she saw our ad. I drove away heartsick, but my advice had no effect — she still sent us the same post card every six weeks. Always wanting a new piano, red mahogany, please, and swearing she would never miss a \$10 payment. It was sad.

A couple of years later, I owned my own piano company, and when I advertised in that area, the postcards started coming to me. For months, I ignored them — what else could I do?

But then, one day when I was in the area something came over me. I had a red mahogany piano on my little truck. Despite knowing that I was about to make a terrible business decision, I delivered the piano to her and told her I would carry the contract myself at \$10 a month with no interest, and that would mean 52 payments.

I took the new piano in the house and placed it where I thought the roof would be least likely to rain on it. I admonished her and the little girl to try to keep the chickens off of it, and I left — sure I had just thrown away a new piano. But the payments came in, all 52 of them as agreed -- sometimes with coins taped

to a 3x5 inch card in the envelope. It was incredible! So, I put the incident out of my mind for 20 years.

Then one day I was in Memphis on other business, and after dinner at the Holiday Inn on the Levee, I went into the lounge. As I was sitting at the bar having an after dinner drink, I heard the most beautiful piano music behind me. I looked around, and there was a lovely young woman playing a very nice grand piano.

Being a pianist of some ability myself, I was stunned by her virtuosity, and I picked up my drink and moved to a table beside her where I could listen and watch. She smiled at me, asked for requests, and when she took a break she sat down at my table. "Aren't you the man who sold my grandma a piano a long time ago?"

It didn't ring a bell, so I asked her to explain. She started to tell me, and I suddenly remembered. My Lord, it was her! It was the little barefoot girl in the feedsack dress!

She told me her name was Elise and since her grandmother couldn't afford to pay for lessons, she had learned to play by listening to the radio. She said she had started to play in church where she and her grandmother had to walk over two miles, and that she had then played in school, had won many awards and a music scholarship. She had married an attorney in Memphis and he had bought her that beautiful grand piano she was playing.

Something else entered my mind. "Elise," I asked, "It's a little dark in here. What color is that piano?" "It's red mahogany," she said, "Why?"

I couldn't speak. Did she understand the significance of the red mahogany? The unbelievable audacity of her grandmother insisting on a red mahogany piano when no one in his right mind would have sold her a piano of any kind? I think not.

And then the marvelous accomplishment of that beautiful, terribly underprivileged child in the feedsack dress? No, I'm sure she didn't understand that either. But I did, and my throat tightened. Finally, I found my voice. "I just wondered," I said. "I'm proud of you, but I have to go to my room." And I did have to go to my room, because men don't like to be seen crying in public.

By Joe Edwards

THE CAB RIDE

Twenty years ago, I drove a cab for a living. It was a cowboy's life, a life for someone who wanted no boss. What I did not realize was that it was also a ministry. Because I drove the night shift, my cab became a moving confessional. Passengers climbed in, sat behind me in total anonymity, and told me about their lives.

I encountered people whose lives amazed me, ennobled me, made me laugh and weep. But none touched me more than a woman I picked up late one August night.

I was responding to a call from a small brick fourplex in a quiet part of town. I assumed I was being sent to pick up some people who had been partying, or someone who had just had a fight with a lover, or a worker heading to an early shift at some factory for the industrial part of town. When I arrived at 2:30 a.m., the building was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window.

Under such circumstances, many drivers just honk once or twice, wait a minute, then drive away. But I had seen too many impoverished people who depended on taxis as their only means of transportation. Unless a situation smelled of danger, I always went to the door.

This passenger might be someone who needs my assistance, I reasoned to myself. So I walked to the door and knocked. "Just a minute," answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor. After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 80s stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940s movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase.

The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

"Would you carry my bag out to the car?" she said. I took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman. She took my arm, and we walked slowly toward the curb.

She kept thanking me for my kindness. "It's nothing," I told her. "I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother treated." "Oh, you're such a good boy," she said.

When we got in the cab, she gave me an address, then asked, "Can you drive through downtown?" "It's not the shortest way," I answered quickly. "Oh, I don't mind," she said. "I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice." I looked in the rearview mirror. Her eyes were glistening. "I don't have any family left," she continued. "The doctor says I don't have very long." I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. "What route would you like me to take?" I asked.

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator. We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl.

Sometimes she'd ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing. As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now."

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico. Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her.

I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

"How much do I owe you?" she asked, reaching into her purse. "Nothing," I said.

"You have to make a living," she answered. "There are other passengers," I responded.

Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly. "You gave an old woman a little moment of joy," she said. "Thank you."

I squeezed her hand, then walked into the dim morning light. Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly, lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away? On a quick review, I don't think that I have done anything more important in my life.

We're conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments. But great moments often catch us unaware; beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one.

By Kent Nerburn

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

QUESTIONS ON RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS OF THE WORLD

Swami has always declared the same profound Truth: "You may call Him by any name, be it Jesus, Buddha, Allah, Rama, Krishna; God is one. *Ek prabhu ke anek naam* (one God has many names), if you understand this Truth, you will realize that all are Divine." Each religion has its own symbols and their connotations. Let's explore a few and test ourselves.

1. There are several different Christian crosses that are symbols for different Christian groups or persons. A cross with the body of Jesus on it is called a

- A. Jerusalem Cross
- B. Crosier
- C. Cross of Sacrifice
- D. Crucifix

2. **Om** (also spelled **Aum**) is a Hindu sacred sound that is considered the greatest of all mantras. The syllable Om is composed of the **three sounds** a-u-m (in Sanskrit, the vowels a and u combine to become o) and the symbol's threefold nature is central to its meaning. It represents several important triads: the three worlds - earth, atmosphere, and heaven; the three major Hindu Gods - Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva; and the three sacred Vedic scriptures - Rig, Yajur, and Sama.

Thus, 'Om' mystically embodies the essence of the entire Universe. This meaning is further deepened by the Indian philosophical belief that God first created sound, and the Universe arose from it. As the most sacred sound, 'Om' is the root of the Universe and everything that exists, and it continues to hold everything together.

How many times does Swami recommend the chanting of the 'Om' mantra?

- A. 11
- B. 21
- C. 51
- D. 108

3. The symbol 'Ek Onkar' is an emblem of the Sikh religion and is found on Gurdwaras (Sikh temples). The symbol is derived from the Sanskrit OM, as written in the Gurumukhi script.

What does 'Ek Onkar' mean?

- A. God is always Omnipresent.
- B. Always speak the Truth.
- C. God is One.
- D. Love All, Serve All.

