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RADIO SAI LISTENERS' JOURNAL

The Enigma of Islam

...Enlightened By Sai

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Pranams at the Lotus Feet

Journal
DEVELOPED BY
HEART 2 HEART
TEAM
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1 March 2008

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Dear Readers,

He was orphaned a few weeks after he was born, but today, just a mention of his name, intense love wells up in the hearts of millions from every race, region and culture. He had no formal education and was, in fact, unlettered, but he bequeathed to posterity such a masterpiece of literary marvel that even now, fourteen centuries later, mankind is still in awe and reverence of his creation. As an adult, he was so upright and conscientious in his character that people addressed him as al-Amin, meaning "the trustworthy", and even his enemies adopted him as the arbiter in their personal disputes. As an entrepreneur he was so astute and successful that in a short while he turned around the business of his employer filling it with profits, and when foreign merchants oppressed the small traders of his area, he led from the front and formed an order of chivalry called *Hilf al-fudul* to protect the poor.

Though he was one of the greatest warriors that mankind has ever seen who had the whole of Arabia under his control within a few battles, he lifted the sword only in self-defense and it was always a bloodless battle won through his sheer moral force. And more importantly, immediately after the incursion, he released all the vanquished and forgave their evil-deeds and mindless atrocities saying, "May God pardon you; go in peace; there shall be no responsibility on you today; you are free!" And such was his greatness that even after people crowned him as the King and his kingdom was rolling in gold and silver, he still mended his own shoes and coarse woolen garments, swept the hearth, kindled the fire and attended the other menial offices of the family.

Not only that, under his rule, mankind had a glimpse of what true democracy is. Even the Caliphs appeared before the judges as ordinary men in his court, and an African slave who was looked down upon by the elite and rich was held in such high esteem that a Caliph offered his daughter in marriage to him! He was such a colossus of inspiration that his early followers, like Sumayya, allowed herself to be torn into pieces with spears, and Khabbab bin Arth laid himself on burning coal with merciless tyrants pressing his chest till his skin melted, but never deviated from their allegiance to him. What he created was a well-disciplined state out of chaos, a system of law that dispensed impartial justice, and a way of life that was in every little aspect Divine. And today one-fifth of the world's population reveres and follows the path laid down by him in complete submission. That is the amazing personality of Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him).

It is said, "He was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope's pretensions, Caesar without the legions of Caesar: without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a palace, without a fixed revenue; if ever any man had the right to say that he ruled by the right divine, it was Mohammad, for he had all the power without its instruments and without its supports." [Bosworth Smifu, Mohammad and Mohammadanism, London 1874, p. 92.] That was his greatness, and more importantly, his goodness. Mohammed was God's chosen Messenger to establish truth and righteousness at a time when men had lost their sense of morality, and either did not believe in God, or had reduced religion and spirituality to senseless practices and spurious worship. Just like all the Prophets before him, he came to awaken the divinity embedded within every man, and connect him to his Immortal Source, but his approach was unique.

While Moses performed supernatural feats to startle the magicians of Egypt, known for their egoistic tricks; and Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead to shock his contemporaries who were skillful physicians; Prophet Mohammed's astounding miracle was The Qu'ran. The Arabs in those days were celebrated for their eloquence and excellent poetry, but what the unlettered Mohammed offered was matchless, and overwhelmed their literary prowess and creativity. Let alone the profound message, the sheer majesty of its style, which is neither prose nor verse, and its captivating rhetoric clearly reflected that it was not the work of a human. In fact, in The Qu'ran

itself, it is mentioned that 'Nothing is like it' and the Holy Book challenges anybody who doubts its Divine Origin to produce anything similar.

In fact, it would be interesting to note that this masterpiece of composition, on which stands the whole religion of Islam, is also a superhuman mathematical feat. The number nineteen, which is not divisible by anything, except itself and one, is the common denominator of the entire composition. Not only does the Qu'ran has 114 *suras* (chapters) which is a multiple of 19, but also the total number of occurrences of the word "Allah" in the classic is 2698 (19 x142). Even the total sum of verse numbers for all verses containing the word "Allah" is 118123, again a multiple of 19. And this is not even the tip of the iceberg. The first verse known as "Basmalah" contains 19 letters; the famous First Revelation where God exhorted Mohammed to read ["Read in the name of Your Lord who created, created man from clots of congealed blood…" - 96:1] has 19 words with 76 (19x4) letters; the total occurrence of the letter "Q" (which represents Quran) in the two Q-initialed *suras* is 114; the number of times "The Quran" occurs is 57 (19x3), and the list goes on. Nineteen is God's signature and in-built proof of The Quran's Divine Authorship!

But why, the number nineteen? The numerical value of the word "ONE" in all the scriptural languages, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic is 19, and The Qu'ran emphatically proclaims this First Commandment of all the scriptures: There is only One God. This message of Unity is, in fact, one of the bedrocks of Islam. In verse 2:136, the Prophet says, **"Say (O Muslims): we believe in Allah and that which is revealed to us and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac and Jacob, and their children, and that which Moses and Jesus received and that the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them and unto Him we have surrendered."** Belief in all the Messengers of God is unequivocal and essential in this religion.

But then, why is Islam, in the minds of many today, a religion synonymous with religious intolerance? Why do we find staunch followers of this faith resorting to violence in the name of Allah? Why does it's very mention generate fear in the minds of millions? There is a huge slip between the cup and the lip, and this is what we have addressed comprehensively in our cover story. When you read "The Enigma of Islam – Enlightened by Sai", you will understand what Islam, in its essence, is. And did you think only Muslims belong to Islam? In a beautiful discourse delivered on Ramzan Day in 1983, Swami said, **"Islam means 'Surrender to God'. And all who, in a spirit of surrender and dedication live in peace and harmony in society, really speaking, belong to Islam."** Surrender is the last stage in the nine forms of devotion that every Hindu believes in, and is the crux of Christianity too - symbolized by the Cross, the crucifixion of one's ego on the altar of Divine Decree.

Miracles have materialized whenever man has obliterated his little self in favour of the Omniwill. And these are happening even now too. When you read the biblical-like experiences of two prison inmates in New Zealand in the Features section, or the amazing instances of Grace conferred on a student, who believed in the "Self" within and submitted with confidence to the Divine Will without any reservations, you will find live examples of this ultimate experience of surrender that every man should strive for.

Swami says, **"Islam means peace. So, a true Muslim is one who leads a peaceful life. Peace originates from a heart that is full of love, which is the basis for any caste, creed or religion. Love is *Shivam* and *Mangalam*, which means 'Auspiciousness'."** This Auspiciousness is Allah, which is the Supreme Love that knows only compassion and mercy, and pervades every atom as the Universal Cosmic Consciousness.

Dear reader, as we celebrate, in this month, the birth of Prophet Mohammed (March 21) alongside Easter (March 23) and the sublime *Shivaraathri* (March 6), let us never for a moment miss this essential Unity that pervades the whole of Creation, and sublimate every second surrendering to His Will and cultivating only that virtue which is the origin and sustenance of this creation – Love.

Loving Regards,
The Heart2Heart Team.

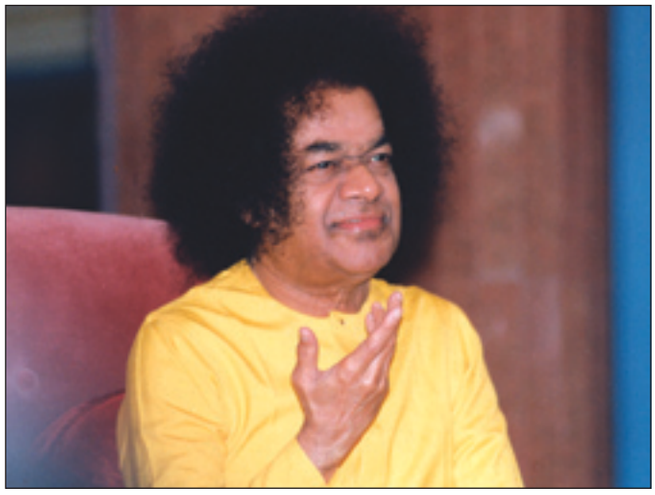
SATHYA SAI SPEAKS
The Supreme Joy of Shivaraathri

On March 6 this year falls one of the most sacred festivals in the Indian calendar, *Maha Shivaraathri*. Why is this day celebrated? And what is the real significance of this occasion? Swami elaborated on these questions in great detail in a beautiful Message on this festival day in 1969. Here are a few excerpts from that revealing discourse:

Many stories are told in the *Shastras*, to explain the origin and significance of the *Mahaa Shivaraathri* Festival. *Bharat*, the name for this land (India) from ancient times, means 'the land of those who have *rathi* (Love) towards *Bha* (Light or Bhagavaan). So, for the people of this land, all days are sacred; every moment is precious…

The Holiness of *Shivaraathri*

Some ascribe the holiness of the Day to the fact of its being the Birthday of Shiva, as if Shiva has birth and death, like any mortal. The story that it commemorates the salvation attained by a hunter who sat on a *bilva* tree on the look-out for animals to kill, and without any intention to worship, unknowingly dropped some of its leaves on a *Linga* that lay beneath, does not make clear why this Day is especially sacred. Another story is that this is the Day on which Shiva danced the *Taandava* (Cosmic dance) in the ecstasy of His Innate Nature, with all the Gods and Sages sharing and witnessing that Cosmic Consummation.



When He consumed the *Haalahala* poison that emerged from the churning of Ocean and that threatened to destroy the Universe, the heat of the fumes was well-nigh unbearable, even for Him. So, Ganga flowed uninterruptedly on His matted locks; but, that gave Him only partial relief. The Moon was placed on the head. That was of great help. Then, Shiva danced the *Taandava* with all the Gods and Sages. All this they say, happened on the same day and so, *Shivaraathri*, was held in commemoration of this occasion.

The Ultimate Aim of all *Sadhana*

We have not only the *Mahaa Shivaraathri* once a year; we have a *Shivaraathri* every month, dedicated to the worship of Shiva. And, why is the Raatri (the Night), so important? The night is dominated by the Moon. The Moon has 16 *kalas* (fractions of Divine Glory), and each day or rather night, during the dark fortnight, one fraction is reduced, until the entire Moon is annihilated on New Moon night. From then on, each night, a fraction is added, until the Moon is full circle on Full Moon Night. The *Chandra* (Moon) is the presiding deity of the mind; the mind waxes and wanes, like the Moon. *Chandramaa-manaso jaathah* - Out of the manas of the *Purusha* (Supreme Being), the Moon was born.

It must be remembered that the chief aim of all *sadhana* (spiritual striving) is to eliminate the mind, to become *a-manaska*. Then only can *Maya* (illusion) be cut asunder and the Reality revealed. During the dark fortnight of the month, *sadhana* has to be done to eliminate each day a fraction of the mind, for, every day, a fraction of the Moon too is being taken out of cognizance. On the night of *Chathurdasi*, the 14th day, the night of Shiva, only a fraction remains. If some special effort is made that night, through more intensive and vigilant *sadhana*, like *puja* or *japam* or *dhyaana* (ritual worship, one-pointed repetition and holy names, and meditation), success is ensured. Shiva alone has to be meditated upon that night without the mind straying towards thoughts of

sleep or food. This has to be done every month; once a year, on *Mahaa Shivaraathri*, a special spurt of spiritual activity is recommended, so that what is *shavam* (corpse) can become *Shivam* (God), by the perpetual awareness of its Divine Indweller.

Linga is the Simplest Symbol of God

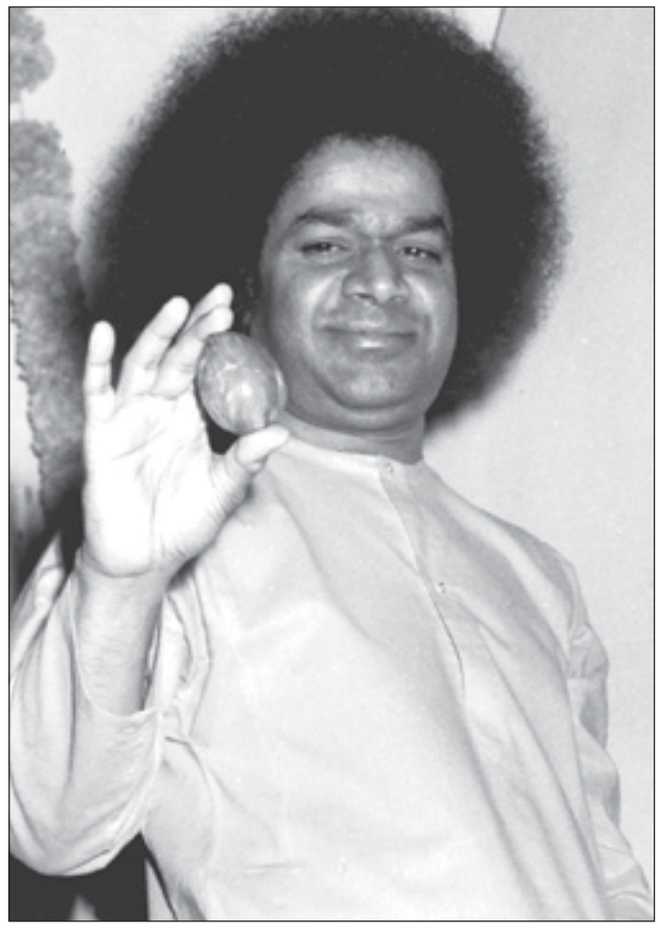
This is a day dedicated to the Shiva that is in each of you. Since thousands pray here and elsewhere in lakhs and crores, the *Linga* is emanating from Me, so that you may derive the Bliss that pervades the world through *Lingodhbhava* (Emergence of the *Linga*).

The manifestation of the *Linga* is a part of My Nature. These *Pundits* (scholars of spirituality) explain it as reminiscent of an epochal event in the past when Shiva challenged Brahma and Vishnu to gauge the height and depth of the *Linga* Form He assumed. They failed and had to accept defeat. But, the *Linga* emerges, as a result of prayer and Grace. You have to recognize in this event a glimpse of Divinity, a sign of infinite Grace. Just as *Om* is the sound symbol of God, the *Linga* is the Form symbol or the visible symbol of God - the most meaningful, simplest and the least endowed with the appendages of attributes. Lingam means, that in which this *jagat* (world of change) attains *laya* (mergence or dissolution), *Leeyathe*. All Forms merge in the Formless at last. Shiva is the Principle of the Destruction of all Names and Forms, of all entities and individuals. So, the *Linga* is the simplest sign of Emergence and Mergence.

Live in the Constant Presence of Shiva

Every form conceived in the *Shastras* and scriptures has a deep significance. Shiva does not ride an animal called in human language, a bull. The bull is the symbol of Stability standing on four legs, *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti* and *Prema* (Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love). Shiva is described as having three eyes, eyes that see the Past, the Present and the Future. The elephant skin which forms His cloak is a symbol of the bestial primitive traits which His Grace destroys. In fact, He tears them to pieces, skins them, and they become totally ineffective. His Four Faces symbolize *Shantam* (Equanimity), *Roudram* (Terror), *Mangalam* (Grace) and *Uthsaaham* (elevating energy). While adoring the *Lingam* on this *Lingodhbhava* Day, you must contemplate on these Truths of Shiva that the *Linga* represents.

It is not this night alone that you should spend in the thought of Shiva; your whole life must be lived in the constant presence of the Lord. Endeavour - that is the main thing; that is the inescapable consummation for all mortals. Even those who deny God will have to tread the pilgrim road, melting their hearts out in tears of travail. If you make the slightest effort to move along the Path

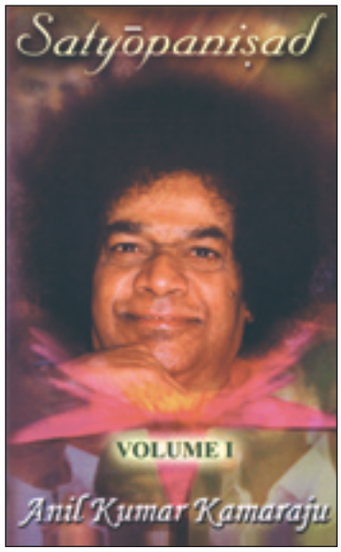


of your own liberation, the Lord will help you a hundred-fold. That is the hope that *Mahaa Shivaraathri* conveys to you. Man is called so, because he has the skill to do *manana*, which means, inner meditation on the meaning and significance of what one has heard. All the joy you crave for is in you. But, like a man, who has vast riches in the iron chest but has no idea where the key is, you suffer. Hear properly the instructions, dwell upon them in the silence of meditation, and practice what has been made clear therein; then, you can secure the key, open the chest and be rich in Joy…

Those who deny God are only denying themselves and their glory. All have Love in them, in some form or other, towards some one or other, or their work or goal. That Love is God, a spark of the God in them. They have *Aananda* (bliss) however small or temporary, and that is another spark of the Divine. They have inner peace, detachment, discrimination, sympathy and the spirit of service. These are Divine in the mirror of their minds.

- Divine Discourse on Shivaraathri Day, February 1969

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI
SATYOPANISHAD - PART 2
Direct Directions from the Divine
(Continued from previous issue)



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 (click here to find links to the entire series), 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 the first chapter called "The India Eternal" from where we stopped in the February issue.

Chapter 1: The India Eternal
(continued from previous issue)

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! Kindly tell us what is to be done in our country now?

Bhagavan: You don't have to protect your country now. You should protect and uphold *Sathya* and *Dharma* (Truth and Righteousness). You should of necessity follow these twin principles. They will protect the entire universe. You should develop love for the universe in all its vastness and magnitude. Love all and serve all. You should rise above the narrow limits of caste, creed and nationality. You should believe in the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. You should never waste time. Gratitude must be expressed by rendering service to the society in which you are born, grew up, made money and earned reputation. Be patriotic and strive for integration, harmony, peace and security in society. You should follow and uphold the great and unique Indian culture.

Cultivate human values and realise the divinity within you. Politics without Principles, Commerce without Morality, Science without Humanity, and Education without Character are not only useless, but also dangerous. You should be a perfect, ideal man. You are from God. You are the spark of the Divine. Hence, your qualities should be daiva, divine and not *dayyam*, demonic. You say, "I am a human being". This is only half a truth. The other half is, "I am not an animal". You should give up animal qualities. If you have both bestial and human qualities, it means your mind is dual. The man with a dual mind is half blind.

If you place a ceiling on your desires, you will be happy. He who has many desires is the poorest man. The man with contentment is the richest man. *Guna*, virtue is more important than ana, coin.

You should know the purpose and the goal of life. Life is not for eating, drinking, and sleeping alone. Animals also do the same. What is your specialty, then? God has gifted you this life in order that you may know, experience and realise the divinity within you. Morality and integrity are very important. *Nitiye jati*, morality, indeed, is national character. A Telugu verse runs as follows:

adivadalitivo kotikante hinudavu,
jati gauravamuni tipai nilucunu
niti kalugu jati nijamaina jati

Without character, you are worse than a monkey. The prestige of a nation depends on its morality. That nation alone deserves to be called a nation when it truly maintains high standards of morality and individuality.

You should always remember these three important points. The first is: do not trust the way of the world. Sometimes it not only deludes and distracts you, but betrays you also. The second is: never forget God who is always with you, in you, above you, below you. Nay, you are God. The third is: do not fear death, as it is sure to take place. In fact, death is the dress of life. Follow the sacred path in life by maintaining unity in thought, word and deed.

There is one more thing I want you to note. Open your heart and close your mouth. Today, people speak what they don't really mean; their hearts are full of jealousy, pride, envy, and what not. I want you to open your heart and be free from all those that pollute it and close your mouth. Dedicate your life to service. Keep God as your ultimate aim and goal. This is what I mean when I say, "Hands in society and Head in the forest."

You should share your precious knowledge and valuable experience with others. You should share Sai's message with others. Have faith in yourself first and then you can trust God. The real cause of the problem of the present day lies here. You don't have faith in yourself. You have no self confidence.