4. The emblem of the Jain religion, symbolizes its main tenet, the doctrine of **Ahimsa**, nonviolence. The wheel in the center of the palm is the wheel of *Samsara*; the word in the center of the wheel reads "stop." Together, they represent the halting of the cycle of reincarnation through the practice of Jain asceticism, the avoidance of harm to any living creature.

In making us realize how important the message of Ahimsa is, Swami teaches love, especially in today's world. Swami often says: "The earlier Avatars used weapons to vanquish evil but this Avatar will use only **love**."

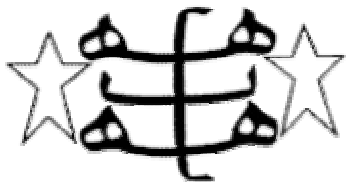
According to Swami, *Ahimsa* (non-injury) is another facet of _____.

- A. Truth
- B. Discrimination
- C. Sacrifice
- D. Charity

5. '*Bismillah*' in Arabic means, literally, 'In the Name of Allah.' This phrase is one of great importance in Islam. It is the opening phrase of the Koran and heads every chapter therein: '*Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*' – meaning 'in the name of Allah, most Gracious, and most Compassionate.'

In daily living, when is it spoken mostly?

- A. After bath.
- B. Before sunrise.
- C. Before undertaking a number of activities.
- D. Before going to bed.



6.

For Bahá'ís, in particular, this is the symbol that is a reminder of God's purpose for man. The three levels of the design represent:



The world of God, the Creator,



The world of His Manifestations,



The world of man.



What does the vertical line represent?

- A. Awareness of the world of God.
- B. Commitment to the world of God.
- C. The link between the world of God and the world of man.
- D. Eternal relation between God and His Manifestations.

7. In Buddhist symbolism, the Dharma wheel (Sanskrit: *dharma chakra*), also known as the 'Wheel of Dharma' is a symbol representing *dharma* (law) in the Buddha's teaching of the path to enlightenment. The overall shape of the *Dharma chakra* symbol is that of a circle (*chakra*), representing the perfection of the *dharma* teaching. The hub stands for discipline, which is the essential core of meditation practice. The rim, which holds the spokes, refers to mindfulness or *samadhi* which holds everything together.

What do the spokes in the chariot wheel represent?

- A. Inspiring sincerity.
- B. Diminishing the ego.
- C. Invoking discipline.
- D. The cutting of ignorance.

8. The **Faravahar**, or **Farohar**, which is one of the best-known symbols of Zoroastrianism, is to remind one of the purpose of life on this earth, which is to live in such a way that the soul progresses spiritually and attains union with **Ahura-Mazda** (the Wise Lord); this state is called *Frasho-kereti* in Avesta.

The Fravahar's face resembles the face of human being, and therefore, indicates its connection to mankind. In the center of the figure is a circle. What does this circle signify?

- A. God's Aura of protection.
- B. The Soul of the individual.
- C. Man's eternal quest for union with God.
- D. The circle of life.

9. '*Chai*' – pronounced *xai* - occasionally is a symbol and word that figures prominently in Jewish culture, and consists of two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which mean 'living', and hence, it reflects Judaism's focus on the importance of life.

What according to the system of gematria – the numerology of the Hebrew language - do the letters of *chai* add up to?

- A. 9
- B. 11
- C. 18
- D. 21

10. A ***Torii*** is commonly found at the entry to a Shinto shrine. 'Torii' mark the entrance to sacred spaces in Japan. Passing underneath a torii on the way to visit a shrine is, along with washing one's hands and mouth with water, an act of sanctification and purification before approaching the *kami* (gods) to pray.

What is a Torri?

- A. Gate
- B. Statue
- C. Flag
- D. Gong

ANSWERS

1D. Crucifix.

The Christian cross is the main symbol of the Christian religion. The empty cross, usually favored by Protestants, reminds Christians of the Resurrection, while the Crucifix, with Jesus on it, favored by Catholic and Orthodox churches, is a reminder of Christ's sacrifice. Jesus, who Christians believe is their Messiah, was crucified (nailed to a large wooden cross). This was one commonly used method for killing people in Roman times. Christians believe that Jesus' death made the sins of all humans who trust in him disappear, and that they are forgiven. They also believe that Jesus was resurrected (came back to life) after three days. Because of this, the cross is a symbol for Jesus' sacrifice and suffering, but also a symbol of hope, forgiveness of sins, and victory over death.

In 1973, interestingly on Mahashivarathri Day, Swami created a crucifix for Dr. Hislop, deep in the forest! He said, "This shows Christ as he really was at the

time he left his body, not as artists have imagined him. His stomach is pulled in and his ribs are all showing. He had no food for eight days."

2B. 21 times.

Swami says: "The sound of 'OM' is 'AUM'. 'A' starts softly from the throat. It is the earth. 'U' comes from the mouth and the sound rises in volume. 'M' is sounded with the lips, with decreasing volume. Like a plane, heard distantly, increasing in sound as it approaches and fading with distance. 'A' is the world. 'U' is heaven. 'M' is divine, beyond all the senses.

OM is in every place, mind, tongue, heart etc. First sound OM on the tongue and then in the mind. **The sounding of OM 21 times is important**; five outer senses, five inner senses, five lives (the five elements), five sheaths (the kosas), and the Jiva."

3C. God is One.

According to the Sikh religion, 'Ek Onkar' means 'God is One' and relates to the Sikh belief in the unity of God, signifying - there is, but one God; He is Truth by Name; the Creator, All-Pervading Spirit, without fear, without enmity, whose existence is unaffected by time, who does not take birth, self-existent, who is to be realized through His Grace.

4A. Truth.

Swami says: "*Ahimsa* (non-injury) is another phase of *Sathya*; Truth. When once you are aware of the kinship, the Oneness in God, the fundamental *Aatmic* unity - no one will knowingly cause pain or distress to another.

5C. Before undertaking a number of activities.

"*Bismillah*" is spoken as a gesture of respect and acknowledgement before undertaking a number of activities, including prayer, eating, and as a general expression of sincerity.

6C. The link between the world of God and the world of man.

The vertical line joins the three horizontal bars together in the same way that the Divine Messengers of God form the link between the world of God and the

world of man. The twin five-pointed stars on either side of the design represent the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, the twin Messengers of God. This symbol can be found in the architecture of the Shrine of the Báb.

7D. The cutting of ignorance.

The *Dharma chakra* symbol, which is represented as a chariot wheel, has eight or more spokes which are said to have sharp edges to cut through ignorance.

Swami has often guided us: "If you want to attain divinity, you have to practice *dharma*. Buddha said non-violence is the greatest *dharma*. Love will be fostered only when non-violence is practiced. When love is fostered, there will be peace in the world. When there is peace in the world, man will naturally take to the path of *dharma*. When man follows the path of *dharma*, he will attain Truth. It is, therefore, the primary duty of every man to foster these life principles."

8B. The Soul of the individual.

The circle represents the soul of the individual. For the soul to evolve and progress, it has two wings. In each wing there are five layers of feathers. These remind one of the five layers with which the soul is linked. To achieve the ultimate goal of reaching Ahura-Mazda, the soul has to pass through all the layers.

In nature, there exist two opposing forces: the good mind and the wicked mind. A continuous conflict goes on in nature between these two. A person's soul is caught between the two, and is pulled by each from side to side. The two long curved legs on either side of the circle represent these two forces.

To help the soul balance itself between these two forces, the soul is given a rudder in the form of a tail. This tail has three layers of feathers, which reminds one of the path of *Asha* - ***Humata*** (Good Thoughts), ***Hukhta*** (Good Words), and ***Hvarasta*** (Good Deeds), or ***Manashni***, ***Gavashni***, and ***Kunashni*** by which the soul is able to make its own spiritual progress.

The head of the figure reminds us that Ahura-Mazda has given every soul free will to choose either to obey divine universal natural laws or to disobey them. The figure also has a pair of hands which hold a circular ring. The ring symbolizes the cycles of rebirths on this earth and other planes which the soul has to undergo to make progress on the path of *Asha*. If these divine laws are obeyed through ***Manashni***, ***Gavashni***, and ***Kunashni***, our soul will be able to attain union with Ahura-Mazda. This far-off event, towards which the whole of creation moves, is called *Frasho-kereti*.

9C. 18.

There have been various mystical numerological speculations about the fact that, according to the system of gematria, the letters of *chai* add up to 18.

For this reason, 18 is a lucky number in Judaism, and many Jews give gifts of money in multiples of 18 as a result.

10A. Gate.

A torii is a traditional Japanese gate. As Shinto is a religion of worship of nature spirits, or *Kami*, most Shinto shrines are located outdoors. The Gate marks the gateway between the physical and spiritual worlds, and is often the only indication that one is entering a shrine.

The Torii is traditionally made in three pieces, three being a sacred number of the *Kami*. When entering a shrine, a visitor will clap their hands three times, and bow three times to summon the spirits.

QUIZ ON DIVINE SUMMER SHOWER DISCOURSES

Often Swami has referred to students as 'His properties'. In one of His Summer Shower Discourses, Swami says, "Vidhyarthi (student) is the one who contributes substantially to the welfare and the well being of society. He is: vidya + arthi, a true seeker of learning. Students should realize that their life span is fast melting away like ice, whether they care to improve or not. The life a person lives as a student is the foundation for the life he will lead later as a citizen. It is only when a student lives a life characterized by peace and self-control that he will have a peaceful and contented life later as a citizen."

1. In His Divine Summer Shower Discourse in 1972, Swami exhorted students with the message:

"The end of wisdom is freedom.
The end of culture is perfection.
The end of knowledge is love.
The end of education is character."

"There is a desire on the part of all of us to acquire these four qualities, namely, wisdom, culture, knowledge, and education, and reach their ends, namely, freedom, perfection, love, and character. But students should realize that if these qualities are not properly utilized, then they cannot call themselves students. As students and future citizens of this country, you have the responsibility for shaping the future of this country. Put your hearts on the right path by listening attentively to the more experienced men.... Those students who are here should not regard this as a month of holidays but should regard it as one of holy days. It is possible during this one month; there may be certain inconveniences you have to put up with..._____ is the first step in self-realisation."

What is the first step in self-realisation that Swami advised to the participants of the summer course in 1972?

- A. Study with concentration.
- B. Bear hardships with equanimity.
- C. Help fellow-students.
- D. Do spiritual exercises.

2. Bhagavan often talks about the three D's. "Students must necessarily have three essential qualities - _____, devotion and duty. It is only when the students have these three qualities, that they will become useful to society. Every student is neglecting these three important qualities. He is behaving in a manner which makes others feel that he is – **(???? is what)** only after getting higher degrees like M.A. or M.Sc. This can also be summed up by saying that he is running after the so-called higher knowledge, not caring for

general knowledge. If one does not possess ordinary common sense, however much he may think himself to be educated; he will have to be equated to an illiterate person.”

What is that first ‘D’ quality that Swami was speaking to the students about?

- A. Dignity
- B. Discipline
- C. Diligence
- D. Dispassion

3. In His goal to make students become spiritually and mentally stronger, Swami explains: “It is the duty of every young student to recognize every bad idea or thought that sprouts in his mind and exterminate it completely. Mind is like a mad monkey and you should not surrender to it. You should control the mind and keep it under your direction. You should not be prepared to yield to all the desires that sprout in your mind. As soon as a thought comes into your mind, you should examine whether it is a good thought or a bad thought. For example, let us look at a piece of cloth. In reality, it is a bundle of threads; and if you examine it more carefully, you will say that it is just cotton. The first stage is cotton, the second stage is thread, and the final stage is the cloth. What would you do if you do not like this cloth? You remove the threads one by one and the cloth will not be there. In the same manner, mind does not have any specific form. It is simply _____”

- A. A bundle of desires.
- B. An aimless slave.
- C. A demanding master.
- D. An illusion.

4. In His Divine 1978 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami helps students learn the value of good conduct with a practical example: “Every student should shape himself as an ideal example. I have told you many times that a damaged car which comes for repair and replacement of various parts like nuts, bolts, screws, etc., should, after repair, be in a good condition when it is sent back home. In a similar manner, you have all come here with the need for repair. You have come here a month ago as a damaged car. You have been repaired in this workshop and your old and mean ideas have been replaced. When you go back to your homes, you should try to move the car of your life with clean ideas and good conduct. You should no longer have evil vision, faulty words or bad thoughts. You should do good work and set yourself as an example to others. If after going home, you still conduct yourself with the same old bad habits, what is the benefit of coming to the summer classes? You will also be setting a bad example to your friends. You will have lost all goodwill. Your time, effort and physical strength will have been wasted and become unsacred.”

What does Swami expect students to do with the teachings, after the Summer Shower course?

- A. Become bal-vikas teachers and teach what they have learnt.
- B. Practise more *Naamasmarana* and *Bhajans* in Sai Centres.
- C. Put them into practice for the rest of their lives.
- D. Open more charitable organizations in His Name.

5. In 1979, Swami purports to the students the reason for the Summer Courses: "It is to impart to you such wholesome ideas and to enrich your value systems that the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust has been conducting these summer courses."