Consider grama seva, rural service as Rama Seva, service to God. Explain clearly to the villagers issues like hygiene, health, cleanliness, and organise medical camps. Ensure to everyone water supply, especially drinking water supply. Tell them about the evil effects of smoking and drinking. Help them to get rid of these bad habits. If you work and serve mingling closely with the local people, in course of time, they will be able to work independently and become self reliant. Service to man is service to God. Service is a greater and higher spiritual path than meditation, penance, worship and chanting. Serve the poor and the needy.

Don't be selfish. Don't give any scope for jealousy, pride, and attachment. Develop virtues like devotion, adherence to truth, discipline, broadmindedness, and never yield to pomp, pride, and egoism. Bad qualities are like tigers while noble qualities are like cows. Will tigers allow cows to live? No. So, don't have any evil tendencies in your heart. You should imbibe human values more and more, and live up to the ideals you cherish.

AK: Swami! Kindly tell us about Vasishtha and Visvamitra, the two sages who are very prominent in the Ramayana?

Bhagavan: In ancient days, kings were always guided by their preceptor. They consulted him on all major issues. That was how Truth and Righteousness were maintained and upheld. History shows instances when kings approached their gurus for blessings and guidance, and thus became great. You know how King Krishnadevaraya was guided by his mentor and preceptor, Vidyaranya, and Emperor Sivaji by Samartha Ramadas.

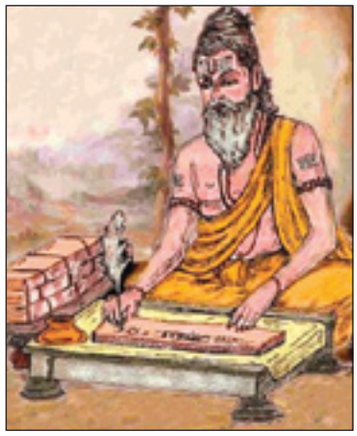
Rama and Lakshmana followed Sage Visvamitra, learnt archery from him and killed demons like Khara and Dushana who were obstructing and desecrating Vedic rituals in the forest. Thus, Visvamitra was instrumental in demonstrating to the world at large the valour and expertise of Rama and Lakshmana. Visvamitra also taught Rama the most sacred mantra, the Gayatri. He was also responsible for the divine wedding of Sita and Rama, which was in essence a union of *prakriti*, matter and *purusha*, energy, the Absolute One. He was and is the *mitra*, friend, of *visva*, the entire Universe, and so the name of the sage has been so apt and befitting.

Visvamitra was the one who gave Gayatri Mantra to mankind. As he was growing in spiritual stature, he wished to be called Brahmarshi by Vasishtha. He was

always competitive and envious of Vasishtha to the extent of even resolving to kill him. On a full moon day he planned to kill Vasishtha and was holding in his hand a big stone to be thrown on his head. Meanwhile, he heard Vasishtha tell his wife Arundhati how bright and beautiful the moonlight was and how it was equal to the power of the penance of Visvamitra. His mind immediately changed and he fell at the feet of Vasishtha and the latter addressed him as Brahmarshi since he had conquered his ego.

AK: Swami! Among the sages, how is Valmiki noteworthy?

Bhagavan: The Ramayana was both composed and recited during the time of Rama's incarnation. As for the great sage and ascetic Valmiki, besides being a contemporary of Rama, he, as the author of the Ramayana, is the very first poet. He gave shelter to Sita, renowned for her virtue and chastity, brought up her sons, Lava and Kusa, and taught them archery and all the arts. Thus, he played a vital role in the Ramayana.



Sage Valmiki, author of the Ramayana

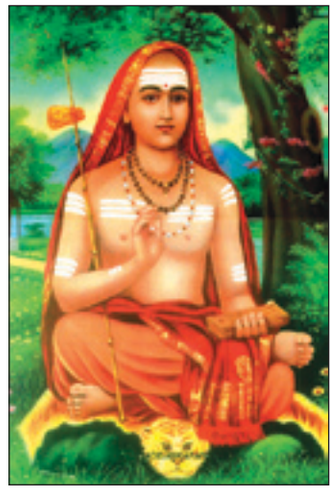
Having completed the Ramayana, he thought deeply about popularising such a great work. At that juncture, Lava and Kusa came forward and took a vow in the presence of Valmiki and other distinguished sages that they would themselves sing the Ramayana and offer its nectar to people all over the world. Thus, Valmiki has the unique distinction of composing the divine Ramayana as Rama's contemporary and having it sung in Rama's presence. Valmiki proclaimed to the whole world the ideals and divinity of Rama, the protector of the world and the inspirer of His muse. Thus, it was only from the Tretayuga that the divinity within humanity began to shine forth.

The purpose of the incarnation of Rama was to pass on to mankind the whole duty of man. What is happening today is exactly the same phenomenon. You would have noticed how in the present avatar too, biographies are written by contemporaries, and the Divinity is acknowledged, worshipped, experienced, and celebrated all over the world. That all this is happening during the time of the incarnation is another parallel to Rama's descent. The same Ideal! The same Love! The same Message, viz., the practice of *Sathya* and *Dharma*.

AK: Swami! We heard about King Dasaratha, the yoga called 'putrakameshti', and so on. Kindly tell us something about King Janaka.

Bhagavan: Janaka was a Rajayogi, a man of great wisdom, utterly devoid of the sense of the body. Therefore, he came to be known as *videha*, one without attachment to the body. As the daughter of that King, Sita came to be known as Vaidehi. Janaka was an ideal king possessing immense devotion to the preceptor, extensive knowledge of the Sastras, and the spirit of renunciation. He performed Sita's marriage as his bounden duty. Later on, Rama left for the forest along with Sita and Lakshmana. Though their stay in the forest stretched into years, Janaka never set foot in the forest. Such was Janaka's abounding wealth of *jnana* and *vairagya* (wisdom and renunciation).

AK: Swami, we hear that Adi Sankara died at a young age. What could be the reason?



Sri Adi Sankara

Bhagavan: It is true that the founder of the doctrine of advaita, nondualism, died young. He wrote commentaries on three important sacred texts known as Prasthanatraya, viz. the Upanishads, the Brahmasutras, and the Bhagavadgita. Besides, emphasising *jnana* (the path of knowledge), he composed a large number of hymns on *bhakti* (devotion). He traveled all over the country and established *pithas* - centres of worship and spiritual learning. He symbolises Sanatana *Dharma*, the ancient, timeless spiritual culture of this land.

Adi Sankara went to the ancient pilgrim centre, Kasi where he prayed to the presiding deity, Visvanath to pardon him for the three mistakes he had committed.

The first mistake happened to be his behavior contrary to what he had been stating all along. Though he said, *Vasudevas sarvamiti*, that is, "God is everywhere", he had come to Kasi to see God. The second mistake was that even while knowing that God is beyond our comprehension and description, *yato vaco nivartante*, he tried to write books on divinity. The third mistake was that while knowing that one God manifested Himself as many, *ekoham bahu syam*, and that the same God is present in everyone, atmavat sarva bhutani and that awareness is in everyone, *prajnanam brahma*, he organised *mathas*, centres of learning considering his disciples separate from him.

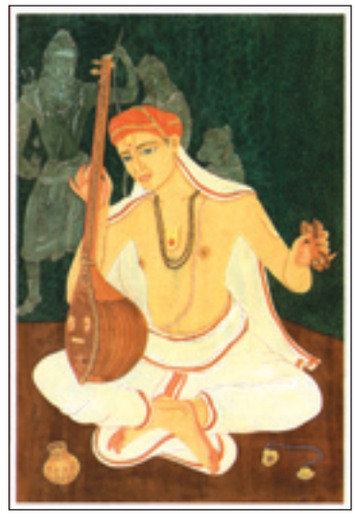
You may also have heard another episode connected with his life. He prayed to his mother for permission to become a *Sannyasi*, a lifelong celibate. She didn't accept the proposal initially. One day Sankara went to a nearby river to have a bath. Suddenly a crocodile caught his feet. Then he started crying, "Mother! Mother! This crocodile is pulling me into the water. It is not going to leave me until you permit me to become a *sannyasi* (renunciant)". His mother at last gave her permission and Sankara was released by the crocodile. The inner meaning of the episode is that the river is comparable to *samsara*, worldly life in general, and the crocodile to *visaya*, sensual pleasure. Man is dragged into the river of life by the crocodile of worldly pleasure. Release is renunciation or detachment.

Sankara shuffled off his mortal coil soon after completing the tasks he had set for himself, because he was sure that his mission would be carried further by his disciples, the torchbearers of his philosophy and that his theory of nondualism would be widely spread and propagated. His disciples too were of the stature and eminence to carry on his mission successfully.

AK: Swami! Tyagaraja, very well known as a devotee of Rama, composed kritis (hymns in praise of the Lord) which are sung even today. What is special about them?

Bhagavan: There are many names of devotees who composed devotional songs all over the world. God also responded to them. Those songs make you ecstatic and sublime. But the hymns of Tyagaraja have a specialty about them. Every song of his is related to an incident in his life.

For example, when the King of Tanjore sent him jewels, provisions and costly presents, Tyagaraja mildly and politely rejected them and put to himself a question in the form of a *kriti: nidhi cala sukhama ramuni sannidhi seva sukhama* that is, is it money that makes you happy or is it nearness to God? Once his brother threw all the idols worshipped by Tyagaraja into the Kaveri River. Tyagaraja cried piteously for this loss. One day when he was taking his bath in the Kaveri, by the grace of Rama he could get those lost idols, and holding them in his palms he brought them home singing, *rara ma inti daka raghuvi ra sukumara*: "Lord Rama! Please come home." In a music concert in the court of a king, he sang paying obeisance to all the distinguished people present in the assembly, *endaro mahanubhavulu andariki vandanamulu* that is, "There are many noble and great people here, my humble pranams to all of you." Like this, every song composed by Tyagaraja is associated with some real life occasion or incident. The hymns of Tyagaraja reflect practical devotion and surrender.



Saint Tyagaraja

(To be continued)

– Heart2Heart Team

CHINNA KATHA
Seek the Point of View of God
A Little Story from Bhagavan

Four friends once started dealing in cotton. They had a godown for the storage of the bales. Finding that the cotton seeds attracted rats to the godown, a cat was introduced by them to scare the rodent throng. They tied jingles to her feet and since they loved it much, the jingles were of gold!

Once, when the cat jumped from the top of the pile of bales, it started limping on one foot. So, they applied some balm and tied a long strip of bandage round the injured foot. The bandage got loose and the cat, unaware of the long narrow cloth that was trailing behind her, sat near the fireplace, and when the cloth began to burn, she ran helter-skelter and fled into the godown itself where the entire stock of cotton was reduced to ashes in a trice.

The four friends had assigned to themselves each, one of the feet of the joint cat and the injured foot belonged to one of them; so the other three charged him with the damages which they claimed from him.

The matter went to court and after hearing arguments on both sides, the judge said, "The injured leg has no responsibility, for it was taken into the godown with the trail of fire by the three healthy feet. So, damages have to be paid by the owners of the healthy feet to the owner of the limping foot." What may thus appear correct at first sight, might prove wrong on second thoughts. There is correctness from the worldly point of view and correctness, from God's. Find out what the point of view of God would be. By association with Godly men, they can give you proper advice. You must seek and not avoid good men.

- Baba

- Illustrations: Ms Vidya, Kuwait

THE ENIGMA OF ISLAM... Enlightened by Sai

Dear readers, the religion of Islam has suffered so much misunderstanding among both adherents and non-adherents alike. The aim of this Cover Story is to clear the mist of these misconceptions in the Light of the Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba.

This has been done in four major parts: Part one deals with the Divine Call of the Prophet and the True meaning of Islam: *Mohammed, The Prophet of Allah*; Part two brings out the quintessential Essence of Islam: *The Essence of Islam*; the third section explores the foundation on which the Pillars of Islam are built: *The Five Pillars of Islam*; while the last section: *The Call Of Sai* is a string of garlands which bears testimony that Sai Baba is the fulfillment of the Prophecies of the Holy Prophet [Peace Be upon Him].

To make this story an experiential awareness for you, we, at Heart2Heart, have carried out extensive interviews of outstanding Muslim devotees from different parts of the world. Their mind-boggling revelations have been inter-woven throughout this Cover Story to make the narrative inspiring and convincing. May your heart beat to the Call of the Prophet as you read.

PART 1: MOHAMMED, THE PROPHET OF ALLAH

"Allah sent forth to them a Prophet among them
who shall declare to them
Thy Revelations and instruct them in the Book
and in Wisdom and purify them;
Surely Thou art the Mighty, the Wise One"
(Qur'an 2:129)

The Holy Prophet Mohammed Bin Abdullah (Peace be upon Him) just like all the holy ones who have realized the unity of Divinity, never reacted to criticisms because he knew that children do not throw stones at trees that are barren. His life and example were the very message which he preached.

The Prophet's Pure Self

The Prophet used to take a certain route to preach the Message of Allah to the people. Along this route there lived one woman whose heart could not take in the message of the Prophet. Day and night she was lost in thought brooding and planning how to injure the Holy one. At last she came up with a stratagem. "Although I may not be able to stop him from preaching this strange doctrine," she thought to herself, "I am going to disturb his peace and ignite the fire of anger in his heart."

Even before the rays of the sunrise had entered her windows, she was busy sweeping her house. She carefully collected all the garbage in a basket and placed it on the roof of her house waiting eagerly for the Prophet to pass that way as was his custom everyday. Her intention was to provoke the Prophet to anger, and to disturb his peace so that he can be an object of laugh and scorn to people.

First Surah of the Holy Qur'an

Everyday, she would stand by her window listening for the approaching footsteps announcing the coming of a man dressed in clean white clothes. She would then climb to the roof of her house taking the basket in her hand and throw the garbage on him as he passed. **But much to her dismay, the Prophet used to continue on his journey without saying a single word, or looking up to see who was pouring the garbage on him. The Prophet was the same in praise and blame.**

This routine continued and the woman became more determined to provoke the Prophet. The Prophet did not want to disappoint the woman and so he continued to walk down the street everyday, instead of picking an alternate route and prayed for the woman to recognize the Truth.

Love Never Hurts; Love Heals the Hurt

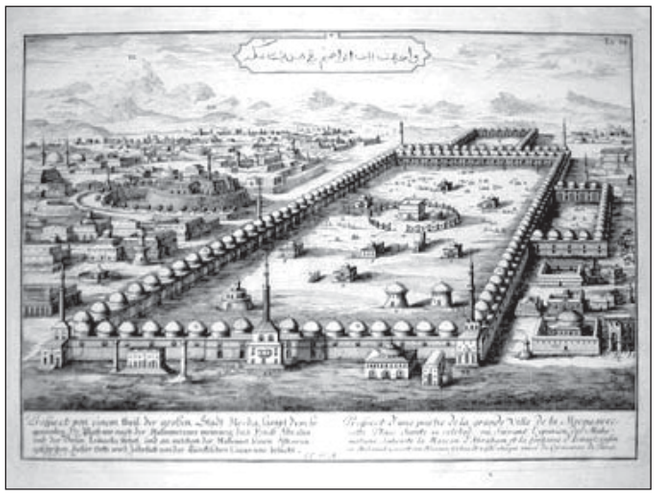
One morning, the Holy Prophet did not receive his usual shower of garbage as he was passing by her house. So

he stopped and looked up; he did not find the woman on the roof. This worried him because he thought something must have happened to her. So he knocked at her door. "Who is it?" asked a feeble fainting voice. "Muhammad Bin Abdullah" was the reply. "Can I come in?" The woman was apparently very sick and feared that Mohammed had come to take revenge on her for what she had been doing. But the love she felt in the voice of the Prophet made her allow him in.

Mohammed entered the house and told the woman that not finding her on the roof had worried him, and he thus wanted to inquire about her health. On finding out how ill she was, he gently asked if she needed any help. Overwhelmed with the power of love which poured forth into her soul as the Prophet spoke to her, she forgot all her fear and asked for some water. He kindly gave her some and prayed for her health, while she quenched her thirst. She was then gripped with remorse for being so cruel to him in the past, and she apologized for her mean behaviour. **Mohammed immediately forgave her and thereafter came to her house everyday, cleaned her surroundings, fed her and prayed for her, till she was on her feet again. The kind attitude of the Holy Prophet transformed her totally and through that she recognized the message of Love and Peace which the Prophet preached.**

The Making of a Prophet

This episode is only a glimpse of the glorious life of Prophet Mohammed (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon Him). His heart, undoubtedly, was an Ocean of Love.



A 16th century depiction of Old Mecca

Born in the year 569 AD in the city of Mecca in Arabia the Prophet became an orphan in childhood. He knew neither the care of a mother nor the protection of a father. And this experience was the first preparation for the child who was born to sympathize with the pain of others. As a boy, he was a cowherd and looked after his cows with intense Love. This reminds one of Lord Jesus who called himself "the Good Shepherd" and Sri Krishna who is adored as the Divine Cowherd Boy.

Once while looking after his herd, a cowherd came to him and said, "I will look after your herd; you may go to the town and enjoy yourself. And then you must take charge of my cows, and I will then go for a time." Young Mohammed said, "No, I will take charge of your herd. You may go, but I will not leave my charge." This same principle was shown all through his life.

The Prophet was not learned; he could neither read nor write. Yet he became the repository of all Wisdom because he realized That, which when known, everything is known, and without which all knowledge is a bondage; namely, the knowledge of Allah. To become a perfect model for the fullness of the Divine Message which he carried, the Prophet experienced all aspects of life - as an orphan, a shepherd, a merchant, a warrior, a politician, a King, a husband, a father, a brother, a son and even as a grandson.

Of Whosoever it is Allah's Will to Guide: He expands his Heart into Islam

The turning point in his life came when his life had taken a downward spiral, in spite of all it could offer. He then sought refuge in solitude. Sometimes for hours, at times for days and weeks, he retreated into a cave on the mountain of Gar-e Hira. There, absorbed in meditation and contemplation, he sought to enter the cave of his heart. Patient as the Prophet was, he continued the search for Truth. It was at the age of 40, in the month of Ramadan, that he received his first revelation from God. It came in the form of the Voice of the Angel Gabriel - that word of inner guidance in the heart of all. The Voice said, "Cry out the Sacred Name of Thy Lord." *(Surah 96:1)*

The message filled him with awe, and he humbly said in reply that he was unlettered, and unable even to read. Then God opened his heart, filled it with Divine Wisdom and spiritual knowledge, and then illuminated

Jabal al-Nur, the Mountain of Light, at the top of which is the sacred Hira Cave

A closeup of the Cave of Hira where the Prophet spent days and weeks in Prayers

his being with Divine Effulgence. And as he began to follow this advice he found the echo of the Divine Word in everything; it was as if the Sky, the Earth, the Moon and the Universe, all said the same Name that he was repeating.

The angel came to Mohammed and asked him to read. The Prophet replied, "I do not know how to read". The Prophet added, "The angel caught me and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read and I replied, 'I do not know how to read.' Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read but again I replied, 'what shall I read?' Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said, 'Read in the name of your Lord, who has created all that exists and has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous." *(96.1, 96.2, 96.3) HADITH 'REVELATION' Volume 1, Book 1, Number 3: as narrated by Aisha.*

Gradually, the Prophet's heart became tuned with the Infinite. He realized his soul to be One, within and without, and the call came to him to go forward into the world and carry out the command of God; to glorify His Name; to unite those who are separated; to awaken those who are asleep, and to harmonize one with another. As it is written in the Holy Qur'an,

"Alif Laam Raa; This Book which we have revealed to you so that you may lead the people from out of darkness into light, into the path of the Mighty, the Glorious." *(Surah 14:1)*

A page from the Glorious Qur'an

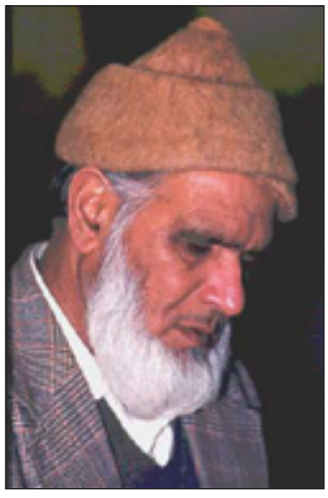
Thus the Prophet started preaching these revelations publicly, proclaiming that "God is One" and that complete surrender to Him is the very goal life.