While teaching values, Swami compares human life to a tree. What is the root of this special tree?

- A. Self-control.
- B. Self-awareness.
- C. Self-respect.
- D. Self-confidence.

6. In His Divine 1990 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami makes students realize: "Whether one is a reputed scholar, an eminent scientist, or a great administrator, the development of human qualities is most essential for everyone. The development of society, the state, and the nation is proportionate to the development of *manavatvam* or the human state. If human qualities are lost, the honour of society and the nation will be lost."

According to Swami, on which sublime quality does the honour of mankind depend?

- A. Tolerance and discrimination.
- B. Unity by co-operation.
- C. Morality and integrity.
- D. Generosity and magnanimity.

7. In His Divine, 1993 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami expresses His point poetically:

"Education teaches humility.
Humility grants deservedness.
Deservedness bestows wealth.
Wealth facilitates acts of *dharma*.
Dharma grants fulfillment here and hereafter."

Swami corrects a misnomer: "Many people have mistaken 'dharma' for _____."

- A. Rules in society.
- B. Laws of Nature.
- C. God's Commandments.
- D. Religion.

8. In His Divine 1995 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami emphasises: "You can achieve whatever you desire! Students should cultivate such determination. Without determination, you cannot achieve anything. Don't say, 'I will try.' Say, 'I must do!' Don't even use the word 'try'. If you say 'try', _____! So say, 'I must do.'"

- A. You will 'cry'!
- B. It will be 'dry'!
- C. Everyone will 'sigh'!
- D. Life won't allow you to go 'high'!

9. In His Divine 1996 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami guides students by asking them to face reality: "Students should realize that their life span is fast melting away like ice, whether they care to improve or not. Students of today are blind to the goal of life. Modern education does not confer any value on man. Even the rich meaning of a word like *vidya* has lost its pristine glory. The syllables *vid* and *ya* are laden with significant meaning. *vid* means 'light' and *ya* means 'that'. Hence, *vidya* means 'that which lends light.'"

What path does Swami propound for students to excel in their education?

- A. Determination.
- B. Strive for First Class.
- C. Spirituality.
- D. Sharing talents and skills.

10. In His Divine 1990 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami clarifies to the students that while He stresses on the importance of spiritual education, He does not misguide that they should give up secular learning. On the contrary, He says: "Along with it, you should try to acquire the knowledge of that which is real and everlasting. How many have not acquired high educational qualifications, name and fame? But how transient and fleeting are such things! The body itself is impermanent. However, even when the body perishes, our *samskaras* (accumulated mental impressions) will remain with us permanently. We should remember that we should live not for the sake of *annam* (food), but for the sake of _____"

- A. Ideals.
- B. Building peaceful relationships.
- C. Fulfillment of personal goals.
- D. Betterment of society.

ANSWERS

1B. Bear hardships with equanimity.

To the participants, Swami said: "Those students who are here should not regard this as a month of holidays but should regard it as one of holy days. It is possible during this one month; there may be certain inconveniences you have to put up with. The food and comfort may not suit you. **You have to bear all this and bear it with pleasure, because such a training is essential in your lives. This discipline is, in fact, the first step in self-realization.** The reason why I have called this the first step during your training is that today there are a large number of people who cannot put up with difficulties and inconveniences, and yet, wish to achieve bigger and more subtle things. This study and discipline, to which you will submit your-selves, will lead you to happiness and bliss. If you cannot put up with small difficulties, how will you be shaping into people who are to rectify social evils? Some day or other difficulties are going to come your way. So also sorrow and great inconveniences are going to come your way. It is much better to stand firm and know what those difficulties are when you are young. **Then you will be able to withstand such difficulties in your later lives with some ease.** In this summer course, you must take various difficulties you come across as part of your education and put up with them cheerfully.

2B. Discipline.

On revealing the consequence of in-discipline, in His Divine 1973 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami reminded students: "**If there is no sense of discipline,** if one acquires proficiency in English education alone, and if one is not educated in matters relating to the *Atma* or the self, **the only result of such education will be slavery.**"

3A. A bundle of desires.

In His Divine 1976 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami explains further: "Mind does not have any specific form. It is simply a bundle of desires. These desires themselves come from the thoughts of your mind which can be compared to the cotton. Thus the three stages are the cotton or the thoughts, the thread or the desires, and finally the desires constitute the mind which is the cloth in this analogy. So we must try to diminish these desires as far as possible. These desires are like heavy luggage in the journey of your life. The journey of life for the youth is a very long one. **If you want to make your**

journey a comfortable one, you will have to make your luggage less; and this bundle of desires is your luggage."

4C. Put them into practice for the rest of their lives.

Swami explains: "Students, **what you have learnt, acquired and seen here during the past one month should be put into practice for the rest of your life.** Many things which you should know and which you should accept in practice for your daily life have been taught to you in the last month. You should not think that the summer classes have come to an end. The education that you have to get is a continuous and life long one. Do not have the thought that from tomorrow we are bidding you farewell. This place always welcomes sacred ideas and sacred thoughts. If you have imprinted in your heart, the experiences that you have had here, the good that you have acquired here will always be with you. Spiritual aspects are well above worldly affairs. Wherever you go, the experience that you have had here will come to you in good stead and help you whenever you need them. Many elders have told you about ideals, and you should attempt to put them into practice."

5D. Self-confidence.

Swami gives an example: "Human life is comparable to a tree and the kinsmen of the individual to its branches. On these branches the flowers of his thoughts and feelings blossom. These flowers gradually develop into fruits of good qualities and virtues. The nectarine juice present in these fruits is character. Without roots and fruits, a tree is mere firewood. **Self-confidence is the root of the tree of life and character, its fruit.**"

6C. Morality and Integrity.

Swami expounds: "**The honour of mankind depends on its morality and integrity.** It is essential for the students of today to foster the human qualities. The human values can progress and thrive only in a spiritual environment. It is only when seeds are sown in the soil and watered regularly that they will sprout and develop into big trees that yield good fruits. Instead of this, if the seeds are kept in a tin and watered, they will only rot and perish. Likewise, morality and integrity can thrive only in the human heart. Morality is the fulfillment of character and conduct. Morality elevates man to a higher level....

Morality and integrity alone are the real and eternal temples of God. In the absence of morality, the human race will go to rack and ruin. Today, the supreme need of this country and the world is morality. It is extremely necessary to observe morality in all places and in all situations."

7D. Religion.

Bhagavan clarifies: "There is no word which can successfully convey the depth and the amplitude of meaning contained in the word 'Dharma'. Words like 'Right action and righteous living' are only translations which do no justice to the original meaning. Only 'Dharma' is the equivalent of the word 'Dharma.' **Many people have mistaken 'dharma' for religion. But 'religion' does not convey the infinitude of meaning latent in the word 'dharma.'** Dharma is an ocean whereas religion is a lake. While the scope and significance of a religion is confined to a certain number of people following a certain creed, 'dharma' is universal in scope, transcending race and religion. Dharma belongs to all rights and dharma are related. When the parents discharge their dharma, the rights of the children grow; when the children perform their dharma, the rights of the parents grow. Similarly when the teachers discharge their duties, the rights of the students will grow. When the students discharge their duties properly, the rights of the teachers will grow.

What is the essential dharma of a student? Self-respect, self-confidence, selflessness and self-support constitute the dharma of a student. Students should acquire self-respect which in turn enables them to cultivate self-sacrifice. It is only the person who performs self-sacrifice can acquire self-satisfaction."

8B. It will be 'dry'!

Swami prods: **"If you say 'try', it will be 'dry'!** So say, 'I must do'. You will ruin your minds with unlimited desire. It is normal to have ambitions, but ensure that your ideals are pure. Note the difference between desires (*aasa*) and ideals (*aasaya*). It does not matter if desires are not realized, but take care that ideals are never violated. Students should be disciplined. Without discipline, life becomes an animal's existence. Cultivate discipline in your daily lives and become ideal men and women."

9C. Spirituality.

Expanding students' minds with His enlightening wisdom, Swami reveals: "The present educational system keeps us in darkness instead of shedding illumination. True education is that which is in consonance with the *vedic* statement, *Tamasoma jyotirgamaya* (Lead me from darkness to light). But today's education-systems, instead of dispelling the darkness of ignorance, have made the students blind and deaf. Students have eyes, but they do not see. They have ears, but they do not hear. They have minds, but they are as deficient as the mentally-deranged. One has lost faith in one's own eyes, ears and mind. Man has begun to deceive himself. Today he sees with the eyes of others, hears with the ears of others and thinks with the minds of others. How can such a man be called human, when he has lost faith in his own eyes and ears and in himself? What can such a man achieve in life?

Unfortunately, today he seeks sensual pleasures instead of seeking true learning. Why should such students enter educational institutions, which are temples of learning? Education today is mistaken for bookish learning. **It is spirituality that lends excellence to education. Education devoid of spirituality is an utter waste."**

10A. Ideals.

Swami elaborates: **"We should remember that we should live not for the sake of *annam* (food), but for the sake of *adarsham* (ideal). Ideals are always supreme and everlasting. If one person becomes an ideal, he can influence the lives of many others for the better.** It is better to live like the swan for one year than to live like the crow for hundred years. It is enough if you live even for ten years as ideal students. To lead an ideal life, it is essential to have love of the nation and love of the Spirit (*Atma*), as well as love and respect for parents.

Students should learn how to harmonize our ancient culture and tradition with the needs of the modern world and to lead lives governed by truth and righteousness. Position or power is not important. They are transient like the passing clouds. One should not be proud of one's wealth, progeny, or youthful vigour. They may all disappear in a moment. Adolescence is a very precious period in one's life. It should be rightly used. Once you waste this precious period, you cannot get it back later on; strive as you may, with all your effort."

QUIZ ON H2H

This quiz tests your recall powers from reading Heart2Heart. 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 the stories of His glory.

1. In our cover story 'God's Own Children' from the June 1st 2004 issue, we shared Swami's Love and ever-vigilant eye on His pride and joy – His students; especially the poor orphans.

On June 19th 2002, the festival of Guru Purnima, Swami inaugurated the fully completed Sathya Sai Nagar for destitute people to make them self-reliant. Today, the Sathya Sai Nagar is an ideal of community living. It is more or less an example of a self-sustained, self-sufficient village.

Every Thursday and Sunday, the boys come for *darshan*, and every time *prasadam* is distributed, Swami makes sure that they receive it. On one occasion, Swami was overseeing apples being distributed to these boys. One of the boys had already got an apple and not knowing this, the volunteer tried to give one more apple to him. The boy politely refused it, saying "Sir, I have already got one!" This did not escape the discerning eye of Swami and immediately He called the boy near Him.

What did Swami say after noticing that the boy refused the second apple?

- A. "Never refuse a *prasadam*!"
- B. "You will be promoted to next grade!"
- C. "Always speak the truth!"
- D. "Come to the interview room with your parents!"

2. In the article 'The Glimpse He Granted' from the June 1st 2004 issue, we shared the narration of an encounter that a student, B. Dutt, II B.Sc. (1987) of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning had with Swami when his family was called in for an interview.

"I went inside with bated breath and beating heart. As usual, groups of devotees were taken in by Bhagavan, into the inner interview room. I was relieved when our turn was over and Swami moved to distribute Vibhuti packets. Suddenly He halted. The expression on His countenance changed from Motherly Love to Fatherly sternness. He beckoned me back into the inner interview room, alone!

My hands would not stop shaking and my heartbeat raced beyond the range of my E.C.G. scale. He was already seated and commanded me to sit at His Feet. I sweated profusely. Then He asked me a question."

What did Swami ask him?

- A. "Do you believe in Swami or not?"
- B. "Do you want to study further or not?"
- C. "Do you want to marry the girl your parents chose or not?"
- D. "Do you want to sing bhajans or not?"

3. In the article 'A Room with a View' from the June 15th 2004 issue, we put forth a story of two men, both seriously ill, who occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end.

Every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. Days and weeks passed. One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep.

As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed.

What did the man see?

- A. It was raining too heavily to see anything!
- B. The window faced a blank wall.
- C. His view was blocked by an advertising hoarding!
- D. The hospital car park.

4. In 'The True Meaning of *Darshan*, *Sparshan* and *Sambashan*' from the June 1st 2004' issue, sharing his views, Prof. G. Venkataraman tells us that Swami reminds us ever so often; 'God is everywhere and is present all the time'. Thus, anyone can have the Darshan of God any time, any place. That is in fact what Swami actually expects of us – not to limit God to just one form but see Him everywhere in the Cosmos and in every living being.

Once, in a Discourse to the youth of Kerala, Swami said that "*Darshan* alone is not sufficient; we must have *Sparshan* [touch of the Divine] and *Sambhashan* [conversation with the Divine] also."

According to Swami, what does *Sparshan* do?

- A. Removes *Karma* [consequences of past actions].
- B. Increases our wealth.
- C. Annihilates the Ego.
- D. Promotes Wisdom.