These messages were given to the Prophet (Peace be upon Him) in portions over a period spanning approximately 23 years (610 AD to 622 AD). He was 63 years when the revelation of the Qur'an was completed and the language of the original message was Arabic.

In the Original Arabic Language

Who is a Muslim?

The term "Surrender" is the hallmark of Islamism. The word Islam is derived from the Arabic verb Aslama, which means to surrender. **It means that a Muslim is one who has totally surrendered his entire mind to God. Anyone who has been able to realize this state of being with God is a Muslim, irrespective of the person's creed, country, caste, or colour.** The Qur'an gave examples of such Holy ones – Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jesus etc, who reached the state of complete surrender to God and referred to them as Muslims.



A Muslim is a person who has conquered his mind

"Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but he was sound in the faith, a Muslim and not of those who add gods unto God." *[Qur'an 3:60]*

"Behold! Allah said: 'Oh Jesus! Verily I will cause thee to die and I will take thee up to Myself and deliver thee from whose who believe not." *[Qur'an 3:55]*

Thus, Islam is a word which denotes not a particular religion but a state of mind, the state of total surrender to the Will of God. The Prophet, therefore, did not see himself as founding a new religion, but as restoring the foundations of Islam which had been there from time immemorial. The Qur'an declares:

"Nay, whoever submits himself whole-heartedly to Allah, and he is a doer of good to others, he shall have his reward from his Lord. And there is no fear for such people nor do they grieve." *(2:112) -**

"Say to those who have received the Book, and to the common folk, "Do ye surrender yourselves unto God?" If they become Muslims, then are they guided aright: but if they turn away – thy duty is only preaching; and God's eye is on His servants."

(Qur'an 3:19)

The True Meaning of "Surrender"

How then do we come to this state of 'total surrender to God' which makes one a true Muslim? The Qur'an declares that to Allah belongs the whole of Creation. What can one give to Allah that does not originally belong to Him? The Heavens and the Earth, and all that is contained therein are His! Time and the Life, which it holds in its womb, belong to Allah; Eternity and the Death, which it holds in its tomb, belong to Allah. So what is this object that we must surrender, that is not Allah in the first place? How can you surrender that which does not belong to you?

"Allah said: 'The son of Adam hurts Me by abusing Time, for I am Time; in My Hands are all things and I cause the revolution of night and day." *[Hadith No.351, Vol. 6]*

The true essence of surrender, therefore, is to loose this false idea that anything belongs to you. And it is the little "I" that is responsible for this false claim. When one succeeds in destroying this sense of "I" and "mine" which, according to the Qur'an, separates "gods from God" one feels one's primordial oneness with the One. The little illusory will of man dissolves completely in the Universal Omnipotent Will of Allah. When this happens, one attains Islam. This is a type of death - the death of the ego - which is known in Islam as "Fana" (annihilation).

"In Islam, the expression salaam is used as a form of greeting. "Sa" in this term signifies the combined expression of *Saalokyam*, *Saameepyam* and *Saayujyam* (Seeing the Divine, Being near the Divine and Merging in the Divine). When these three expressions are combined and merged into one – "La" signifying merger – you have Salaam (the merging of the many in the One)"

– Divine discourse of Sri Sathya Sai Baba on 25th December 1991

Islam is the Highest Form of Worship

We see from the above that Islam is the essence of all religions. Islam, as this total dissolution of the ego, is the very essence of Christianity, symbolized by the death of Jesus on the Cross to teach humanity how to cut across the "I" on the tree of life so as to realize the resurrection of the Immortal Spirit. St Paul attained this essence when he said: "It is no longer 'I' who lives, but God living in me". (Galatians 2:20)

The Mosque next to the Taj Mahal

"Are they desiring some religion that is not Allah's? All in earth and heaven have surrendered to God either by compulsion or on their own." *[Qur'an 3: 83]*

In Hinduism there are nine steps to the realization of Oneness with God. And the ninth and final step is Surrender. Hence in Hinduism, "Islam" - this state of total surrender to God - is the final and last stage of worship. This is the reason why Islam is regarded as the final and last message of Allah to humanity, because it represents that highest and final form of worship on man's journey to God.

And because Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon Him) is the vehicle of this 'last' message, he is regarded as the final messenger of Allah. The inner meaning is that the last Prophet, which is truly this final call which awakens us to the path of total surrender - is within us.

"Mohammed is not the father of any man among you, but he is the apostle of God, and the seal of the Prophets and Allah is full of knowledge." *[Qur'an 33: 40]*

And once we abide by this inner call, once we destroy the root cause of our separation with the One, which is the ego, we reach that highest state of realization where we are One with God. It is this root ego which makes false images of God, and thereby separates or joins "gods to God". This is the fundamental sin in Islam. It is also the "original sin" in Christianity, namely, Adam's forgetfulness of his oneness with Yahweh. When one thinks that there is more than One, then one tries to join or separate that which is inseparable. But there is indeed only One and He is Allah.

"Islam denotes the social community whose members have achieved supreme peace through surrender to the All-merciful, All-powerful God and who have vowed to live in peace with their fellowmen. Later, it came to be applied to communities that considered themselves separate and different and so hostile to the rest. Islam taught something higher. It directed attention to the One in the many, the unity in diversity and led people to the Reality named God."

– Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SSS Vol. 16, P 80)

Beloved Sathya Sai Baba has drawn so many Muslim devotees from different countries to His Lotus Feet. With the Power of His Divine Love, He transforms them and makes them realize the very essence of Islam. Natalya Kandaurova is one of these such privileged souls. She is

a devout Muslim from Kazakhstan and a member of 'The International Association of Healers', and an 'Honorable Healer' of Kazakhstan . Having been saved four times from the clutches of physical death, Naytalya narrates to us her transformative experiences with Sathya Sai Baba as she journeys on the path of Islam.

Transforming Experiences

Ms. Natalya Kandaurova, Kazakhstan

I had not heard anything about Sai Baba before. One night He came in my dream and told me, "Come to Me soon. Don't be late. You will come to Me in two weeks with 6 more people".

The next day, one of my patients came to see me and casually mentioned about her friend who had been arranging trips from Alma-Aty to India, Prashanthi Nilayam in particular. I took her phone number. In three days I bought my ticket to India

I went there with a group of seven others. I asked the organizer to show me the picture of Sai Baba. You will not be surprised - He was the same person who came in my dream.

The Pillar of Orange Light

Ever since then, Swami is my heart and life, and for all my family. Swami assured me that He will always be with me, giving healing energies as a column of bright orange light in the center of my room where I see my patients. I always request my patients to stand in the middle of the room. I seldom tell my patients about this Divine Phenomena since only a few can see this column of orange light; but invariably the healing has very positive results.

On the first pilgrimage to Swami I came here for a month. After three weeks, Swami came again to my dream and said, "Now you can go". So we decided to spend the last week visiting some other sacred places in India . On our last day Swami went out round the ashram in His car. As the car was passing us, Swami looked at me and lifted His Hand in His benevolent gesture of Blessings. I felt very happy to receive His bountiful blessings and benedictions. Swami's Love is so dear to my heart.

Learn How to Die Before You Die

Truly speaking, my spiritual awakening happened five years before I came to Swami. At the age of 33, I had nearly died four times and had undergone three cancer operations. Then, my doctors said I had only one or two months to live. Needless to say, I was shocked to hear this medical verdict and was crestfallen when I went to sleep that day. That night I had a prophetic dream that changed my whole life.

The late Kazakh poet, Abbay, came to my dream and said, 'You will read the Holy Book Qur'an. You will heal people. Your path is Islam'. In the morning I started spontaneously reciting prayers from the Qur'an in Arabic!

I had never learnt Arabic and when I asked people what I was saying, they remarked that these are recitations of the *Fatihai* and *Ihlas*, which are prayers from the Qur'an.

We All Come From Love

For six months after this, I was in a quandary; I was puzzled and beset by doubts. I was a Christian by birth, and my parents had baptized me when I was still very young. I knew fully well how serious it would be to change my religion.

After 6 months of heart-rending doubts, Jesus Christ came to me in an incredible dream and said, 'We all come from Love. We have the same

ancestors - Adam and Eve. It does not matter which path you choose as long as you are on the way to God'.

The Pillar of Light

So at the age of 33, after so many trials and tribulations in my life, I took the religion of Islam into my heart and soul. The word Islam means 'surrender' and a Muslim means 'someone who has surrendered to God'. When we take our life trials with surrender and love, they can no longer be the cause of suffering but mere tests or exams in the open university of life. It took me five years to come to terms with my ambitions and egoism, and learn the valuable lessons of surrender and acceptance of all life circumstances as the Will of God Almighty. Only then I was ready to meet my spiritual teacher. As a matter of fact, a teacher will call his disciple only when he is ready.

So my spiritual life encompasses Christianity, Islam and the teachings of Sai Baba. I don't see any contradictions between any religions. The rituals may be different but the purport of all religions is the same: love all; hurt none; forgive others; find the cause of all that is happening in your life within yourself. We should not be idle and passively wait for God's Grace.

We should constantly make an effort on the way of self-transformation by helping others and dedicating all our actions to God. The main tenets of all religions are the same. Don't be angry; don't worry; love the world around you; be respectful to elders.

God is One

For the last 7 years ever since I have adopted Islam, I do *Namaz* five times a day as all Muslims are supposed to do. I also repeat Christian prayers and Sanskrit mantras. In our 'Center for Spiritual Development of Academic', there is a big altar in the center where you can see symbols and prayers from all major religions. All day long we play music and prayers from different religions.

Our visitors can listen to Gregorian songs, music from the Qur'an, Egyptian and Jewish music, and also bhajans. Followers of all religions come to the center and each one can find something familiar to him or her, and also learn something about other religions. This helps many realize that God is One, but we worship Him in different ways and pray to Him in all languages.

PART 2: THE ESSENCE OF ISLAM – 'LA ALLAHA ILLA ALLAH'

"Truly, your God is truly One." *(Qur'an 37:4)*

"In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say He is Allah, the One and Only, Allah, the Eternal, He begetteth not, and He is not begotten;

"And there is none like unto Him." *(Qur'an 112)*

Arabic inscription for *La ilaha illa allah*

The most fundamental and the heart of God's revelations to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) in the Qur'an is faith in the unity of God. This

is expressed in the primary *Kalimah* of Islam as "God Alone is" (*La ilaha illa allah*). This beautiful phrase is the bedrock of Islam, its foundation and essence. The Prophet himself said that this verse alone constitutes one third of the whole of the Qur'an. It is the expression of this belief which differentiates a true Muslim from a *kafir* (non-believer).

"A man heard another man reciting in the prayers: 'Say (O Muhammad): "He is Allah, the One." (112.1) And he recited it repeatedly. When it was morning, he went to the Prophet and informed him about that, as if he considered that the recitation of that Sura by itself was not enough. Allah's Apostle said, "By Him in Whose Hand my life is, it is equal to one-third of the Quran."

(Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 93, Number 469)

God is One, there is no second. God is One, the Only. There is nothing apart from Allah. Only Allah exists. To think that there is something apart from Allah is the mark of an unbeliever who joins 'gods to God' (Qur'an 3:57). This is the message of the Glorious Qur'an.

Three Possible Misconceptions: The First Misconception: "Your God is different from my God"

There are three possible misconceptions of this fundamental Truth expressed so powerfully throughout the pages of the Qur'an: God is One and Only. The first misunderstanding is to think that one's own God is the true God, the One, and that the 'gods' of other people are false. The Qur'an declares that there is Only One God and this One and only has so many Names; yet He is beyond every attribute. God is not different but He has different Names.

"To whichever Name you call upon Him, to Him belongs the most beautiful Names," *(Qur'an 17:110)*

When anyone says: "Your God is different from my God", "Your religion is different from my religion", "Your belief is different from my belief", that person has not understood the fundamental Truth of Islam because he divides the Unity of God.

"God is One; there are not many Gods, one for each tribe among men! Love is One; it transcends caste, colour and creed, if it has to be genuine. Truth is One; there cannot be two. For, two can only be One, occurring twice. The Goal is One; for, all roads must lead to the One God. Why then should men quarrel and fight over the Eternal and the Absolute?"

- Sathya Sai Baba (Divine Discourse 12th October 1983)(Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 93, Number 469)

"A Jew came to the Prophet and said, 'O Muhammad! Allah holds the heavens on a Finger, and the mountains on a Finger, and the trees on a Finger, and all the creation on a Finger and then Allah said, 'I am the King.' On that Allah's Apostle smiled till his premolar teeth became visible, and then recited: 'No just estimate have they made of Allah such as due to Him."(Qur'an 39.67)

(Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 93, Number 469)

"Allah laughs about two men who kill each other but both enter paradise." *[Hadith, Shakir 5:51]*

The Second Misconception: "God and His Creation are Separate"

The second misunderstanding of this basic Truth of the Qur'an is to see God as different from His Manifestations. This misconception arises from the illusion that seeks to separate that which is inseparable. Like the Sun and its rays, the Ocean and its waters, the Tree and its branches, God is not different from His creation, although God is beyond His Manifestations. **God is the Existence from which all things derive their existence. Everything that is, is in God because God alone is. To say that something exists outside God is to join 'gods unto God'.** It means that a particular thing can exist outside Existence and this is a contradiction - The contradiction

of those who join 'gods unto God'. The Holy Prophet resolves this contradiction so beautifully in the Hadith when he stated:

"My Lord! You are The First; Nothing is before You. You are The Last; Nothing is after You. You are the Outward; Nothing is over You. You are the Inward; Nothing is inside of You. Help me to pay my debt and keep poverty from me." *(Al –Hadith 57/3)*

Like the Tree and its branches, God is not separate from His Creation

The Truth is that everything is God, yet God is beyond everything. The Holy Bible conveys this same principle of Oneness when it is said in Acts of the Apostles:

"In God we live and move and have our being."

(Acts 17:28)

In the Bhagavad Gita, which is the essence of the Vedas, Lord Krishna had given a very beautiful and apt analogy to explain the unity of God and His creation. Let us suppose we are looking at a big tree. In this tree we see a number of leaves, branches, roots, fruits and so on. But though we see all this, we do not call the flowers by the name of the leaves, nor do we call the leaves by the names of the fruits or roots; we use an appropriate name for each part of this single big tree.

The branches are branches but they do not become fruit. Similarly, the leaves do not become roots. When we want to enjoy the fragrance of the flowers, we must smell the flowers and not the roots. Similarly, if you want to taste the fruit you must eat the fruit and not the branches. This big tree, which has so many different components and so many different parts, is really one in the sense that the seed which gives rise to this tree is only one. Just as there is only one seed for the entire tree, there is only one Divine Being and all other parts are related to this One Source.

"The foremost need today is for everyone to realise that God is One. This is what Jesus and Mohammed proclaimed. The word *"Allah"* really means the One Supreme which contains everything in the Universe. This is the primary message of the Vedas …The essential truth of all religions is that God is one. Jesus proclaimed the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. One can have only one father, not two."

– Sathya Sai Baba

The recognition of this oneness in the entire and diverse aspects of Divinity is really the basis of *Tawheed* (Islamic Monotheism) in Islam. The term *Tawheed* is derived from the Arabic verb *Wahhada* which literally means "unification" or "asserting oneness".

Allah is the Seed for all beings. We are witnessing all these different forms and parts of the Tree, although they have arisen from the same Seed. So also we are experiencing different aspects of the one God. God is only One. There is nothing outside of Him.

The Third Misconception: "I am Different From God"

The third misunderstanding of the basic Truth of Islam - He is Allah, the One and Only - is to see God as different from oneself. Again, it is this sense of difference that joins 'gods unto God'! **When one thinks "I am separate from God" one creates an illusion which**

God is ONE

seeks to separate that which is inseparable and to join that which was never apart. And this illusion is the delusion that blinds man to the vision of the One in the many and makes him an enemy unto Himself who is none but Allah.

The Mind is the Culprit for these Misconceptions

The root cause of this delusion is the mind. It is the mind that separates, joins and divides. It is the mind that projects God outside of itself, and thereby, is deluded that God is different and separate. When this mind is surrendered completely to Allah, one becomes one with the very essence of Islam: 'la allaha illa allah' - God is One and only. When God is One and Only, where is the second to compare with Him?

Thus Islam forbids the making of images of Allah because it is just not possible to make images of Allah when one has attained Islam; that is when one's mind has been completely dissolved in Allah. It is the mind that creates mental images of Allah. And it is the same mind that confuses the image it has created as the Reality which is uncreated. To confuse the Reality with its image is the idolatry which the Prophet was sent to abolish.

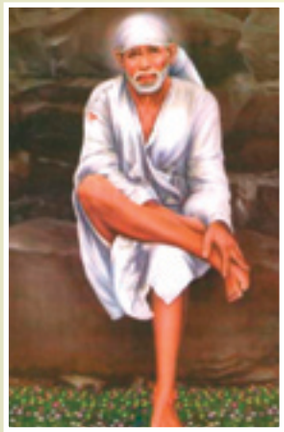
And the root of this idolatry is the mind. Once the mind is there, it will always create images because the very nature of the mind is imagination. Even when you think of Allah as "Nothing-ness" or "Emptiness", this "emptiness of nothingness" is also a subtle form of image which you have created in your mind. Allah is beyond "Nothing-ness", Allah is beyond "Some-thing-ness", and Allah is beyond any mental attribute that we can ascribe unto Him. For there is no likeness unto Allah! *(Qur'an 112)* Consequently, it is only possible to have no mental image of Allah when one succeeds in removing the mirror of the mind. But as long as the mirror is there, it will always reflect images.

Islam teaches that it is only possible to remove the mind when one has totally surrendered his will to the Will of Allah. When this happens, there will no longer be any difference between Allah and His Servant.

Allah's Apostle said, "Allah said, 'I am to My servant as he thinks of Me.'" *[Hadith No.502]*

Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi is venerated as the reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi who was regarded by the Muslims as a Muslim and by the Hindus as a Hindu. In the story below we see how Shirdi Sai Baba revealed the Oneness of God and proved to both the Muslims and the Hindus that this Unity can only be realized by one who has totally surrendered himself to God.

Allah Malik! Datthaathreya Malik!



Shirdi Sai

A controversy arose among the local people in Shirdi as to whether Baba was a Muslim or a Hindu. At one time He used to say: "Allah Malik! Allah Malik!" (Allah is the Master) At other times, He would say "Datthaathreya Malik"!

Whenever He shouted "Allah Malik!" Muslims used to come to Him in the Masjid. His appearance was very much like that of a Muslim; hence, many Muslims used to come to Him. Hindus also used to come and offer incense to Him. The Muslims did not approve of what the Hindus were doing. The Hindus did not like the way Muslims revered Baba.

Consequently, bitterness developed between the two communities. One day, Mhalsapathi was sitting near Baba and serving Him. Mhalsapathi was the priest in the Khandoba temple. The Muslims, who were opposed to the presence of a Hindu priest near Baba, came with sticks and beat up Mhalsapathi.

At every stroke, Mhalsapathi cried out: "Baba!" "Baba!" Each time he shouted the name of Baba, the blow was borne by Baba. Finally, Mhalaspathi fell to the ground.

"They worship Allah but they beat Allah"

Baba came out. Muslims had great reverence for Baba. Baba roared at the Muslim crowd: "Saithan! On the one side you worship Me and on the other you beat Me. Is this your devotion?"

Baba was bleeding all over the body. The Muslims saw it and asked Baba who had beaten Him.

"Did you not beat Me? Did you not beat Me?" said Baba pointing to several men in the crowd. They said: "We did not come near You at all. We only beat Mhalaspathi."

"Who is in Mhalaspathi? I am in him," declared Baba." He has surrendered to Me and hence all his troubles are Mine."

Progeny of the Same Mother

On hearing this, the Muslims fell at Baba's Feet and craved His forgiveness. Baba then summoned the Hindus and Muslims and told them: "Dear Children, you are all the progeny of One Mother."

"Whatsoever you do to anyone, it is unto Allah you do it"

Thereby Baba demonstrated the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. He wanted all differences of caste and creed to be eschewed.