5. In the article 'The Creator' from the June 15th 2004 issue, one of Swami's students shared his experiences with Swami, reiterating that there isn't a day that passes when Swami reinforces the principle of GOD – 'Generation, Organization and Destruction'.

Once, in a devotee's garden, Swami plucked a plum from a creeper! When Swami put the "plum" into the mouth of one of the boys and asked, "How does it taste?" What was his reply?

- A. "Like a pear!"
- B. "Like a tomato!"
- C. "Like *Vibhuti*!"
- D. "Like chocolate!"

ANSWERS

1C. "Always speak the truth!"

Swami said "Good Boy! Always speak the truth!" He waved His hand, materialized a gold chain and put it around the boy's neck. "Speak the truth always, and I shall give you everything you want!" He assured him. Imagine what an impact it would have made on the boy and the others watching the whole scene. Needless to say, only the Divine Mother Sai can do this in such a beautiful and loving way!

2A. "Do you believe in Swami or not?"

B. Dutt continued: "Swami asked me: 'Tell me! Do you believe in Swami or not?' (By now it had become a choice between wanting to believe in Swami or not). He then gave me an undeniable and incredible proof of His Omnipresence, of which even my own mother did not know. He told me how, utilizing my pocket money, I had gone to a Hindi movie, instead of attending school. He even told me the name of the film I had gone to, the name of the friend with whom I had gone, a Sarabjit Singh and even the amount of money I spent on '*samosas*' during the interval, which was incidentally Rs. 10/? This revelation jolted me into the realization of my aimless derogatory living and opened new vistas of a happy, joyful life, in which I have made and am making sincere efforts to transform myself."

3B. The window faced a blank wall.

It faced a blank wall. The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

Epilogue...

There is tremendous happiness in making others happy, despite our own situations. Shared grief is half the sorrow, but happiness when shared, is doubled. If you want to feel rich, just count all of the things you have that money can't buy.

4A. Removes *Karma* [consequences of past actions].

Prof. G.Venkataraman reminds us that Swami also says that *Sparshan* removes *Karma* [consequences of past actions], and *Sambhashan* removes *Sankatas* [difficulties].

"*Sparshan*, for most of us, means *Pada Namaskar*. When Swami brought the curtain down on *Pada Namaskar* some years ago, basically He asked, "Who is giving *Namaskar* to whom? You and I are One; so where is the question of My giving *Namaskar* to you?"

That remark sends a strong message: "Snap out of it and go beyond *Dvaitam* or duality to *Advaitam* or the non-dual state." We don't want to do that and wish to cling to the dual state but the Master would have none of that. So when we say denial, it simply means we want to be in the KG while our dear Lord and Master wants us to move on to a higher class.

Swami has also said: "Do you think you can get Liberation, just by touching My Feet? If it were so easy then every fly that sits on My Feet would get liberated!"

5D. "Like Chocolate!"

The student continued: "Swami turned His palm upwards and showed me a pair of fruits. He asked, "What is this?" I replied, "Swami, they are plums." Swami gave His sweet smile and said, "Do plums grow on creepers?"

Swami instructed the students to board the bus and Swami graciously joined us. As we started to move, He put the "Plum" into the mouth of one of the boys and asked, "How does it taste?" he replied, "Like chocolate and no seed!"

THE HEALING TOUCH

A STARFISH AND THE OCEAN

By Mr. Y. Arvind

The commercialization of the healthcare sector has dehumanized the practice of medicine to the extent that life and death decisions are governed by their billing potential and patients are identified by the disease rather than by any personal identification. While such an impersonal environment has rendered modern medical science as a commercial venture, Sri Sathya Sai Baba is redefining the very fundamental approach to patient care as service to God where love and empathy must be the sole currencies of trade.

When Mahesh was diagnosed with three complications of the heart, two of them major, and the other congenital, equally life-threatening, his father Parshivappa, a farmer, took him to state-funded hospitals, but found no sympathy or support. It is then that, by providence, he stepped into Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, Bangalore. Here is the touching tale of what happened next.

"Well, sister how many today?" I asked at the Nurse's desk of the CTVS (Cardiac Surgery) ward. "Three", replied the sister-in-charge, "Mahesh, Ashokan and Anoushika." I smiled to myself.

Turning, I caught the eye of the duty doctor. I wondered if he was having the same thoughts. I was smiling at the thought that generally once in a hospital, a person became a PDA (congenital heart illness), or an ASD (valve repair) or a Coronary (clogged arteries), not Mahesh, Ashokan and Anoushika. This is the uniqueness of the SSSIHMS, where we treat the patient, not just the disease. And it was not surprising to see the feeling percolate right down to the front lines. The duty doctor walked up with a smile on his tired face.

"Night duty, sir?" I asked, knowing the answer.

"Yes, finishing the morning rounds." He replied, then added, "What's new, Arvind?"

"Just came to find a new starfish, sir!" I replied.

"Starfish!?"

"Yes..." I gestured to the patients. "Starfish!"

"Oh! Starfish!" he exclaimed. "The old man and the little boy on the shores of the ocean? Those starfish?"

"Absolutely sir!"

Making an Ocean of Difference

Whoops! I seem to have got a bit carried away here. In the earnestness of giving you the exact repartee, I lost out on the main stuff. I was referring to the parable of an old man on the shores of a wide ocean. A little boy playing on the beach saw this solitary grey haired veteran walking on the sands close to

where the waves ebbed and flowed. Every few steps, the old man would pick up something and throw it back into the sea. The boy ran up and saw to his surprise that the old man was, in fact, throwing starfish back into the sea. His little brown eyes wide open, the boy asked,

"What are you doing, Grandpa?"

"What do you think?" replied the old-timer, a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Throwing... starfish... into the... sea?" asked the lad, scratching his head.

"Yup!"

"But, Grandpa, there are so many," the boy looked up and down the beach.

Hundreds of starfish lay beached on the sands at low tide. He bent down, picked up a small fish and threw it back; then another, and yet another. He stopped and looked up.

"Are you going to throw all of them in? The sea will drop them back again tomorrow at low tide. How many can we save?" he continued.

"What do you figure? Can we save all of them?" asked the old man sending an orange star splashing into deep blue.

"I guess not! Well! Not all of them anyway!"

The old man picked up another and sent it flying into the ocean.

"But definitely that one! Right!"

"Right!"

"You see, kid," he continued straightening his back with a sigh. **"It's not how many we were able to save, but the ones we have saved that matter."** He swept his gnarled palm expansively at the shore line and continued. "I may not be able to make a difference to all of them." He paused, picked up a starfish, flicked it out to sea and looked into innocent eyes, three score years younger, "But, it definitely makes a difference to that one..."