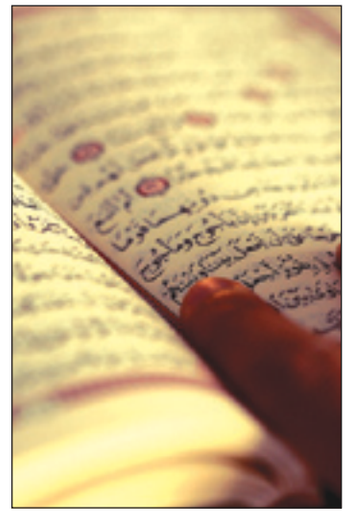
What mattered for mankind was the heart. One who is only concerned about his creed will never discover the Divine.

You must seek the Divine within you. Baba pointed out that all caste and creed distinctions related only to the body and mind and that one should go beyond these two to attain the Unity of God.

(Sathya Sai Baba discourse, 25-12-1985)

The God of Islam

In every age there were people who held the idea of a Formless God. This idea is called Islam. The realization of God as He is, beyond Form, beyond Name, beyond all attributes and images is the highest stage of worship. Yet it is not possible for all to at once reach this exalted state of the worship of the Attributeless and Formless God without going through the stage of worshiping God with Attributes and Form.



"Read with the Name of thy Lord" Qur'an 96:1

This is because the goal of uniting or merging the individual limited will of man into the Universal Infinite Will of Allah is a gradual process. **For anyone to come to that complete surrender to Allah which the Qur'an talks about, that person must have passed through stages of transformation, sublimation, and total annihilation of the mind. As long as one is attached to the body-mind complex which steeps him in body consciousness, one would not be able to understand and reach the Attributeless and Formless Supreme.**

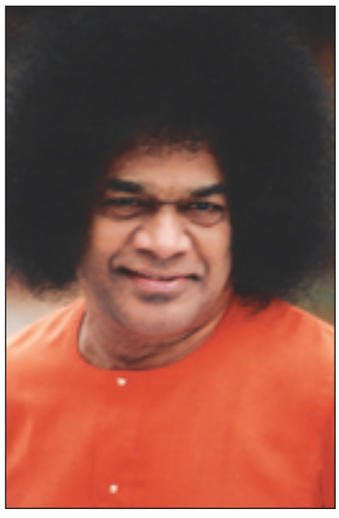
The Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet (the authentic sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohammed [Peace be upon HIm) are like the two legs of Islam. These two Books of Allah give a well structured and step by step laid out spiritual principles which transform the savage

mind into a civilized person in the primary school of Spirituality , sublimates the civilized mind into a moral person in the college of Spirituality, and annihilates the moral mind into a Divine person in the University of Allah's Universality.

The Formless is Understood Through the Form

It is important to realize that the goal of Islam is to lead man to the correct understanding of the nature of God. Every mental image of the Almighty limits God to a particular Form and Name. Islam teaches that God, in His true nature, is beyond Name and Form. But to realize this Formless, Omnipresent and Unchanging aspect of Divinity, one has to pass through a process of mental surrender which leads from the Form to the Formless.

Beloved Swami gives us an apt example to illustrate this process. He says that let us suppose you want to teach the word "chair' to a small child. If you merely utter the word "chair" it does not become clear to him what this form is. However, you can show him a chair and ask him to look it over carefully, all around. While he is doing this you repeat the word "chair". The form of the particular chair you used to teach him the meaning of the word may be impermanent (that chair may change); but the word "chair" and the type of objects it represents will remain. Unless he sees the impermanent form, he will not learn the permanent word "chair". The permanent element is understood through the impermanent one. Therefore, though Divinity is Formless, you have to associate it with a particular Form to understand it.



Leading man from the form to the Formless

Little children must be taught with the help of big letters scrawled on boards and slates. Temples , images, rosaries, statues, flowers, etc, are the slates and boards, for children in spiritual progress. But, even if we play with a toy elephant we cannot get the experience of contacting a live elephant, can we? The Formless Godhead can be understood only when we have rendered ourselves formless! But as long as we are still immersed in the world of qualities, we have to attach ourselves only to God with Attributes.

Left – Right - Left – Right

We can therefore describe Islam as the end of a journey. To walk on this path and reach this end we need two legs. Both legs cannot be on the ground at the same time, else we will not move. Similarly, both legs cannot be in the air at the same time otherwise we will be flying and this is not possible. Hence, in order to progress on the spiritual path and reach the goal which is 'Islam', one leg must be on the ground at a time, while the other is in the air. We need to move from the 'Form', - that is left leg on the ground, - to the 'Formless' - that is right leg in the air. And from the 'Formless', that is right leg in the air, - to the 'Form' again. Both processes are possible and progressive until we arrive at the end of our journey which is Islam, where no movement is possible, because you have reached Allah who is Omnipresent, and no movement is necessary because there is no place where Allah is not.

The Masjid al-Nabawi - Tomb of the Holy Prophet in Medina

A Painting of the Holy Quran that Adorns the Poornachandra Stage at Prasanthi Nilayam

The Personal God is an expression, a symbol, a representation to help the child on the path of spirituality to realize the Impersonal Formless God. The Impersonal and Formless God personates and assumes Form and Attributes in order to guide and teach the child how to move from the Form to the Formless. This is the very Nature of the Divine, for Allah says in the sacred Hadith: "I am just as My servant thinks I am". This means that Allah who is Formless, Attributeless, and Nameless, condescends to be remembered in any Attribute, Form, or Name, or concept, or image, which His devotee thinks of Him

The Prophet said, "Allah says: 'I am just as My servant thinks I am, and I am with him if he remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group that is better than they; and if he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.' *[see Hadith No. 502 and Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 93, Number 502, & 583]*

In this process, the Incomprehensible Allah becomes comprehensible in the mind of His Devotee. The art of remembering God is a mental process. And it is impossible to invoke God in the mind without the aid of an Attribute or Name or Form or concept or idea or image.

Remember Allah as you remember your fathers; nay with an even stronger remembrance.

Burst the Balloon of Body Consciousness

Air is Formless, but it assumes the form of the balloon. Allah is Formless, but He assumes the Form in which His servant remembers Him. The same Formless air is present inside, as well as outside the balloon. Balloons differ in size and color, but the air within them is one and the same.

Both are One: The Air Inside the Balloon and the Air Outside

The body can be compared to a color balloon. The air within the balloon can be compared to conscience or mind, and the all-pervasive air to the Universal Consciousness or Allah. When more and more air is blown into the balloon, ultimately the balloon bursts and the air within (mind) merges with the air outside (Universal Consciousness).

Similarly, the Religion of Islam helps man to expand his mind with Love until the balloon of attachment to body, name and form bursts and the conscience within merges with the Consciousness outside.

The difference between conscience and consciousness is only in quantity, not in quality. The difference between the will of man and the Will of God is only in quantity, not in quality - for "When Allah decreeth a thing He only saith to it: 'Be', and It is." (Qur'an 19:37 ; 3:55)

Imran Musakhanov is another privileged Muslim who has experienced the transformative Power of Sai Baba's Love. He was born in a very devout religious Muslim family in Dagestan, a Muslim Republic in the south west of Russia . Imran tells us stories of his fascinating encounters with Sai Baba and how he was able to harmonize the worship of God in Form and the Formless Divinity.

Know The Dreamer

I started reading books from Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and so on from my early childhood, thanks to my parents who were broadminded and gave me this freedom. I wanted so much to progress on the path of Self-surrender to Allah. But I did not have a clear idea how it should be done.

Then Swami graciously came to my dream even before I heard about Him. It was a bright and vivid dream which I can still remember in all minute details. I found myself in a jungle at night time.

Mr. Imran Musakhanov, Russia

It was pitch-dark. I looked around and saw a dim light in the distance. Like a moth I went towards the light. Soon I came to a temple on the outskirts of the jungle.

I later realized, the temple had a dome similar to the three domes of the Museum of All Religions here in Prashanti Nilayam. Another thing that struck me was that it had many architectural features from different religious traditions. It was like a combination of a Mosque, a Hindu Temple , a Church and a Buddhist Temple , all in one. The doors were wide open and I went inside. There, in a big hall, I saw many people sitting silently in meditation. Some were sitting cross-legged as yogis, others on their knees according to Muslim tradition. I was curious to know what these people are doing. What were they meditating upon?

Then, I noticed that they all started bowing down and prostrating with a lot of love and devotion to somebody. The earth started shaking and I could hear dramatic sounds of thunders from behind. I turned around and saw a hallowed old man in a dark blue mantle with a hood covering His head. I could see some curly black hair under the hood. He had a stick in His hand and was surrounded by a group of His disciples. That scene had such a powerful impact on me that I fell on my knees and spontaneously bowed down to Him. On their own accord my lips whispered, "God! God! God!" The old man was looking straight into my eyes. His eyes were very serious, and yet, very Compassionate. I can well remember those remarkable eyes. I can now see those very eyes every time Sai Baba looks at me.

Cosmic Consciousness Embodied

He lifted His left hand with a finger pointing up and said, "You should! You should! You should!" He didn't say *what* I should do, but in my heart I felt that I should strive for God-realization.

I did not know at that time who that God was, but I started putting more efforts on the way of self-transformation. A few years after that dream, or rather inner-view, I met some people who told me about this great spiritual Master who lives in India.

I started studying His books and took active part in the activities of our Sai center in Mahachkala.

It took me almost a decade to come to Prashanti Nilayam and pay my homage to His Physical Form. I understand fully well that Sai permeates the whole Universe, which He Himself created for His pleasure. But for the pleasure of devotees and for our benefit, He has assumed a Human Form so we can feel our kinship with God which will help us progress and evolve faster.

When the Disciple is Ready, the Master will Appear

Before I could have Darshan of the Master of all Masters, Swami graciously gave me the privilege to meet other teachers from other religious traditions.

Swami gave me the opportunity to meet a Sufi master, Sheik Mahmoud Baba. He lives in a small village called Bilingy, 170 km from Mahachkala, in the south-east of Dagastan, Russia. He is from the

Islamic Sufi tradition and is one of the four most highly regarded holy men in Dagastan. Many people come to see him, even in large groups and he has the reputation of being a loving conduit for praying to Allah for healings and spiritual blessings – in Islam this is called Dua, prayers interceding for others. He spends most of the day in the *zearat*, a small mosque next to his house, and can be found engrossed in prayers, and recitation of God's Name.

I met Mahmoud Baba through some friends and started to see him regularly. We have become good friends. Mahmoud Baba is a very tall man who is 80 years old. He looks like an angel, as he has a long grey beard, always wears white and carries a rosary.

The first time I went to his house, I noticed many pictures and small statues of Sai Baba and Shirdi Baba in addition to other Indian sages. I asked Mahmoud Baba for his opinion of both Sai Baba and Babaji (who was made known to the world by Swami Yogananada and is known as Payigambar Babaji Hizri, the Eternal Angelic Baba), and the Muslim saint replied that he saw no difference between them, but that he saw Sai Baba as 'King of the World'.

How Shirdi Sai Baba Came to Mahmoud Baba

From Shirdi Baba to Parthi Baba

Whenever we met Mahmoud Baba, he would talk a lot about Shirdi Sai and Sathya Sai Baba. He told us an interesting story about how he heard Shirdi Baba's name for the first time. He had made a Holy Pilgrimage to Mecca in 1996 with his disciples.

He was buying some rosaries from a small shop. There were many people around and then he felt somebody lightly pat him on his shoulder. He turned around and saw an old man with a white beard in shabby clothes. He looked like a mendicant.

This old man leaned over to him and whispered into his ear, "You know, My Name is Shirdi Sai Baba," and he replied, "Ok, thank you for telling me that" and continued looking at the rosaries.

But the old man stayed put and said to him again, "You know, I am from Puttaparthi". Mahmoud Baba replied that he didn't know where Puttaparthi was, trying to put an end to the conversation, but the old man did not budge.

Mahmoud Baba felt that maybe He was in need of some money as He was wearing shabby clothes, so he told one of his disciples, to give the old man some money. The disciple was reluctant to give money away, as there were so many beggars around. But Mahmoud Baba insisted that he should give something to this old man. Finally the disciple reluctantly gave a few coins into Baba's hand. Shirdi Baba looked at the coins, kept them in His bag and moved away into the crowd, vanishing into it.

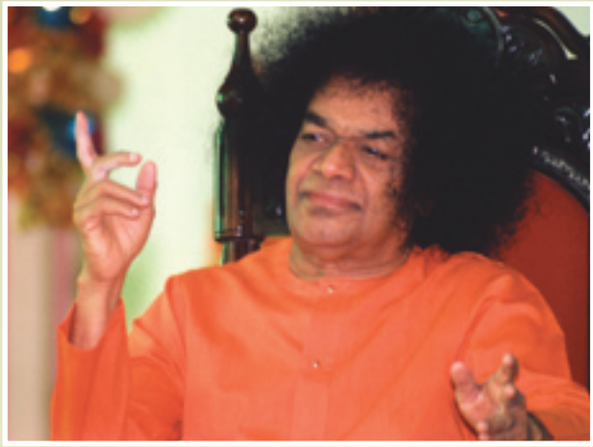
Mahmoud Baba then intuitively realized that this old man was a Divine Being, and he scolded his disciple for being hesitant in giving something to the One who sustains, guides and guards all living beings. So he sent him to find this Divine man as he wanted to talk to Him. But despite much searching, he was nowhere to be found.

How Sathya Sai Baba Came to Mahmoud Baba

A few years later, a group of Muslims came to visit Mahmoud Baba. They had heard about Sai Baba and His hospitality to Muslim pilgrims, and had come to clear up their doubts about the authenticity of this Holy Man of India.

After being asked about this matter, Mahmoud Baba said that he didn't know much about Sai Baba, he had only heard His name, but he would pray to the Almighty Allah for guidance in this matter. So, in their presence he turned towards the Kaaba and started praying to Allah.

As a reply to his prayer he had a vision in which he saw an extraordinary person with Divine attributes, who was surrounded by a large group of disciples. As soon as they appeared, the earth started shaking and there were dramatic lightning and thunders in the sky. Immediately he realized that Sai Baba was a Divine Incarnation.



"Call Me by any Name..."

Turning around to the visitors he said to them, "Sai Baba is a Divine Person, you should certainly go and see Him, actually, all should go and see Him". Since that time Sai Baba started to appear to him in different forms and spent a lot of time with him, eating with him, and instructing him about different religious matters. He would even give minute details about the proper practice of Muslim rituals. He became his best friend, guarding and guiding him.

"Who Is Sai Baba To You?"

On many occasions, large groups of seekers would go to see Mahmoud Baba for his blessings and guidance. Once, I was part of a big group going to visit him. We were travelling in a bus and I was talking with a friend about Swami. We were discussing Swami's stories and Miracles. We didn't know that a well respected orthodox Muslim, who had established a *madrase* in Mahachkala, was nearby us, and actually listening to what we were talking. Growing impatient with our conversation, he told us "Don't you know that Sai Baba is not recognized by the Muslim authorities?" After some discussion we concluded that we should ask Mahmoud Baba about this matter, as he was a holy man of great wisdom.

When we reached the presence of Mahmoud Baba and sat with him, the central theme of his talk was: Sai Baba of Shirdi and Sathya Sai Baba. He recounted many stories about them. The orthodox Muslim grew more and more confused on how a well-known and much respected Muslim Sheik should believe in Sai Baba, since He is not recognized by the Muslim authorities. Finally, rather bewildered, he put a straightforward question to Mahmoud Baba: "Who is Sai Baba for you?" Mahmoud Baba's face became serious; he looked deep into his eyes and said, "Subhan Allah Illyazim" which means "He is the Supreme God".

God is all pervasive, all peace and all powerful

This answer left the man even more confused. Seeing his predicament, Mahmoud Baba told him compassionately, "You know, my son, this is a mystery. It is not revealed to many. Even some great sheiks and *Mahasiddhis* are not aware of this fact".

After this conversation, Mahmoud Baba requested everybody to join him in *Namaz*, in which he was bowing down to the Images of Sai Baba.

After the *Namaz*, I explained to the orthodox man that Mahmoud Baba actually prayed not to the Image itself, but to the Universal Spirit that it represented.

From The Formless to the Form and From The Form to the Formless

Mahmoud Baba requested some followers of Sai Baba to bring him some pictures and statues of Shirdi Sai Baba and of Sathya Sai Baba, which he installed in his *zearat*, and started worshipping and praying to them.

After some time, the Muslim community became concerned about this situation, seeing that he was not only praying to idols but also to Saints not recognized by the Muslim authorities. So, the authorities came to visit him in his *zearat* and told him that he should not pray to idols as it was against the Muslim tradition, and that Shirdi Sai Baba and Sathya Sai Baba were not recognized by the Muslim clergy.

To this Mahmoud Baba replied: "You see, so many people come to me with many problems and ask me to pray to Allah for them. Whenever I pray to Almighty Allah, He comes in the Form of Sai Baba and helps the people, healing them and solving their problems. So, why do you think it is not proper to pray to this Image of Sai Baba?" After this reply, the authorities left without saying anything further.

But many respected people of the republic kept on requesting him to oblige with the clergy and remove the idols as it was against the tradition. Seeing this, Mahmoud Baba said "If you want me to remove the Idols, so be it" and he removed the Idols from his altar.

Sometime after this incident, Swami came to his dream and told him, "Don't you know that this is My temple? Reinstall the Idols and continue your worship". So it was that Mahmoud Baba installed back the idols and continued his worship as before, with the same steadfast love and devotion.

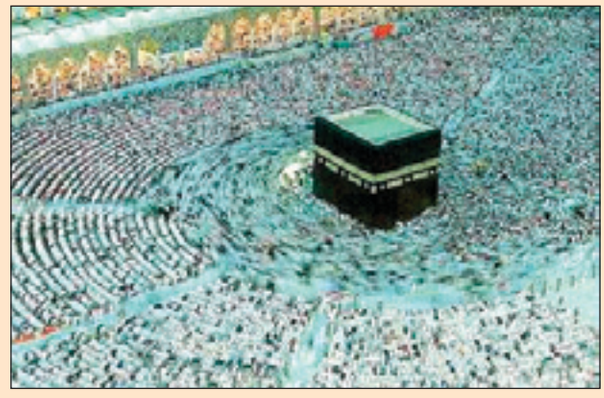
Wherever You are, I am There

My friends and I requested Mahmoud Baba to come with us to Prashanti Nilayam for Swami's Darshan. He said, "I would love to go and see Swami in His actual Physical Form, but Swami told me to stay here and continue to give spiritual guidance to the seekers".

PART 3: THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

The whole of Creation is made up of five elements. We see the imprint of this spiritual pentagon in the very constitution of man: in his five senses, five organs of action, five vital airs, five sensations, etc. Truly speaking, Creation is built on Five pillars; namely the Five elements. But the pillars of the outer physical world are only a reflection of the inner spiritual foundation. Beloved Sathya Sai Baba tells us that these five spiritual pillars which are the bases of the inner and outer worlds are: Truth, Peace, Love, Right Conduct, and Non-Violence.

The Religion of Islam is based on these five spiritual pillars: ***Shahadah*** which relates to Truth; ***Salah*** which relates to Peace; ***Zakat*** which relates to Right Conduct, ***Sawm*** which relates to Non –Violence and ***Haji*** which relates to Love.



The Kabah at Mecca

With One Voice and One Heart they call on Allah

Shahada: the Basic Creed of Islam

The Shahada is the first pillar of Islam. It is a declaration of the Truth: *"La allaha illa allah; Mohammed rasulul allah"* which means "God is One and Mohammed is His

Prophet." This Truth is not only the basic pillar of Islam and indeed of all religions, but also the very foundation of Existence. All the Religions declare that God is One.

Once a Scribe came to Jesus and asked him which is the greatest Commandment in the Jewish scriptures and Jesus replied:

"Listen oh Israel , the Lord your God is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength. And your neighbor as your self." *(Mark 12:29)*

"There is no Commandment greater than this", Jesus told the Scribe.

In the Vedas and other scriptures of Hinduism, the Oneness of God form the basis of Advaitha which is the soul of Hinduism: Ekam Sath Vipraah Bahudaa Vadanti – Truth is One, but Sages interpret it in many ways. Ekam Eva Adviteeyam Brahma – God is One not many.

The second part of the ***Shahada*** states that Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah. Who is a Prophet? A Prophet is a messenger of God. Who is a messenger? A messenger is one who carries the message. Hence, a Messenger is a Vehicle of God.

The inner meaning of this is that each one of us has the potential of becoming the Prophet of God. This happens when our hearts are emptied to carry the message of Allah; The Glorious Qur'an says: "whosoever it is Allah's Will to Guide: He Expands his heart into Islam." ***(Al-An'am 6:125)*** **Hence, the means of this self-emptying is Islam – that is complete surrender to Allah until one's heart becomes a house of revelations.** Al Ghazali mentioned it in the *Ihya Ulum al-Din* that the Prophet said that Allah had told him:

"Neither My Heaven nor My Earth can contain Me. Yet the Heart of My devotee contains Me."

Professor Abdul Razak Baburao Korbu merged in the Lord on May 27, 2000 at his residence at Jaisingpur, Maharasthra, India. Prof. Abdul's wife is a very devout and orthodox Muslim and had great difficulty believing in the reality of Sai Baba. Below is a story of how the All Compassionate, All Merciful Sai dissolved her fears and brought her to the realization of the Islamic Truth: God is One

The Divine Invitation

Beloved Sai Baba had invited me to bring my wife to Puttaparthi. My wife blatantly refused this request. I pleaded with her so many times using many persuasions: 'I am not forcing you to go to any temple at Puttaparthi, or to do *namaskar* to Sai Baba or to bow at His Feet. You will just accompany me. Is it not said that the wife should see the husband as a spiritual head?"

When Love takes a Form...

My wife retorted sharply: "Don't quote the scriptures for your advantage. Why are you forcing me to go there?" "I am not forcing you", I said. "It is Sai Baba Himself who has called you." Then, to my greatest relief she said, "Alright, I will come on the condition that I will not do *namaskar* in front of anyone and I will not bow down to anyone's feet."

On the second day of our arrival Sai Baba called us for an interview. My wife entered the interview room with a taciturn face. She did not do *namaskar* or bow down at Swami's Feet. However, on Swami's Face was a celestial smile. I tried to apologize to Swami saying: "Baba, Please forgive her." And Swami said: "Keep quiet. You talk too much." My wife gave me a strong look of disapproval.

God is the Doctor of Doctors

Below is an English translation of the brief conversation between Baba and my wife in Hindi.

Baba: "How are you, my bachhi (child)?"

My wife did not feel like answering, but the word 'Bachhi' made her open up. Looking at the floor, she answered.

Naseem: "I am fine."

Baba: "How many children do you have?"

Naseem: "Four. Three sons and a daughter."

Baba: "What do they do?"

Naseem: "Two are practicing law. Two are studying. Daughter is doing medicine."

Baba: "Very good. I am very happy."

After this my wife felt better, but I was uneasy. Then Baba turned towards me and enquired about my teaching at the college.

Baba: "Abdul, tell me if you desire anything from Me."

Abdul: "Nothing Baba. But ....."

Before I could complete the sentence, Baba indicated by His Hand to stop talking. Although Baba told me to ask, I was not in an appropriate state of mind to do so. Naseem was sitting in the meditative position of *Namaaz*, with face looking down and both hands folded on her knees.

To my wife, Baba said again **"***Meri bachhi***"** (My child). It was very touching when Baba called her *"Meri bachhi!"* Naseem became slightly relaxed and for the first time raised her head to look at Baba. In a very casual manner, Baba asked her, "Don't you want your own son?"

His Love Pulls us Beyond the Barriers of Religion

Now I became completely relaxed. With this question, Baba gazed into Naseem's eyes without batting His eyelids. Naseem was transfixed with her eyes looking at Baba only. This Divine communion went on for a short time. Then suddenly, as if pulled by some invisible force, she fell at Baba's Feet and plaintively murmured **"***Oh! Mere Baba***."** (Oh! My Baba.)

Her whole body was trembling. She was profusely weeping and washing Baba's feet with her tears! I was about to go near her and help, but Baba signaled me to sit quiet. Baba picked up His handkerchief, wiped His face and lips, and sat at ease. Except for the sound of Naseem's sobbing, there was pin-drop silence.

Surrender at His Feet

After a few minutes, Baba said *"Utho mere bachhi"* (get up my child). Naseem managed to get up and sat up. In her hand she held a corner of Baba's robe which was hanging on the floor.

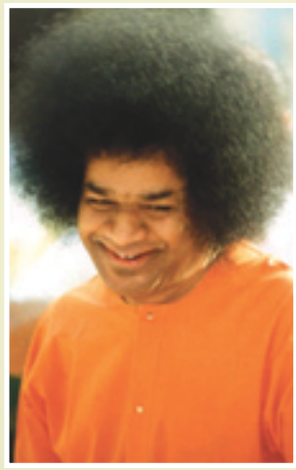
And Allah Says, "Be" and It is

Baba looked at me, kept His hand on my left shoulder and told me to sit next to my wife, who was still sobbing. Continuing to look at me, Swami said, "This lady is pregnant from this moment. She will deliver a very intelligent son on a nationally important day. She will deliver one more son on another important day."

Oh! My jaw dropped and I was amazed. Slowly speaking, I said, "Baba, the doctors confirmed that....." Cutting off my sentence, Baba said, "What doctors? Doctors – I am the Doctor of doctors!" Naseem and I both understood, and both of us fell at His Feet again. In this manner, Naseem did *'Sai Namaz'* prayers twice.

As a prologue to this Divine Drama, I have to narrate that I married my second wife, Naseem, about eight years back. She did not bear any child for a long time so we consulted gynaecologists at Kolhapur who declared that it is not possible for her to conceive due to blockages of tubes, O-Rh-negative blood, etc. But Naseem loved my first wife and her four children without any reservations. And the children too loved her very much. That was the reason why when Baba asked, "How many children?" She gave a firm answer, "four".

After returning form Puttaparthi, on the second day I went to Dr. (Mrs.) Meenatai, and told her that Naseem is pregnant and will deliver a son and later on a second son. Meenatai looked at me doubtfully as she had thoroughly checked Naseem just prior to our leaving for Puttaparthi.



He says: 'Be' and It Is

Then I narrated to Meenatai all that had happened at Prasanthi Nilayam. She and her Bhadre family members were devotees of Sai Baba of Shirdi. She was suspicious of Sathya Sai Baba. However, she said, "I do agree that this is possible only with the Divine Omni Will."

On the appointed date, I took Naseem to the clinic. After carrying out necessary medical examination they reported "the pregnancy has been clinically confirmed."

In this manner, as per Baba's Divine Will, Naseem gave birth to her first son on October 2, 1993 coinciding with the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi – a nationally important day! Swami Himself performed the naming ceremony and gave him the name 'Sai Baksh' which means "Sai's Gift".

Naseem gave birth to her second child, a boy, on November 19, 1984 . This day is the birth date of Indira Gandhi! The naming ceremony was done at our home and the boy was named 'Sai Kalam' as per Baba's wish. The sacred verses of Quran are called *'Aayat'* and the second line of *'Aayat'* is called **'***Kalam***'.**

(Dear Reader, because of the limited scope of this cover story, we do not intend to go into the details of all the Five Pillars of Islam and other concepts like "Jihad". But we would love to offer it you as another Cover Story at a later date, provided you let us know if you would really like such an article. Please write to us at h2h@radiosai.org)

PART 4: THE CALL OF SAI

In this present age, humanity is witnessing an unprecedented Phenomenon in the history of Creation. Can the children of Adam see? Will those born from the womb of Eve perceive? For Allah says to His Prophet (Peace be upon Him) in the Glorious Qur'an:

"Of whosoever it is Allah's Will to guide, he expands into Islam; And of whomsoever it is His Will to send astray, his heart He made closed and narrow as if it were engaged in sheer ascent." *(6:125)*

So that:

"Hearing and hearing, they fail to understand; seeing and seeing, they do not perceive; they have closed their eyes and their ears cannot hear because their hearts have been blocked; lest they turn to Me and let Me heal them."
(Mathew 13: 14 -15; Isaiah 6:9-10)

What signs do the men and women of this generation seek; because they seek the wrong things? What wonders

do the children of this age require, because they search at the wrong places? What proof do the children of God need, because they knock at the wrong doors?

Hear the clarion call of Sai. Awake! Arise! Realize your Oneness with Allah. Sai Baba has come to lead us to the sublime heights of Islam. Sai Baba has come to take us to that complete surrender to the Will of Allah. Sai Baba has come to teach us the art of "Die-mind" whereby it is not possible to create images of That which has truly, in its essence, cannot be confined to an image.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, Surah Ale Imran, chapter 3: v 63-64:

"Oh people of the Book! Why disbelieve the signs of God of which yourselves have been witnesses? Oh people of the Book! Why cloth ye the Truth with falsehood? Why wittingly hide the Truth?"

Allah is Great!

As long as one sees oneself as the body and is tied to the body-mind complex, one cannot understand the formless aspect of God. As long as one thinks that one is the body, one cannot attain the exalted state of Islam. This is the message of Sai.

Many Devout Muslims who have recognized the resonance of the Islamic Wisdom in the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba believe that now is the time to come to terms with ourselves by the signs of God which we have been witnesses: Say He is Allah, the One and Only. Say He is Allah, the Absolute Eternal. Say He is Allah, He begets not nor is begotten. Say He is Allah, there is nothing like Him. Say He is Allah, He says, "Be" and it is!

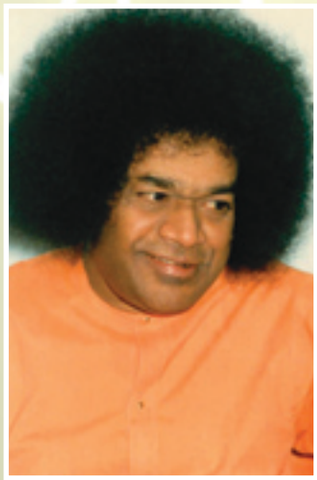
Not only this! Sai Baba leads devotees world over to an experiential awareness of the Oneness of Allah; to a lived example of His Omnipresence; and to the pragmatic import of His Omnipotence.

Based on their first-hand experiences and the revelations they have received, they strongly believe and urge others to adhere to the call of Sai.

Let us listen to yet another experience of Professor Abdul Razak Baburao Korbu who is one of the witnesses to these signs of God with us.

Say He is Allah Who Holds the Heavens and Earth in One Finger and Who says 'Be' and It Is

Sai Baba called me for an interview. Within the interview room, Beloved Swami put a question to me which captured me fully:



"I know you have faith... But do you really believe in Me?"

Baba: "I know that you have faith in Me, but you do not believe in My Power with which I create articles. Is it not so?"

I could not think of anything to say. In a way, I was happy that finally this topic has surfaced as I was still not fully satisfied on this account. I wanted to see and experience it myself. During the past five years, I spoke of Baba and about Baba to scientists, doctors and other learned persons.

I could not answer their questions on creation of objects from sheer Will. I felt it maybe because I did not experience it or I had no adequate knowledge about it due to my half-hearted efforts.

Abdul: "Forgive me, Baba. It is so."

Baba: "Your absence of belief in My Power of Creation is genuine and inquisitive also. I like your frankness and love you. It is very good that you do not take anything for granted. Your faith in Me is not blind; very good. Now I am telling you to ask Me for anything and I shall give it to you here and now. Take your time and ask for anything you desire."

Now I had a break. I had seen a number of objects created by Baba and handled them also. I was convinced about the genuineness of the articles, but I was not sure whether Baba Himself created them. After thinking for a while, knowing very well that there were very few Muslims among Baba's devotees, I decided to ask for an impossible article no one has seen so far!

Abdul: "Baba, please give me such a thing which embodies in it the entire Universe and only my own religion is shown on it."

Baba: (With a sweet smile) "Abdul, do you really think that you have put an impossible request before Me?"

Without a reply, I kept on staring at Baba.

Baba: "Look at My Palm. Do you see anything in it? Nothing is in My palm or behind it. You can verify it."

Baba turned His Palm upside down, His cape was above the elbow. I could not dare to hold His Hand. Then Baba caught my wrist forcefully and moved my palm from around His palm to His elbow.

Baba: "Now, go on looking at the centre of My palm for some time."

Within seven to eight seconds, the skin in the centre of His palm opened up and I saw a round large sized object coming out of it, soon the skin became normal as before and there was a beautiful luminous ring there.

The revealing Ring materialised by Swami for Abdul

Baba: (In Hindi) "You pick it up and give it in My hand. Before that have a careful look at it."

As ordered by Baba, I picked up the ring and inspected it very carefully. It had a crescent moon and a star engraved in gold. I put it back in Baba's palm.

Abdul: "Baba, I cannot understand anything about this ring. Please explain."

Baba: "You are only born as a Muslim. You do not understand anything about Islam."

That was the truth. I am not a religious person in the true sense.

Baba: "I have made this gold ring in *Asta konas* (Octangular), embedded *Nava-ratnas* (nine gems), both represent the Universe, and in the middle of the *navaratnas* I have put the Islamic symbol of the star and crescent in emeralds (green gem stones.)"

Abdul: "Baba, where is the Muslim religion on this ring?"

Baba: "Look at these green stones. That is your religion. Now I will put this ring on the fourth finger of your left hand as your right hand finger is disfigured."

With this talk, Baba put the heavy ring on the said finger. Ah! It fitted perfectly. I bowed down again at His feet, now with plenty of tears. After a few minutes, I followed Baba to the outer chamber. Baba told the nine foreigners, who were waiting in there, about the ring and described me as "My naughty devotee?"

I came to the outer veranda. The fourth finger of my left hand became heavy with the ring which had a heavy sparkling beauty. Prof. Kasturi's attention was drawn to it at first. He raised my palm, examined the ring minutely and exclaimed, "I have never seen such a beautiful creation by Swami so far! These are *navaratnas* (The Nine Universes). But what is this in the middle green portion of the ring? Is it Aum?"

Dr. V. K. Gokak, who also examined it, said, "It is not Aum certainly. Whatever it may be, this ring is an exquisite beauty. I am also witnessing such a creation by Swami for the first time." A few other devotees also saw this ring and touched it to their foreheads and eyes.

I had almost lost my speech, finding it difficult to utter even a single word. As I came into the Darshan hall, a very large number of devotees surrounded me, amongst them were many foreigners.

One of them was a bearded American devotee. He came near me saw the ring closely, took my hand with the ring, put it on his chest and said, *"All Hum do Allah!"* (Oh! God, your pastime is fathomless).

I was astonished by this and asked him to tell me more. He answered, "I am a Muslim. The ring reveals that you too are a Muslim." I asked him again, "How did you make this out?". He said, "Can you read Arabic?" When I answered in the negative, he clarified, "It is inscribed in the middle all in green." I further asked, "What is the meaning of the inscription?" He answered: "It is 'Allah' in Arabic."

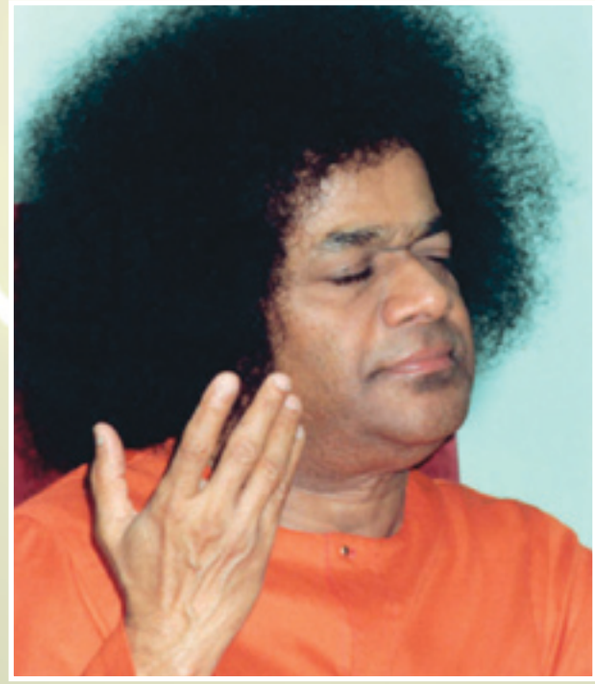
At that time I came to know that Baba has inscribed the word "Allah" in the centre of the green emerald stone. I had asked Baba for my religion, and Baba blessed me in this wonderful manner!

Once Sathya Sai Baba wrote on the cover of The Holy Qur'an for a Muslim devotee – "I am in you and around you. Be happy." He signed below without mentioning the date.

Dr. Zeba Basheeruddin, a Professor of English from Hyderabad who served for many years in Sri Sathya Sai University, initially thought the 'I am' in the inscription referred to the physical body of Sai Baba, but changed her opinion later when Sai Baba revealed His Omnipresence to her. When Sathya Sai Baba says "I" He does not refer to His physical body but to the Universal Eternal Consciousness; the 'I AM THAT I AM'. (Exodus 3:14)

Below is an account by Dr. Zeba Basheeruddin.

Allah, the Omnipresent



The Omnipresent Sai

"I had once engaged my three children in a difficult task, as I was unable to attend to it myself. Many hours had gone by; but the children had not

returned. I was worried about their safety. With emotions of fear mingled with hope, I sat at the doorstep scanning the street. Sensing my tension, my mother calmly started chanting *'Ayatul Kursi'* [Lines in Koran ensuring safety and security].

After some time, she closed her eyes and remained silent. Minutes ticked by; but there was no sign of the children coming. The silence aggravated my tension. Why did mother stop praying? What could have happened? After a seemingly long spell of fifteen minutes, mother opened her eyes and asked, "Does your Baba have large eyes?"

"Yes, He has." I replied.

The next query was, "Has He got thick hair neatly set around His head?"

The third one threw more light on the identity. "Does He wear a long *Kurta* reaching down to His Feet?"

Definitely the description was that of Baba. What she told me after that was extremely important as far as I was concerned. She revealed, "As I was chanting the prayers from Qur'an, I had the vision of your three children in my inner eye. Baba was also with them."

Oh God! Oh my God! What a relief! What a fool I was to be worried! I informed mother that Baba had promised to protect the children right from their birth.

My mother, who firmly believed in the Formless Allah, was not a Sai devotee. She explained that Sai Baba's promise was not referring to His Physical Form, but to the Power of His Omnipresence. Sai is *Al Hafiz* [The Protector].

The children were back safe and sound, within an hour." *[Sai Baba – Mercy to the Worlds P. 19, 20.]*

Mrs. Sarojini Palanivelu in her book 'Miracle and Spirituality' relates the story of a Muslim lad from Tamilnadu who called to Allah with all his strength to save his father from the pull of evil habits and how Allah responded as Sai.

God Runs to the Devotee - by any Name He May be Called

His father was a notorious ruffian and hence he was compelled to keep aloof from the company of his classmates. Boys of his age despised him branding him as the son of a rowdy. Whenever he tried to mingle with others, they ostracized him.

The tender heart ached. One day, interspersed with sobs, he managed to convey the cause of his sorrow to his mother. His mother said, "Yes, your father is what they say he is."

Innocently, the boy asked, "What shall I do to reform my father?"

'Pray to Allah' was the instantaneous reply.

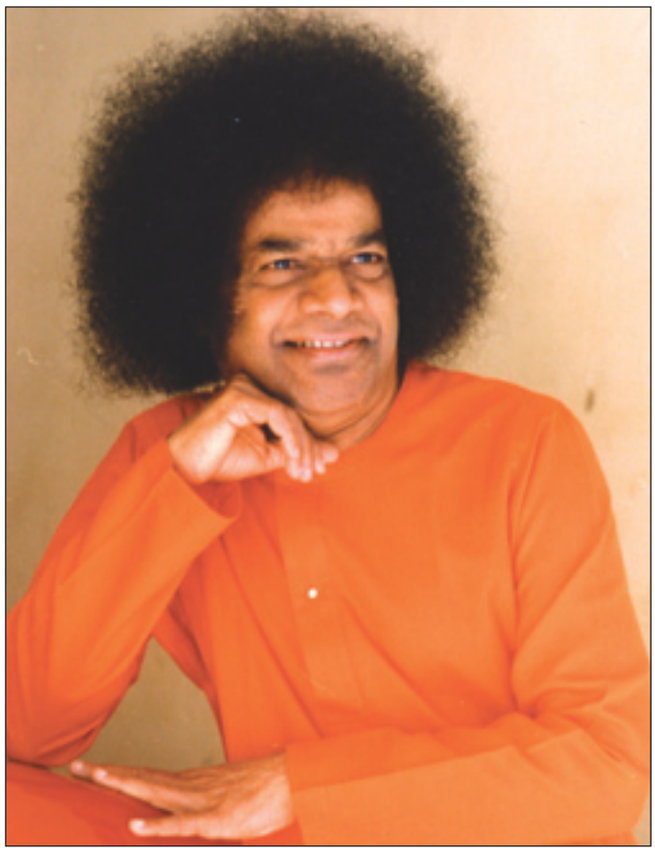
The boy started chanting 'Allah...Allah..' as if in severe penance.