The sun sinking into a fiery red ocean smiled at the two figures throwing starfish into the sea.

The reason this story came to my mind was: To a clinician, patients get classified according to the seriousness of the malady. We think, "Yes, that's a major case; Oh! Yes, that is indeed a major case; that's a minor case..." But to the patients who are 'people' to whom even the thought of surgery is a nightmare, nothing is minor - to a man who knows he is going under a knife, albeit for his own benefit. Often we forget that the 'minor' cases too are as much 'major' as the 'major' ones.

These thoughts flashed across my mind as I looked into the mischievous eyes of a young lad grinning up at me with undisguised happiness.

A Starfish Worth Saving

"Why is he so happy?" I asked a nurse.

"He is being discharged today; he is going home!" she replied.

"I am going home!" echoed the boy, his eyes dancing with glee.

"Mahesh?" I queried arching my eyes at the nurse.

"My name is Mahesh!" butted in the lad, "My name is Mahesh!"

I could not but help joining him in the celebration of life. Full of zest for what the future held. The past behind him – he was 'okay' now. He was going home...I felt I had to know more about this little starfish. His smile was infectious... I felt, muscles that I had bunched unconsciously, relax.

"Who is with him?" I asked the sister.

"My father," piped up the little jack and scampered off only to return a few moments later, leading a short, trim man. The face was lined with many summers, forearms sinewy with hard physical work, the back was straight and well muscled. He walked with firm steps, a man who knew the vagaries of the earth. He smiled uncertainly, apparently unused to attention.

"Are you happy that your son is now okay?" I asked cutting to the chase.

"Why, of course! I am happy," he said, the smile growing broader.

"Would you like more people to be happy, the same as you? I would like to tell many others about your little boy. Do you have any objection if I do so?"

"Why should I have any objection? After all happiness is to be shared."

I turned to the duty doctor. He grinned, patted me on my shoulder, and said, "Onward, my friend, onward!"

We sat in a cubicle in the ward, well lit by the sunshine streaming through the huge windows. Mahesh and his father Parshivappa narrated their tale of darkness to light.

Mahesh was the second child in a family of three, Nandini being the eldest, and Devamma, the youngest. All the three of them studied in a local government school.

'5th class' Mahesh proudly announced. "I am in 5th class, I have finished my exams and will be in 6th class in June."

Smiling indulgently Parashivappa continued. "We are from the village Attugulipura in the Chamrajnagar district of Karnataka. We have been in the same village for generations. We have four acres of land, and I cultivate coconut and sugar cane. Our area is famous for turmeric and sugarcane," he added.

"Both, coconut and sugarcane, in four acres? Is the land sufficient?" I asked.

"The coconut trees are along the boundary," he clarified. "I make a good living, because the land is fertile. I have a bore well, and we are able to manage in a good manner. We are about three kilometres from two dams,

Chikkuvale and Suvarnavati, and about 50 kms away from Najungud, the abode of Lord Nanjundeswara.

Mahesh's Malady

"When did you first identify the problem?" I edged in gently.

"The problem was diagnosed when he was six months old. He was having breathlessness, and kept falling sick often. We took him to our local doctor, and then, we went to Mysore, to paediatricians who suggested some tests. Then after doing the scans as instructed, we went back to our first doctor, Dr. Ramesh*. He saw the reports and told us that there is a heart problem.

The final diagnosis was that Mahesh had one Monocuspid Aortic Valve as against three that a normal aortic valve should have. He also had a problem with his Mitral valve. And to add insult to injury he had a PDA (congenital heart problem wherein there is abnormal circulation of blood between two of the major arteries near the heart) that was aggravating the other two more serious conditions.

In 1998, they approached Jayadeva Hospital, and they were told that a balloon interventional procedure was required. The cost was pegged at Rs.37,000. Since Parashivappa was considered financially stable, he was not granted a green card. In India, the 'below the poverty line' populace are given a green card by the Government so that they can avail of medicare at lower prices. The amount was too large to foot, and so Mahesh was put on Penidure injection.

"We continued on injections till one day he became very sick. There was blood in his urine. We panicked, and took him immediately to Vikram Hospital in Mysore. We were again told that the operation would cost a lot of money. We, then, went to a Christian mission, and they directed us here."

"He was having high fever when we came to this Hospital in January 2008. On January 21, an Angiogram was done, and Mahesh was discharged three days later. We were told to come again after three months. We returned to our home town, and were back in the Hospital in April, obtaining an admission date in May. We came again to get Mahesh admitted. Today (May 15, 2008) is the third day after the operation, and the doctors have said it is okay to go home now."

The Infectious Joy of a New Life

I could see that Mahesh was restless, and wanted to say something. "Now that you are okay, what do you want to do?"

"I like playing *kabbadi*, but the doctors say I must take some rest, before I start playing again. I want to be a policeman when I grow up."

"Why?"

An impish grin was my reply. Not that it was a whim. The boy had great resilience, and one could see that, beneath the frivolity, was energy that only needed proper direction.

“We will come back for a check up if required,” said the father. “I will come back every year for service at Sai Baba’s Ashram for the rest of my life. He has given us so much; we must pass on as much as we can. This place is really a temple.”

So ended my morning, and for the rest of the day I wasn’t surprised to have people ask me why I looked so happy. It is only when one touches the waters of a placid lake that the ripples begin. A smile inspires more smiles. A single smile, a dew drop...the laughter of many, an ocean...come to think of it, it all began with the smile of Mahesh. I don’t have to wonder how many starfish will find their place in the sea. I know that the ones that make it back will know how lucky they are. Just as the selfless crusader of the neglected, Mother Teresa so aptly pointed out, “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”

YOUR SAY

Feedback from our readers on the May issue

Feedback on *Transforming The Tribals – A Tale of Only Love*

Dear Editor,

The tale of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Dal Volunteers is incredible and awesome, beyond thoughts, imagination and expression. Bravo lads!

Entering into the cave 50 feet deep from the top of the hill is like a scary dangerous adventure novel. The discovery of the Shiva Lingam which has existed for over 1000 years is like a climax to the adventure. The Sai Youths have unfolded the mystery of Mallana Swamy. These Youths of Sai have become surveyors, project consultants, planners, engineers, construction specialists, team leaders, psychologists, social reformers and priests with very large hearts.

The fact that tribals are existing near Vishakapatnam City without a drop of water for years is unimaginable. The condition of the tribals and their neighbourhoods is really pathetic. This is real India after 61 years of Independence.

Due to Sri Sathya Sai's Grace and the youth volunteers inspired by Him, we are seeing the radical transformation of suffering people and development of a new generation with leadership qualities. Let the facts portrayed by you in H2H infuse Youth Seval members and others to great achievements.