One day, Sathya Sai Baba appeared in his father's dream and said, "Come to Puttaparthi; bring your family too." At first the father, who had no awareness of Baba, paid no heed. But Sathya Sai appeared regularly in his dreams asking him to come to Puttaparthi.

Spotting this boy in the rows for Darshan, Sathya Sai approached him and lovingly embraced him. He materialized a pearl necklace for the boy and patting on his back said, "Now your father is a good man; be happy." *[P. 96,97]*

The Golden Age – The Godly Chance – The Gift of God

For those who have opened their hearts to the light of Baba's universal teachings, the One who leads all to the fulfillment of true Islam is here. The One who sent Jesus Christ to the world is here. The One who taught Arjuna the Sacred Bhagavad Gita is here. He is Sathya Sai Baba.



Beyond Name and Beyond Form

He has come to lead humanity back to its Divine Source. He has come to reestablish the ancient and Eternal foundations of all the religions: The foundations of Truth, Love, Right conduct, Peace, and Non- Violence.

He declares:

"I have not come to speak on behalf of any particular religion. I have not come on any mission of publicity for any sect or creed or cause; nor have I come to collect followers for any doctrine. I have no plan to attract disciples or devotees into My fold or any fold. I have come to tell you of this Universal unitary faith, this Atmic principle (principle of the Oneness), this path of love, this Dharma of Prema (nature of love), this duty of love, this obligation to love."

– Sri Sathya Sai Baba

May all be One. May all realize the One. May all live in the Oneness of Allah.

"Each should practice his own religion sincerely. A Christian should be a good Christian. A Hindu should be a good Hindu. A Muslim should be a good Muslim. Let each one be a true practitioner of his religion"

– Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Author: Father Charles Ogada, a Catholic Priest of the Order of the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers and an ardent devotee of Sai.

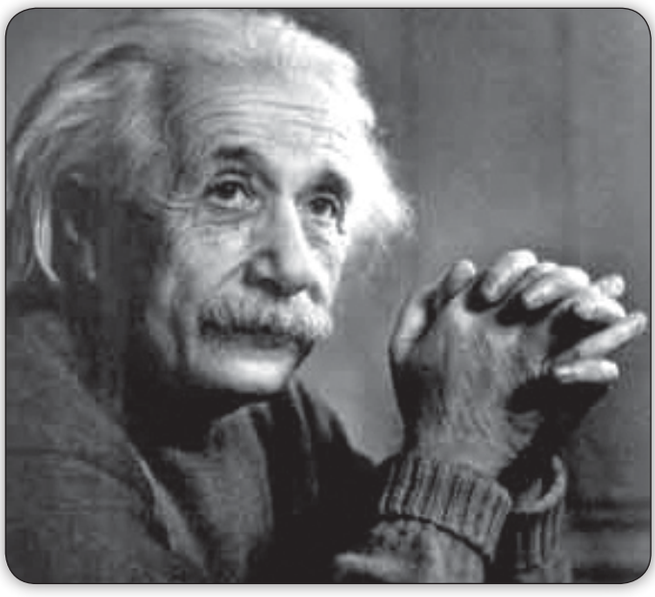
Dear Reader, how did you like this story? Was it inspiring? Did it help you in anyway? Would you like more such cover stories based on the religion of Islam or any other religion? Please write to us at h2h@radiosai.org. Thank you very much for your time.

QUEST FOR INFINITY
Part 14
By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. We are now at a very interesting stage in our understanding of the Cosmos. Before I take you further, I do hope you recall what I ended with last time; it was all about what is called the Cyclic Model of the Universe. You may recall that we got focussed on the Cyclic Model because that is what Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok were trying to develop, basing themselves not on the traditional approaches, but on String Theory and its extensions, especially the M Theory [*QFI - 12*]. I also pointed out that the so-called Cyclic Model has a long history, going back to ancient times, when it was aired as a concept rather than as a scientific theory [*QFI - 13*].

The Cyclic Model of the Universe

I now want to say something about how the Cyclic Model came to be considered by scientists in modern times and what happened thereafter. There are two aspects to the story of the Cyclic Model before the entry of Paul and Neil into the ring. The first relates to the early days after Einstein developed his theory of gravitation, and the second relates to the period when analysis of the history of the Universe came to be done with more inputs that provided by gravitation alone. These are ideas that need some explanation and that is what I shall now attend to.



Sir Albert Einstein

You might recall my mentioning earlier that in the early part of the 20th century, scientists literally took the Universe for granted and did not bother much about how big it was, when it came into existence etc. In fact, at that time, it was even believed that the Milky Way was all there is to the Universe – that is to say the entire Universe consisted of just one galaxy! Can you imagine that! And then, quickly things began to happen, events that were seemingly disconnected; the connection between the dots was to become evident later. There was Einstein, who in 1915 gave his epoch-making theory of gravitation that made Newton's earlier theory into a poor village cousin. And around 1919 or so – I have described this exciting story earlier – there was experimental proof that Einstein was indeed right with his theory, and overnight he attained almost a rock-star status [that he retained till the end of his life! – see, for example *QFI - 05*]. Meanwhile, astronomers discovered that our Universe had more than one galaxy; in fact, it soon became evident that there were billions of them! Amazing!! Just a few years prior to this, everyone thought there was only one galaxy and now we had billions! In other words, the Universe was far, far bigger than we had earlier imagined it to be.

The story does not stop here. Having discovered his famous equations of general relativity, Einstein begins to work them, as they say. He said, "Let me try and apply these equations to the whole of the Universe and see what I get." He did that and lo and behold, he got something he simply did not like! His equations told him, "Hey Prof! You know what?! The Universe is expanding!" The venerable Prof was simply horrified by what his own equations told him. He muttered, "Yuk! This can't be true! The Universe always was and always would be, exactly as the Good Lord willed it to be. Something is wrong with my equations and so let me fix it."

Watch Out Einstein! Expanding Galaxies

So how does the Prof fix his equations which, he thought were traitorous to him? By introducing a constant Λ [Greek letter lambda, upper case] called the *Cosmological Constant*. And when he did that, Einstein found that his equations were quite well-behaved, meaning that they now no longer allowed the Universe to expand as it pleased. The Universe was steady and disciplined! Einstein was happy, put down his pencil and reached for his pipe to relax. But he could not relax for

long; why? Because he got the news that in far away America, an astronomer named Hubble was reporting that our Universe was by no means steady but expanding, and fairly fast too!

Edwin Hubble and Albert Einstein

This was too much. First there was more than one galaxy and now the Universe was far from steady; in fact, it was becoming obese! Einstein was shattered. He went back to the drawing board as they say, and stared at his equations, the version 1.0 that had no Λ, and version 2.0 that had a fix, that is to say, boasted of Λ. Slowly shaking his head, the Prof took a red pencil, cut out the *Cosmological Constant* Λ, dumped version 2.0 and went back to what he had first, namely the original equations without Λ. As he did so, he muttered [in German of course], "Boy! What a lousy mistake I did!! That was the biggest blunder of my life ever. From now on, I had better be careful; also I should make sure that people forget that I ever goofed this badly."

Three Possible Universes

All that story I have told you before and also how people did not forget Λ; in fact, this constant, once infamous, came back with a vengeance to be rehabilitated as the source of dark energy [see *QFI - 08*]. Now why am bringing all this up again? For a good reason. You might recall I had described earlier [see *QFI - 02*] how soon after Einstein had developed his famous gravitational equations, young Friedman in Russia worked on them and came up with three possible scenarios for the history of the Universe, following its birth. The essence of these three scenarios is captured in the Figure 1 to the right:

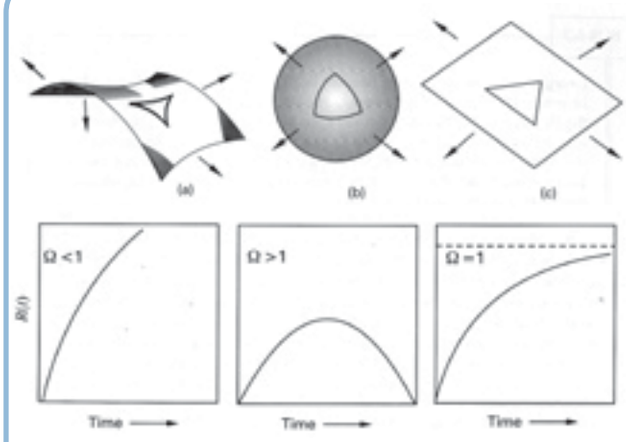
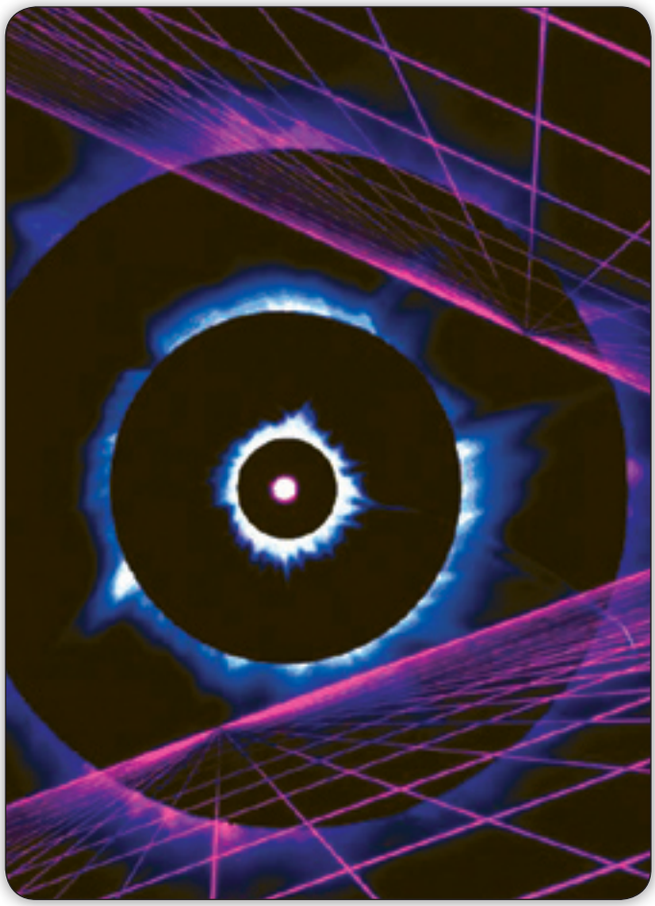


FIGURE 1: The schematics above are a repeat of what we saw earlier in QFI – 02. Basically, they indicate the life history of the Universe under three different conditions, as deduced by Alexander Friedmann, using Einstein's Theory of Gravitation. The three cases are distinguished from each other by an important parameter Ω that is a measure of the mass content of the Universe. The essential point, as far as we are concerned right now, is that unless the mass content is sufficiently large, that is to say Ω is greater than 1, the Universe would not shrink and end as a point, closing upon itself.

Notice the following: In all cases, there is a birth; however, what follows after the birth differs enormously in the three cases. What differentiates the three cases? The amount of matter in the Universe, symbolised by a quantity denoted by the Greek letter Ω. All this we have gone through before. Notice that no matter what choice one makes for Ω, in every case the Universe has a beginning. Now that led to many questions like: "What was there before the Universe? Where did it come from? Who deposited the energy that one now finds in the Universe? From what energy bank was that energy drawn?"

A Singular Problem

Here I should draw your attention to a technical problem that always bothers physicists, namely the birth of the Universe from literally a geometrical point. Now you might be aware that in idealised geometry, a point has no size; if you want to describe its radius, you have to say the point has zero radius! Which means that at the instant of birth the Universe had zero radius. And all the



Artist's impression of the birth of the universe from a point with zero radius

matter or energy if you wish that would later become manifest in the Universe was all locked up in this point of zero radius. In turn, this means that at the instant of birth, the Universe had infinite energy density or matter density, depending on how you wish to put it. When you have an infinity in physics, you have what is called a singularity. And physicists are very allergic to singularities in a finite Universe. In this case, we have a singularity at the instant of birth and this has worried people a lot; may be I shall come back to it later. I might add that a lot of modern physics has involved fighting various infinities that appeared on the way as roadblocks to development.

Friedmann's Endless Cycles

Let me now get back to older times, to Freidmann in particular. He did not bother about the singularity issue – it was not very prominent in those days. Instead he said, "Well, the way things come out of the present analysis, there is a problem of what was there before the birth of the Universe. Maybe, what I see as just one history involving birth, expansion, then contraction and finally a big crunch, is merely one chapter in an endless scenario. In other words, perhaps the history of the Universe is cyclic – see figure below:

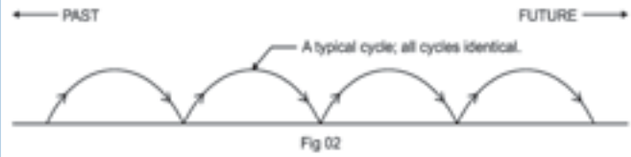


FIGURE 2: This figure illustrates schematically the nature of a Cyclic Universe. Basically it is an extension of one of the scenarios of the previous figure [the case corresponding to Ω having a value greater than 1]; the extension is on both sides of time, that is to the past and to the future. From this we see that the Cyclic Universe has an endless history - born again and dying again! Reminds us of Shankara's Bhaja Govindam, does it not? Well, any redemption or *Moksha*?! Find out by reading more!

Freidmann's point was simple. He said, "Listen, in this cyclic scenario, the birth, death and rebirth of the Universe is an endless process. So, the question of what was there just before birth is easily answered; we have another Universe just finishing up!" That is how the cyclic model entered the history of modern physics, almost as a way of avoiding the question: "How did the Universe just pop up out of nowhere?" No doubt there is the philosophical question of who ordered the Cyclic Universe, but Freidmann did not bother about that.

Now there is an important reason why I am mentioning all this. It looks as if Einstein himself was thinking about such a scenario. Before I discuss that, I must now bring in another personality and that is Richard Tolman. Tolman was trained as a physical chemist but when he joined California Institute of Technology [popularly called Caltech] in 1922, he became attracted to cosmology. What happened was this: Tolman heard about the oscillatory model of Freidmann and began to wonder. He said to himself, "If the Universe is a kind of a huge balloon filled with gas say, then as the Universe expands and then contracts, it is like the balloon first expanding and then contracting. Now if it is a gas that is

expanding and contracting, then it is subject to the laws of thermodynamics. Maybe, the Universe too is subject to the laws of thermodynamics."

Physicist Richard Tolman

The insight that Tolman brought to this issue is important and requires some explanation, and let me try to do it slowly and in steps. First of all, thermodynamics is that branch of Physics that deal with the macroscopic aspects of heat. The subject has a long history, and is enshrined in two important laws called the First and the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Basically, they are statements related to heat flow and associated issues. They are a part of what is called Classical Physics, and at the working level, they are two great pillars. They have remained intact, not withstanding all the advancement at the micro level; what it means is that while physics at small distances and very short times shows considerable deviations from what Classical Physics would predict, thermodynamics, which works at the macro level, is as strong as ever; no sign of the **slightest** deviation. What it means is that the Laws of Thermodynamics are not set aside when one considers the macro aspects.

The First Law of Thermodynamics - Heat Causes Disorder

The First Law says that energy is always conserved, including energy in the form of heat. Sum up the amount of energy in a system that exists in all forms [including heat energy of course], and that total sum does not change with time. The Second Law goes out much farther and makes an even deeper and more profound statement, related to disorder. You see, heat causes disorder; I mean when you heat ice, ice melts – this we all know. What happens is that while in ice the individual molecules of water are all nicely organised on a crystalline lattice, when ice melts, the individual water molecules become free to move around and the beautiful orderly arrangement of the molecules obtained in ice is lost; it is like a military parade, for example. During the parade, there is order and discipline amongst the soldiers. When the parade is dismissed, the order dissolves and the soldiers disperse; the same sort of thing happens when ice melts into water – spatial order decreases. In general, when the temperature of a system is increased, disorder also increases. The word disorder is just a word; in physics, we need measures; if we are talking of disorder, we need some scheme for quantifying it and measuring it. Disorder is quantified using a concept known as **entropy;** the more the disorder, the greater is the entropy – I hope you get the general idea.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics - Entropy of A System Always Increases In Time

The Second Law of Thermodynamics concerns disorder in a physical system; it says that in a system that is perfectly isolated and is left to itself, entropy of a system always increases in time. **This is a "global" law, meaning the statement applies to the system as a whole; it is quite likely that entropy in particular region might decrease; however, if the system as a whole is considered, the entropy would always be found to increase.**

The Life Cycles of Universes - In Brief

OK, all this is fine but what has cosmology and the oscillatory model of the Universe have to with the Second Law and all that? That is what we shall consider now because that is what Tolman decided to examine. What I shall be offering would be a hand-waving account of how Tolman analysed the issue. He started by asking: "We have this Universe; it is an isolated system, huge no doubt but that does not matter. This system is undergoing changes; what happens?" Tolman then gave this answer: "One thing we know from the Second Law is that the entropy of the Universe would steadily increase. Most of the entropy is in the form of electromagnetic radiation, meaning light, ultraviolet radiation, x-radiation and of course heat or infra-red radiation." You might recall from my earlier description of our Universe, in the very early days, there were no stars; they came a bit later around 100,000 years or so after the Big Bang; the exact time does not really matter. What matters is that when

stars form and start shining, the radiation they emit automatically adds to the entropy; more stars, more entropy or more disorder. So at this point, the entropy goes on increasing. But when the stars stop burning, then the radiation emission comes down, and at that stage, gravity starts asserting itself, provided there is enough matter in the Universe.

This is where the value of Ω, which is an index of how matter there is, comes into the picture. When I say gravity starts asserting itself, it means that the attractive force of gravitation starts becoming important, as a result of which, the Universe starts contracting, and that in turn starts heating up the Universe. And even as the Universe becomes hotter and hotter, the entropy again increases. So the long and short of it is that both in the expanding and in the contracting phase of the Universe, the entropy increases on the whole. Net result? **The total entropy content of the Universe at the end of one cycle is higher at the end than at the start.** Keep this in mind.

Let us now look a bit further into the next cycle; remember, we are starting with the idea that the Universe obeys the cyclic model and then examining what happens, especially as a result of the play of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Remember, that at the end of the earlier cycle, the mass at the end is less than what was there at the beginning, while the radiation content has increased; of course, the entropy also has increased. In this new cycle, once again, three things happen; mass content again decreases; radiation content again increases, and entropy also increases, adding to the entropy carried over from the earlier cycle.

This lesser mass content in the cycle that follows has implications. Basically, since the mass of the Universe is less than in the earlier cycle, the contraction phase gets slowed down – I guess you can follow that argument; less mass, less the gravity pull; that is what is being said. So if we plot this second cycle by the side of the earlier one, we get a scenario as below – this is according to Tolman.

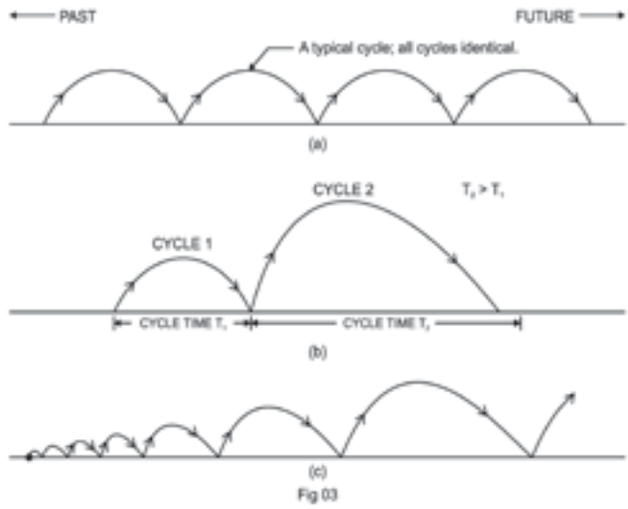


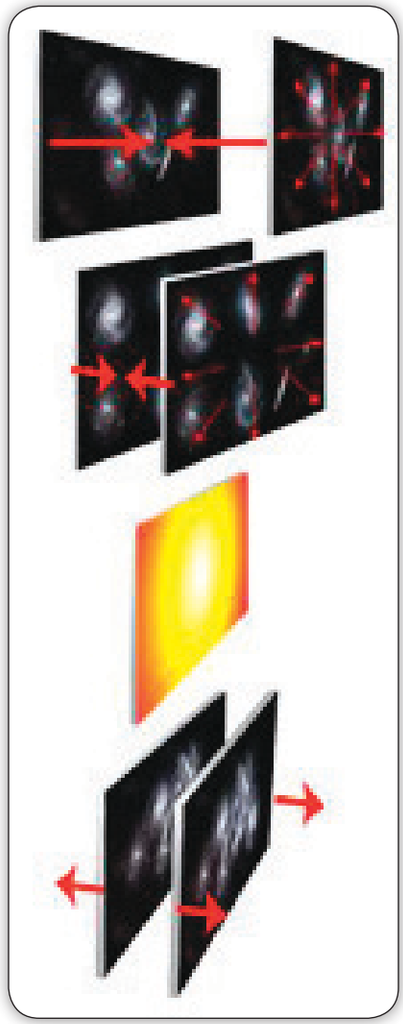
FIGURE 3: This figure illustrates what happened when Tolman re-examined the conventional Cyclic Model, by applying the Laws of Thermodynamics. In (a), we start with a repeat of Figure 02; this represents the model that Tolman decided to examine. In (b) are illustrated two successive cycles [of the endlessly repeating Universe]. Tolman found that the two cycles are not identical as they should be in the standard model. Rather, cycle 2 is slower than cycle 1. This has deep implications that are brought out in (c). This shows what happens when the findings of (b) are incorporated across the board; we find that as we ride into the future, the cycles become slower and slower and beyond a stage they might take an infinite time to close. On the other hand if we extend into the past, the cycles becomes shorter and shorter and there comes a stage when the cycle time is zero. That means that the Universe was born at a particular time! Altogether, a drastic change in the original Cyclic model! Change 1: There was no Universe prior to a certain time! Change 2: Beyond a certain time, the Universe exists for ever without shrinking!

Arguments Against the Cycle Model

Notice that while Tolman started with the cyclic model which required all cycles to be identical, as in Figure 3(a), his arguments told him, "No, that is not quite what would happen; the second cycle would be somewhat slower as (b) illustrates. Tolman then said, "OK, let me extend this

figure both to earlier times and to later times." He did that and got the picture in (c). Now this picture is very different from the picture that the cyclic model gives us. In the standard cyclic model, (1) the cycles repeat endlessly and (2) all cycles are identical. But Tolman found that this cannot be; instead, if we take the Second Law of Thermodynamics seriously, and we HAVE to, then (1) the successive cycles become slower and slower as illustrated above, (2) as a result, after many cycles, the Universe may take a very long time to close and may in fact at one stage stop doing so; which means, no cycles at all! (3) Further, and this is very important, as one goes back in time, the cycles not only becomes shorter and shorter, but in fact becomes zero at some stage! That means that beyond a certain time in the past, there WAS no Universe! In other words, Tolman started with the idea of a Cyclic Universe and when he applied the Second Law, found that the idea was not tenable! In short, Tolman delivered a knockout blow!

As it turned out, the poor Cyclic Model received many other blows, as I shall point out. But meanwhile I must caution you once more, that I have given only a highly diluted version of Tolman's arguments, and this should not in any way be used to argue that Tolman was naïve or anything like that. Far from it, Tolman was as careful and as rigorous as he could be at that time, considering that many things about the Universe was really NOT known at that time. The important point is that Tolman concluded, and justifiably given what he knew then, that the Cyclic Universe idea was a non-starter.



The cyclic model of the universe was not well received!

Although Tolman's argument should have stopped all discussion about the Cyclic Model of the Universe, it turned out that as cosmologists developed more and more detailed as well as complex ideas related to the Universe, the Cyclic Model was considered many times more, perhaps incidentally. However, during every attempt to stage a comeback, it was again "No, No" to the Cyclic Model. For example, in the fifties and sixties, certain cosmologists discovered that if say, the Universe, after expanding for a while starts contracting, tiny differences in the rate of contraction in different parts of the Universe could become rapidly magnified, sending the Universe into wild gyrations. Now when the Universe is about to get on to its contraction phase, it would be pretty big, much bigger than it is now. So at that stage, it is quite likely that that the rate of contraction is not quite the same in all parts – I mean the Universe would be so huge, some small fluctuations are not only possible but also to be expected.

OK, there are these tiny, tiny fluctuations in the contraction rate; so what? Cosmologists analysing the situation discovered that the gyrations could go out of control and become amplified and even wild. Further analysis showed that the Universe would then steady itself by adopting unequal rates of change along three perpendicular direction; along two directions it contracts while along the third direction it actually expands! It is easy to see that with this kind of situation the Universe would slowly but surely go over from a spherical shape to a cigar-like shape.

The story does not end here. After a while, the situation suddenly switches, the directions of contraction and expansion become different. All this is the result of fluctuations operating in a very large system! Pretty soon, the kind of switch-over of contraction/ expansion directions repeats over and over again, somewhat randomly. What happens then? Well, have you ever seen a person, say your mother, mixing wheat power and water and making dough by kneading? If you have, then you would have noticed that the lump would have a sort of irregular shape with ups and downs scattered across the surface. If dough mixing is done in a machine as is often done these days, the squeezing and

stretching does tend to differ from location to location. Keeping this in mind, this description has been called the "chaotic mixmaster" model of the Universe.

Now, remember that over and above all these variations that I have just described, the Universe as a whole is being crunched and becoming smaller and smaller. Eventually, the Universe shrinks to very small size before the birth of a "new" Universe, followed by expansion in the next cycle. However, the Baby Universe in this case would start-off with an "infant" that is very inhomogeneous. So, in the next cycle, the Universe would be quite inhomogeneous – that is to be expected; if in-homogeneity is imprinted at birth, its signature would be evident in the adult also; it is almost like a genetic imprint. However, our Universe as it appears to us today, is quite smooth and homogeneous – I have mentioned all this before. Sure, there are very tiny fluctuations; they are very much needed and had better be there!

So the question becomes: "We know that in the previous cycle, the Universe must been "put in a mixmaster" while undergoing contraction. In that case, how come in this cycle, all the ups and downs that must have been imprinted have got wiped out so that right now our Universe is absolute uniform, at least to a very high degree? Where did all the genetic imprints of the earlier fluctuations go? People said, "Listen; all these problems arise when you hang on to the Cyclic Model. Why not simply say: 'Before the Big Bang there was no Universe, and the Universe we are in now, was born without a past?'" What it all adds up to is one more blow for the Cyclic Model, via very different arguments as compared to what Tolman used; got the point?

Cycles Banned!

Poor Cyclic Model; in the 1990s, it received two more fatal blows! First came the experimental evidence that the Universe is not only expanding but also that the rate of expansion is actually increasing; in other words, the expansion is accelerating [and this, I told you is connected with Dark Energy – see *QFI - 08*]. Well, no Cyclic Model allows for a situation in which the expansion accelerates; so, that discovery is not really good news.

Again, in the mid-1990's, the satellite WMAP data showed that Ω [remember this symbol that is indicative of the mass content of the Universe?] was very close to unity. That is not welcome news for the supporters of the Cyclic Model. Why? That is not too difficult to understand; I have mentioned earlier that basically, if the Universe has to go through cycles like we are talking about then, Ω **must** be greater than 1. If the matter density is low, then there is definitely no chance for the Universe to close on itself and get into a crunch mode. So, one more blow to the Cyclic Model of the Universe.

Four blows one after the other, and though attractive from a philosophical or even spiritual point of view, scientifically it seemed that it was all over where the Cyclic Model is concerned. As Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok put it, "There seemed to be little prospect of resurrecting an idea [the Cyclic Model] so fatally flawed."

Sometimes, we can make wrong forecasts because sometimes the future can bring great surprises. That is exactly what happened when Paul and Neil latched on, of all things to the M Theory, to revive the Cyclic Model; that exciting story next time.

Jai Sai Ram.

PRISON BREAK! Sai's Love Breaks Barriers at a Prison in New Zealand

Even as humanity remains embroiled in its daily struggles of survival and success, the most mysterious, sacred and potent presence on the face of the planet in the Divine Self of Sri Sathya Sai Baba continues to awaken the God in millions of hearts, in thousand different ways, in places close and very far from the seat of His Physical Presence – Prasanthi Nilayam, India. The first ever Divine Incarnation of international influence during His very lifetime, the story of the Sai Avatar continues to elude human comprehension. Yet, never for a moment does He stop in the holy task He has come to foster - to remind each of us of our own divine nature; that everyone is God and all is one. Baba says:

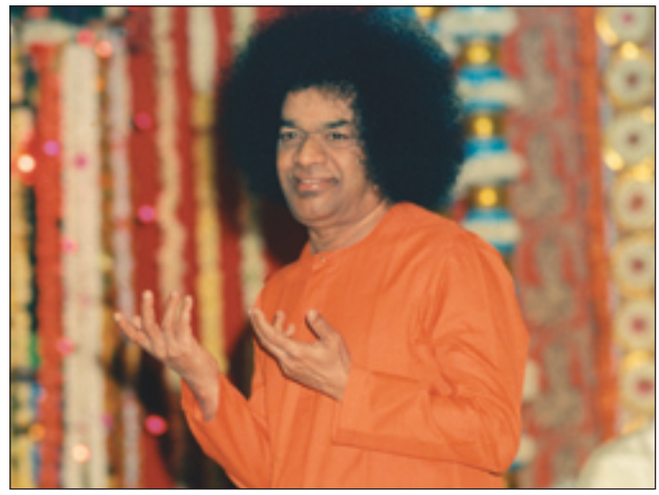
> "My Reality is unreachable. Unreachable it will be not only today but even for a thousand years, even if a thousand years are spent in ardent enquiry by all the people of the world in active unison. But the Bliss emanating from My Reality is within the reach of all the nations of the Universe and you can partake of it. My mystery, My Power can never be understood."

True to His words, this chronicle is yet another little episode from the love revolution initiated by a little village boy on 20th Oct 1940 in a remote place called Uravakonda, in rural India that has turned into a tidal wave, a global love tsunami, sweeping millions of seekers off their feet from corporate America to prisons in New Zealand!

The current feature is a story of the most unexpected of spiritual seekers who are experiencing the bliss of Bhagavan Baba's Reality in the least likely of locations, proving that God realization is not limited to such places as churches, temples, mosques, synagogues or the caves of the Himalayas.

Bill and Arthur are two prison inmates whose cells are their seats of sacred and intense spiritual discipline. The Cosmic Consciousness that is personified in the person of Sri Sathya Sai Baba has revealed itself to them right there, inside the prison. Mr. Peter Phipps is a prison counsellor who became the chosen instrument of God in taking the Avatar's message to these two inmates.

This account, possibly startling to some, only due to the limitations of human rationality, comes to you from all three men involved. It is woven in three distinct voices to bring you each of their individual experiences, proving that the tales of God's Glory elucidated in the Bhagavatham, the Bible and the Quran are daily occurrences in the career of the current Avatar. For every single recorded instance of His mind-boggling Powers, there are a million others that no one knows of, for such is the Glory of the Lord of the Universe, fondly referred to as Swami by His devotees. In a landmark discourse on October 24, 1993, Swami said:



> "Very soon the Glory of Sai will spread to every part of the world. It will increase a thousand fold. The reason is the essential goodness of the Sai Mission. It is totally free from any taint. Every act is done out of the purest of motives. Everything that is said is based on Truth. All activities are conducted without depending on any outsider. Hence, there is no room for fear. After the harvest, when the sheaves of grains are winnowed, the wind blows away all the chaff, leaving only the grains behind. Through this process, the true devotees will remain steadfast. The wavering puppets will drift away. This is the process of winnowing."

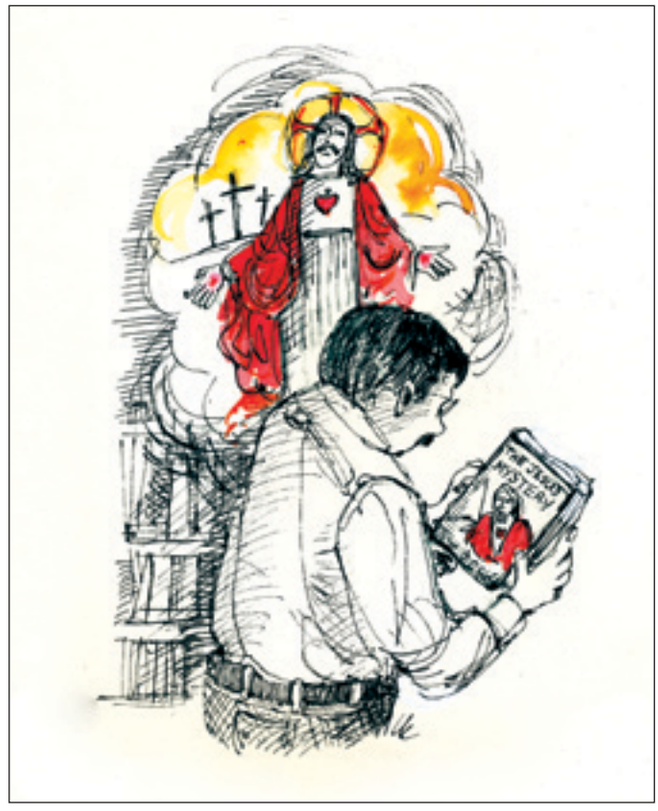
My name is Peter Phipps and this is the story of my path to prison ministry in New Zealand. I studied psychology while at University and gained a post-graduate degree in this subject. For practical experience, I joined the Probation Service in 1961 and was later invited to become a prison psychologist in 1962. I enjoyed the former job but hated the latter. The Prison Service had grand formal objectives of rehabilitation, reformation and transformation of prisoners. In practice, it was a hotbed of negativity, destruction, anger and malevolence. I left it around 1968; I was a broken and disillusioned man.

In the intervening years I observed prison policy and practice in New Zealand with some level of cynicism and despair. I knew that the high-sounding statements of politicians, publicly stated, were far from the truth.

I first heard of Swami from an American hippie around 1975, but coming from a man who had once been into LSD and other mind-altering drugs, I was sceptical of his claim of having met God in flesh and blood. However, he introduced me to a form of meditation on light that I found very positive and especially helpful at a later time, as we shall see. The meditation is similar to what Ms. Phyllis Krystal teaches.

I was active within the Christian church, on and off, over the years, and obtained work with the Salvation Army in 1989. In 1990, I attended a course for Victim Support offered by two Americans. Included in the course was a half-day workshop on mass murder counselling. The course members protested that these things do not happen in New Zealand, but the trainers insisted that this was part of their training.

Ten days later, we had a mass killing at Aramoana, a small settlement near Dunedin in the South Island. I received a call asking whether I would be prepared to drop everything and join a team of three to work with survivors and the community. I was quite apprehensive about the job, but due to Swami's Grace, we had been recently trained for just such an event. I am sure this was no coincidence.[1] On the flight down, I started the light meditation, which I often used as a form of spiritual protection and support, and I asked God for His help, as I knew I could not do the job in my own strength. Immediately, I felt a powerful presence of Love and Wisdom and felt a strong current of energy flowing around us. This energy stayed with us all for the whole time we were working. Everyone on the team felt the energy and had the same experience. In the short time on the ground, we saw many miracles of healing happening before us.



While giving thanks to God after the event, I heard an internal voice say, **"I am greater than you know, seek Me out and find Me."** I started to enquire if there was anything about Jesus that I did not know. I started in a book shop dealing with "New Age" type of books, and in a few minutes, one book almost leapt off the shelf into my hand. It was "The Jesus Mystery" by Janet and Richard Bock. The book looks first at the life of Jesus and then describes Swami. I knew I had found what I was looking for. However, given my scientific bent of mind, I

first tried to prove Swami could not be who He says He is, but I was unable to find any fault in Him. Subsequently, I made several trips to Prasanthi Nilayam.

Reconciling Christian Beliefs with Sai Spirituality

In an interview with Swami, I put the question to Him: "How do we present Your message to Christians?" He replied:

> **"Do not teach Sai Baba, teach Jesus Christ. But teach that Jesus taught Universal Love." He added a beautiful mini discourse on the nature of Love, concluding "only Love for God is Bhakti or devotion."**
>
> **"Jesus sacrificed His life for the regeneration and welfare of mankind. Today, there are some who exaggerate the so-called differences between different faiths and, for their own selfish purposes, exploit these differences; they thereby bring a bad name to the founders of those religions, who were spiritual giants. No Prophet or Messiah asked his followers to hate other religions or the followers of other faiths. Every religion has declared that God is One and that the Divine dwells in every being. Jesus also proclaimed the Truth that the One Spirit resides in all beings."** *— Sathya Sai Baba*

I became a lay minister in my Church and accepted other positions of leadership, and taught about Jesus in the way Swami had directed me. I undertook a diploma level course in theology and Christian history. I became well-known beyond the boundaries of my parish because of my work in opposing the building of casinos and gambling facilities.

I was the Director of a weekend Cursillo (short course in Christian living) and got talking to Audrey Moonlight, the wife of one member of my team, who was involved in prison ministry. She told me that a "Faith Based Unit" was being established at a nearby prison and that they were looking for mentors and group leaders. After my earlier experience with prisons, I hoped that this would be an exciting idea that should prove to be a more positive experience this time around. So I applied for both opportunities and was appointed as one of four group facilitators in 2003, and joined the team working under a contract with Prison Fellowship New Zealand.[2]

Many Voices, One Song; Many Faiths, One God

While the leaders and other facilitators of the team are Christians of a rather fundamentalist group who believe that "the only way to God is through Jesus Christ", I am quietly more universal in my teaching.

At different times we have had Moslems and Buddhists in the groups. We are supposed to convert them into Christians, but I liked to point out to the Buddhists how the teachings of Jesus and Buddha are the same, and start a session with "Allah-O-Akbar" when Moslems were present. It is always my objective to help them take one step towards God in whatever form they expect Him to be, just as Bhagavan Baba has taught us that paths are many, but goal is one.

Our sessions are intended to be based on the Bible, and some prisoners expect me to produce a Biblical reference for every statement I make. Other prisoners ask questions beyond the general framework of the Bible, and I am happy to talk to them on any question, provided it is spiritual.

Divine Energy Pervades Prison

At Aramoana, I experienced Swami as a great current of Energy flowing through me to others. There are times in the prison that the same experience occurs. The Energy sometimes seems so strong that I feel I am plugged into the electricity mains. I notice this is always a time when someone has a need for something as basic as forgiveness for their crimes or support in times of grief. It is beyond my control, but happens when I open myself to Swami in my efforts to help the man.

There have been times when the presence of God seems extraordinarily strong and profound. At these times there is often a period of conflict and difficulty as too many men take the spiritual energy to their ego and regard themselves as "the best Christian in the unit". Then there may be fights as to who it is that speaks for God. Ego is the great enemy in the prison, as much as in any place else.

At present we are going through a time when there is very strong spiritual energy in the unit, with many of the men undergoing transforming experiences or great blessings. I urge the men to keep quiet about what has

happened so as not to give rise to jealousy in the other men. Many of the events we might recognise as miracles go unnoticed as a result.

I do not speak openly about Swami, but always present His message in combination with a Biblical text, which it is easy to do.

Gayatri Mantra, the Universal Prayer

Some men ask me, in private, questions of spiritual nature that go beyond Christian orthodoxy. They may be along the lines of past lives and *karma*. In response, I give them material from various sources, possibly including Swami, without mentioning the name. When the questions are persistent and sincere, I may give them a book about Swami or a printed discourse that answers the question. This is when the moment of Truth arises!