Om Sri Sai Ram,

Raji Prasad

Sairam,

I was deeply moved by the selfless service of the youth from Vishakapatnam who are now working on the project to provide drinking water for the tribals. It, truly, is inspiring and turns our eyes towards what we could do to help others!

Saraswathy, Chennai

Dear Friends,

This story is outstanding and should be published in the international press. It is such a powerful illustration of the effects of Swami's teachings, especially on the Youth, that everyone should be made aware of this.

With Love

Jacqueline Trost, Australia

Dear Sai brothers at Radio Sai,

Your article on "Transforming Tribals" is a truly amazing story of hard work done by dedicated Sai Youths for the love of Shri Sai Bhagavan. To go into a primitive area of the country and work for people living there without enough basic necessities of life, to bring about better living conditions for them, these Youths are truly the followers of Swami's message of "Manav seva is Madhav seva". The transformation and comforts brought to the tribals by the selfless love of these Youth workers is indeed praiseworthy.

Aum Sairam,

Gopal Mehta, Toronto, Canada

Feedback on *Mesmerising Moments with the Divine Master - Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 2*

Dear H2H Team,

This article has clarified, enlightened, and deepened my understanding of what Baba means when he uses the word 'Peace'. Mrs. Rani Subramanian's interview has been very helpful to me.

Sai Ram!

Wilbert M. Stephenson, New York, USA

Feedback on *Mother Easwaramma - The Epitome of Compassion*

Sairam,

The article is very useful and educative to all. It points to us the divine qualities of the head and heart of Divine Mother Easwaramma. How Baba loved and adored her. How happy she was with her divine child. This should move people to love the Mother, as Mother and Motherland are greater than heaven itself. May Easwaramma bless us all.

V.S.Davey, Narayanapuram, Chennai

Dear Heart2Heart team,

Reading this lovely article brought deep joy and appreciation to my heart. I live in the USA and today is celebrated as Mother's Day, so the timing is very good. Through compassion we can help others find their way and support them as they grow and connect to the Divine. I pray we are all more like Easwaramma in our abilities to express the goodness of our hearts and make the world more beautiful.

Kind Regards,

S. Iswara Aajul

Feedback on *Heavenly Ganga, The Farakka Barrage and its Atrocious Aftermath*

Sai Ram,

I just read the article about Ganga by Desai. It is so true and explains so much.

Thanks,

Dani

Feedback on *How I Grew up with Swami*

Sai Ram,

Thank you for posting the beautiful article. Mrs. Geeta Mohan Ram was a guest speaker in one of the retreats I attended a couple of years ago, and she has been one of the most inspiring, loving, enthusiastic women I have met! Her stories are amazing, and they help re-iterate my faith. I appreciate the work you do in keeping my day happy and holy! Thanks again,

Shanu

Dear H2H,

I went through the incidences from Mrs. Geeta Mohan Ram's life which were full of love and devotion. I saw how Swami was almost a family member and helped the whole family in their own particular needs. This account has affected me deeply as I could understand Swami's approach based on love and care. I will apply this in my life from now on, in terms of serving others in need. Let life be in the service to mankind!

Bhanu

Feedback on *Science, Society and Spirituality – the Sathya Sai Synergy*

Sairam,

The message this article brings is for the whole scientific world. I am sure its greatness will be valued by all who earnestly seek.

Sai Ram,

Sathya

Feedback on *The Win-Win-Win Formula*

Dear Heart2Heart team,

It is a great pleasure to see Sai devotees excelling by following the teachings of Bhagavan and such incidents are an inspiration for students like us who are in the middle of our careers.

Best Wishes,

Mahesh Gourishetty, Location HR Manager, Pune

Feedback on *Never Away From the Avatar's Eyes*

Jai Sai Ram,

Yes, this article and the ones before, they are all inspiring. Thank you for bringing them to our attention. They so beautifully describe our Lord, Sri Sathya Sai Baba's *leelas* and *mahimas* that they bring tears to my eyes. Once again, thank you.

Love and light from Jayanti.

Feedback on the Quiz

Om Sai Ram!

This quiz was enjoyable and instructive, as well as somewhat challenging, a good quality. During meditation, we stimulate the right brain hemisphere; a little bit of left-brain stuff won't hurt...occasionally. This particular quiz certainly illustrated the recurring theme, over the centuries, of the understanding that Brahman/God is all-pervasive. Now, I am waiting, with impatience, for such a realisation!

With love,

Jacqueline Trost MA, Australia

Feedback on the inspirational free daily email service *Sai Inspires*

Om Sri Sai Ram,

Thank you for the wonderful articles you send me everyday that inspires and consolidates my faith in Bhagavan. Today's story by Mrs. Uma Ramakrishnan was most touching. I have been receiving these mails for the last month or so. And quite recently I made a decision to visit Bhagavan for the first time in my life (I hope to go next month after my final year medical school exams and work in His hospital or in a medical camp for 2 weeks). These stories and the excerpts from Sai's Divine Discourses somehow apply to my everyday worries, dilemmas and situations.

For example, today I received a call from my father saying that his brother's health has suddenly become worse after the stroke he had two weeks ago and that he is now being fed via a nasogastric tube. I became really worried and prayed to Bhagavan.

And just now, immediately after having prayed to him and playing a few *bhajan* songs on the flute in front of His picture, I read this story by Mrs. Ramakrishnan! It was very soothing and I prayed immediately afterwards to Bhagavan to help my uncle.

Whilst I hope that my uncle gets better, I feel blessed that Bhagavan is watching over me and helping me feel His Presence. I had been praying to Bhagavan for the last 7 years but never considered myself a devotee. But His basic message 'Love All Serve All' has been the mantra that I have been following. However, I never have wanted to visit Him. But things have been happening in the last few months that have made me want to do that. And your emails are re-enforcing it in a personalised way every day. Thank you and do continue your service!

Om Sri Sai Ram,

Mayooran Shanmuganathan, London, UK

Jai Sai Ram,

I am very happy and indeed blessed for getting a ***Sai Inspires*** mail daily. Swami's *Darshan* along with the New Year events' photographs made me feel present in Prashanti Nilayam - all because of His grace. My sincere appreciations to the H2H team for bringing these articles and photographs. Once again, humble *pranams* to Swami.

Jai Sai Ram,

Mahaveer Nabhiraj Jain

Dear Sir,

I thank you from the bottom of my heart by making the nectar of divine wisdom available to us on daily basis. May God bless you abundantly and may this work grow with leap and bounds.

Yours sincerely,

Smita R