The Gayatri Mantra is the Universal Prayer enshrined in the *Vedas*, the most ancient Scriptures of Man, which asks for a clear Intellect so that the Truth may be reflected therein without distortion. *(Sathya Sai Speaks - X - 109)*

The Gayatri Mantra is a Prayer that can well be spoken with yearning by men and women of all creeds and climes in all centuries. Repetition of this Mantra will develop the Intelligence. *(Sathya Sai Speaks - V - 58)*

There is an inmate, a man whom we shall call Arthur. He asked me some very searching questions that I could only answer with reference to Swami. I started giving him some material and he kept asking for more. He told me that he was having trouble meditating so I gave him a book from the UK on light meditation. I followed it up with information on the Gayathri Mantra and a CD with Swami chanting the Gayathri Mantra 108 times. He started to chant the Gayathri Mantra with Swami each morning, and very soon Swami began to visit him in his cell several times. On his own volition he became a vegetarian and had a battle with the prison administration to change his diet.

Explaining the sudden inner transformation he underwent due to his Divine tryst with Bhagavan Baba, Arthur says:

"I was first introduced to Sathya Sai Baba by a devotee, Peter Phipps, who was facilitating the Christian group programme in the Faith Based Unit in a New Zealand prison, where I am at the moment serving time for drug offences.

By the time I met Peter I was determined to find the meaning and reason for my existence. I asked him for information on some of the spiritual questions I had. He presented me with materials either by Swami or about Swami to read.

When I began to study the materials and the teachings of Swami, I was so struck by the Universal Truth they teach. This really motivated me into more inquiry about Swami. I was very blessed because Peter was always gracious to answer my questions. I spent a long time with him in talks about his experience with Swami. This was the beginning of everything for me.

As a prisoner, I have a lot of time to study, meditate, and practice the teachings of Swami. I prayed to Him to help me transform my life and to cultivate love for Him. He answered my prayers and changed my life in a very profound way. I am deeply grateful for His love. Looking back, I realised that He has always been there and has always protected me."

Since I used to sometimes bring Sai literature to answer Arthur's queries, one day as I was photocopying some pages from Sanathana Sarathi for him, I spoiled the

first page by inserting it the wrong way into my copier. It had a picture of Swami, in colour, together with an extract from the discourse. I would never destroy a sacred image of Swami and wondered what to do with it. I was prompted to take it in to Arthur. When I went into the prison that day, Arthur told me **"Swami told me to ask for a picture of Him"**. I told Arthur I had the picture with me. He was overwhelmed. Since then he has made a frame for the picture and the quote and displays it in his cell. Several other prisoners as well as custodial staff note the picture and the Divine quotation and ask Arthur about it. Several staff members as well as his fellow prisoners are drawn to the picture and ponder on the wisdom of the words.

Experiencing the Father and the Holy Son on Christmas

Before last Christmas, Arthur was on a three-day fast and was hungry. He was also concerned about finding sufficient money to buy noodles as a present for all the 60 prisoners in his unit, but did not have enough funds. He had managed to have only 54 packets of noodles and was trying to decide who should not get a packet. On the second day of his fast, on December 23, as he was praying, his cell filled with a bright light and he opened his eyes to see Swami dressed in white, holding up bleeding palms.

Swami told Arthur that he and Jesus Christ are the same. He said Jesus had transcended body consciousness and did not feel pain during the Crucifixion. He told Arthur to complete the fast and that he would no longer feel hunger.

Addressing his other concern, Swami also told Arthur to distribute the noodles to all and assured him that there would be sufficient to go around. When Arthur enlisted the help of a friend, another inmate, whom we shall refer to as Bill, to distribute the noodles, he pointed out that they were insufficient for everyone. Yet when Arthur and Bill got together again, they were astonished to find that every man in the unit received a packet and there were eleven left over!

I requested both the prison inmates concerned - Arthur and Bill, to share their individual reflections of the experience.

Arthur says:

One early morning of November last year [2007] I was chanting Gayatri in my prison cell. I still had about 30 to go when the prison staff came around to unlock the cells. I prayed to Swami to please help me to finish before the staff gets here. The time was 7.15 am. I finished the mantras before the door was unlocked and the time was still 7.15 am. I couldn't believe what was happening. I felt like time was standing still.

This experience, coupled with the previous occasions when Swami has appeared to me, left me with a deep sense of love and devotion to Him.

As I continue with my *sadhana*, Swami has come several times into my cell and talked to me. Ever since I became aware of His Divine Presence in my life, it has been like coming home to where I belong.

Before Christmas I decided to undertake a three day fast to help me to clear some issues I had with the person of Jesus Christ and Swami. I gave my food to the others with joy because I knew that Swami would take care of me. On the second day of my fast, December 23 [2007], I was feeling very hungry physically and was in hunger pain too.

I was on my knees praying to Swami in my cell when suddenly I felt a powerful presence with me. I stopped praying and opened my eyes and to my astonishment the room was lit with brilliant white and blue light and the cell seemed to dissolve as there was nothing existing except myself and Swami dressed in white and smiling beautifully. At this moment

I had lost the sense of myself. He held up His hands, from which blood was coming from the palms. He was speaking to me but He was not making any sound and yet I could understand what He was saying.

He said that He and Christ are the same. He told me that Christ did not suffer on the Cross, as there was no body consciousness. He told me also to continue and finish the fasting and that from that point I would not feel any more hunger pains [this proved to be true].

As this was going on, there was no sense of time or body. I could not tell how long this experience lasted. When He left, I returned to the body and my cell and I was not feeling anything but total transformation and joy. This was the most wonderful experience I have ever had in my life.

I had decided before Christmas 2007 that I would present my brothers in the Unit with me with a packet of noodles as a Christmas present. I had been purchasing noodles out of my prison wages. I was quite concerned that despite sacrificial saving from my meagre prison earnings there was not sufficient money to buy for all the men in the Unit.

I decided that I and my closest friends would have to go without. On the morning of the Christmas day, I called my friend Bill, and asked him to help with distributing the noodles to the men. We prayed to Swami and told Him to bless the gift and that we are just an instrument to be used to distribute it. I handed a bundle of packets to Bill and told him to distribute them to a group of prisoners, but that there would be none for him as they were not sufficient.

I distributed the rest of the food. Bill and I came back in astonishment. We had distributed the food to all those designated and not only was there enough for all, but there were about 11 packets left over.

We could not explain it. I recognised at once that Swami had multiplied the food. I was overjoyed at this example of Swami's Love, Omnipresence and Omnipotence.

Bill, who distributed the food with me, was aware that Swami had multiplied the food and was transformed by this experience and has become a devotee as well.

I have also noticed that several men who ate the Divinely multiplied food have made dramatic transformations in their characters."

"The Gayatri Mantra can be repeated anywhere at any time, including night time. The Gayatri Mantra is synonymous with Divinity and has therefore to be approached with humility, reverence, faith and love towards the Mantra."
— Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Bill, the other inmate at the same facility, has also become a devotee of Swami. He also chants the Gayathri Mantra108 times each morning. Another man since then has told me that Christ has appeared in his cell and asked for material about Swami. Bill explains what he makes of the Divine phenomenon occurring in the prison in New Zealand.

Bill says:

"I grew up thinking that miracles are the stuff of the Bible, never to be manifest in our time. I have come to know of the Being we call Sai Baba, and the miracles He performs for His devotees. The first time I heard of Swami I knew that He was who He said He is. But like most, I had to pass through the mental barrier I had placed upon myself, believing that only Christ can perform such miracles. Swami has helped me to see that He and Christ are the same Being, manifest in different physical bodies, and that with God there is no limit. The more I read about Swami, His teachings and the miracles performed, I began to truly believe that God cannot be restricted to what we conceive "Him" to be.

"We believe that nothing is impossible for God, but we are always reluctant to believe that He can do all that He says He is capable [of]. We pray for miracles each day but when a "man" in India begins to perform the very same miracles, we are quick to dismiss them as a trick or an illusion. The illusion is our ignorance of who God truly is. My journey with Christ has shown me that miracles are a natural state of an enlightened man - He that has attained Christ Consciousness, Buddha-hood or closeness with God. When in this stage, miracles are a natural state for the created [man], then isn't it child's play for God Incarnate?

Going back to Bill's account of the experience where the food multiplied, he recorded the following in his reflection:

"I am currently a prisoner at a Christian Faith Unit, and last Christmas I was witness to a miracle performed by Swami. Brother Arthur had purchased noodle packets from our canteen to distribute as a gesture of goodwill to the brothers at this festive time. The noodles purchased were not enough for all. At this time, Brother Arthur was fasting for three days prior to Christmas [2007] and Swami appeared to him during meditation. Swami's instructions were to distribute the noodles [to all the inmates of the unit] and there will be enough [for all]. Brother Arthur asked me to help distribute the noodles on Christmas Day, and sure enough, there was enough for all and some left over. The two of us discussed this chain of events and truth be told. Neither of us was surprised, reason being, when one is surrendered to the Will of God, and works with undying love in their heart for the Lord and fellow brothers, such 'unnatural' acts occur. I realise that this miracle happened because of Swami's Grace, and in my heart I thanked Swami for the blessing and my love for Him grew even stronger.

For me, Swami was manifesting these miracles for the persona of Jesus, the Christ, 2000 years ago, and He is manifesting the same miracles at this time in the persona of Sri Sathya Sai Baba."

Today, my work as a prison counsellor is still evolving, and lately at a more rapid pace. Five men so far have been told of Swami and all accept Him for who He claims to be, but not all yet feel called to practice His teachings. Only two of the five could be described as committed devotees. They need nurturing, and Swami is ensuring that they get what is needed, whether by appearing in person or telling them to "ask Peter".

I need to be careful because due to their limited understanding of Swami's Universal Message, which is all inclusive and validates every one of Jesus' teachings, my fellow facilitators may mistakenly conclude that I am fostering a non-Christian religion or philosophy. It is interesting that many custodial staff and prisoners are open to Universal Truth as being more sensible as the narrower "Jesus is the only way to God" line that we are supposed to teach.

I have no doubt that Swami is richly blessing this work and is preparing some men to be great ambassadors for Him both in prison and after release.

Intense Yearning - Key to Spiritual Success

Interestingly, a large part of the success of the project is that prisoners generally have a great spiritual hunger. Many suffer from acute feelings of guilt and remorse. Many genuinely want to change themselves to avoid coming back to prison or to become better fathers or husbands. I have found that in parish work in the community, there is not the same level of hunger or dissatisfaction with themselves as to who or what they are. People only ask for feeding when they are hungry, and one does not find this level of spiritual hunger in the community.

The multiplication of Swami's grace through the unit is, truly, leaving me quite stunned. Those lads with their intense *sadhana*, application of Swami's teachings and their hunger for Truth would leave most of us ashamed. They are getting the Grace they deserve.

Apart from the few we have been discussing, the rest of the unit is extraordinarily gracious. When, a few months ago, the prison system had to increase the lockdown hours due to staff shortages, the men rejoiced and held a service of thanksgiving. Other units experienced various degrees of anger. The men are now locked down for 15 hours per day in single cells.

There are over 20 units in the prison complex, but I am hearing that the level of violence is now decreasing in the other units.

I have had the sense for a long time that we can start a spiritual revolution in Unit 7 that would then be taken out to the subculture who largely form our criminal

population. Once the revolution starts with those at the bottom of the social pyramid, it should then extend to the rest of the country. I think we are seeing the start of it. Swami once told a New Zealand group that in time to come "New Sailand" will provide and example of stability to an unstable world.

Grateful to be His Instrument of Change

To be an instrument for Swami's Mission is a great privilege and I recommend Sai devotees should consider whether they, also, should be ministering to those in prison. What better way to explain the joy of my bonding with fellow aspirants, my brothers in the prison, than by quoting what Arthur has to say of Swami's presence in his life?

Arthur says:

> **"I am at loss to find the proper words to describe what Swami is doing in my life. I have come Home. Swami's Love is my Home and that's where I belong forever and ever.**
>
> **May the Divine light of our Lord Sathya Sai Baba illuminate the heart of every person who read(s) this account of His Divine Love and Power."**

I shall conclude with a short passage from the Bible:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, `Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer Him, `Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite You in or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see You as sick or in prison, and go to visit You?'

"The King will reply, `I tell you the Truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.' *(Matthew 25:34-40)*

"SERVICE TO MAN IS SERVICE TO GOD." — Baba

** Names have been changed for prisoner privacy*

Illustrations: Ms. Lyn Kriegler Elliott

Endnotes:

1. **Victim Support Team:** In 1990, I attended a course on Victim Support taken by two visiting Americans. Included in the course was a half-day on mass murders. The course members protested that these things do not happen in New Zealand, but the trainers insisted that this was part of their training. The last mass murder had been during World War II. Ten days after we completed the course a man at Aramoana, near Dunedin, had an argument with his neighbours, shot the family and then started a brief shooting spree that left 13 people dead, including four children. I was invited to be part of a team of three to comprise a Victims Task Force. Our job was to deal with surviving members of the community and provide counselling and support for those affected. We were quickly on the ground and stayed for only two and a half days. Part of the model we used states that we do not bond with the community but set up support systems to help the community deal with the issues themselves. The killer, David Grey, was shot by Police about the time we landed at Dunedin Airport. Our work was highly successful, as the mental health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder did not develop in the community. This can be attributed to the very early intervention undertaken by the Victims Task Force.

2. **Prison Fellowship:** Prison Fellowship is an international movement started by Charles Colson. He had been one of the staff of Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal of the early 1970's. He had become a Christian in 1973 and was becoming uncomfortable with the culture of the Nixon Administration that any means at all were justified to protect the President from criticism. A number of illegal acts were performed by people who included members of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Watergate burglaries were an attempt to find incriminating evidence on the Democratic Party as well as spy on their election strategy. Colson decided to be true to his principles and plead guilty to Watergate-related charges in 1974. He was given a one-to-three year sentence and served seven months at Alabama's Maxwell Prison. He was appalled at conditions in prison and on release formed Prison Fellowship Ministries, which has become the world's largest outreach to prisoners, ex-prisoners, crime victims, and their families. There are now more than 40,000 workers and volunteers in over 100 countries. It is based on Christian principles.

HARNESSING THE HEART PART 4...
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 and Mr. C. B. S. Mani.

In this issue, we carry the exciting account of Mr. Karthik Ramesh, a former student of Sri Sathya Sai University, who narrates how he could miraculously come out of dangerous situations in his professional life just by being steadfast to his values and the Voice within. Through so many revealing instances, he shares his journey from Self-Confidence to Self-Realisation while busy delivering in the corporate world.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE 'SELF'

By Mr. Karthik Ramesh

Mr. Karthik Ramesh is an alumnus of the Sri Sathya Sai University who completed his Masters in Business Administration in March, 2007. After this degree, he joined a prestigious multinational firm based in the USA with its Indian arm in Chennai, where Karthik currently serves as the Executive Assistant to the CEO. During his current stint in this Organisation, when deputed on short global assignments, he has actively participated in the activities of the local Sai Centres.

"This college has not been established just to prepare you for earning degrees. The main purpose is to help you to cultivate self-knowledge and self confidence, so that each one of you can learn self-sacrifice and earn self-realization."

These words of Bhagavan kept reverberating in my ears throughout my stay at the University, and more so when I left the portals to venture into the corporate "jungle". And today I can say with confidence that Swami's Teachings have served as a beacon light in the turbulent world outside.

Self Confidence – the Sole Energizer of Life

Barely two months after I had been employed by a multi national company, I was on one of the toughest assignments of my life. I was selected to lead a team for a project kickoff and I was asked by my CEO to visit one of the most dangerous countries in the world. This nation was known for its kidnappings, crimes, political upheavals, piracy, labor-relations disruptions, etc., to mention a few security issues. There was an urgent need for a delegation from our company to visit this African country for a period of two weeks - this immediately after a series of kidnappings of Indians. In fact, the security situation was so volatile, that the Indian Embassy in that country had issued a security advisory, warning any Indian against venturing into that territory. Very few in the

company would have ventured for such an assignment, and my CEO later said that he was pleasantly surprised when I jumped at the opportunity presented to me. I did not have the slightest fear, thanks to the confidence in the "Self".

As we landed after a tiring eight hour flight from Dubai, we were greeted by an airport lacking the most basic facilities and totally unfriendly airport personnel. As we moved to the Visa on Arrival Counter, some of the personnel demanded a bribe for the issue of the visa, and our passports were taken from us for nearly a week after that. To have stayed in a country without a passport for a week was just the tip of the iceberg in terms of our 'memorable' experiences in that foreign land. Our trip from the airport to the hotel was made secure with two pilot vehicles accompanying us with armed guards – a pre-cursor for us on the volatile situation prevailing in the country. The hotel we checked in had recently been attacked by a gang, and one could sense a constant fear in the air.

During this time, we had to undergo the discomfort of checking in and out of multiple hotels, and during this time, I remembered the rigorous schedule we had in the hostel at the Sri Sathya Sai University which built my strength to bear such pressures in life. **But, all through these unpleasant experiences, if I was able to maintain my cool and give more than my best to my work, it was solely because of how He had prepared me during my two year stay at the University. But the story does not end here.**

Self-Satisfaction - Doing Things Right and Doing the Right Thing

Towards the end of this trip, the client, a global leader in consulting in the US and worldwide, hosted a lunch in appreciation of all our efforts for the successful project kickoff. Under the influence of Swami's Teachings on non-violence, I never ate in any non-vegetarian restaurant, but unfortunately for me, the lunch was scheduled in a Chinese specialty restaurant serving non-vegetarian food. Despite prompting from my manager and team, who were accustomed to taking non-vegetarian food, I was totally against even visiting the restaurant. As we awaited the Chief Partner of the consulting company to arrive for lunch, my team was pressurizing me to give in to my apparently "adamant" behavior, as it might lead to customer dissatisfaction.

I believed that true satisfaction could come only through adherence to one's conscience and belief in doing the right thing, rather than doing things right. As I stuck firmly to my resolve, I was desperately praying to Swami to bail me out of the situation without offending the client or my team.

To my relief, on her arrival, the Partner of the consulting company, was pleasantly surprised to learn of the concept of strict vegetarianism and the religious sentiments behind non-violence. The entire discussion then turned into the varieties of vegetarian food available, the goodness of health associated with it, and so on. To my great delight, she also commended me on my strong belief in what was the right thing to do. She, in fact, appreciated my resolve to abstain from non-vegetarian food and it helped to make a good impression demonstrating determination displayed in tough situations.

That I was able to see through successfully the kickoff of the project, amidst a highly unpleasant and eventful trip, was solely due to the first lesson of self-confidence - the belief that the Self and the Indweller, was the sole energizer of life.

Truth Alone Triumphs

Following this tough assignment in Africa, I was sent on another special consulting assignment, this time to the Middle East, which incidentally involved extensive use of Knowledge Management, a subject that is taught in great detail at the Sri Sathya Sai University, in practice as well as theory. The situation demanded a

lot of patience and empathy with the clients who were tough and uncompromising sheikhs. Working with a Government was especially difficult, given the high levels of bureaucracy, red-tapism and political complications.

I was inducted as a special IT consultant to the project, when there were quite a few challenges facing us and our partner who had bid for the project. The client had been very unreasonable and things were made increasingly difficult for a project manager from our partner company, who was given the goal of developing a "Knowledge Management System" for the Economic Department of the Government. Given that there were many other competing vendors bidding for the project, we had a month to prove our capabilities and expertise in the field of Knowledge Management by producing a comprehensive reporting system. By the way, this was a subject that Swami had referred to many times in His Discourses to the teachers and students of His University.

On getting into the details of the project, I realized though the assignment was on "Knowledge Management Systems", the scope of work given to us was more on "Management Information Systems". I was asked to come up with a comprehensive architecture of how the final system would work, including all the technical details and also develop a working prototype for the same. Basing on the learning I had gained while at the University, I realized that though the scope was more towards a reporting system, the real need was that of a comprehensive knowledge system. The reporting system would meet the short term requirements, but it would not address the long term need of the Government. **I also realized that though using our head would ensure success, empathizing with the client and using our heart would give them greater benefits.**

As I chalked out the entire knowledge roadmap for the Government with the team and conducted several stakeholder interviews across the departments to gather the client requirements, I was faced with tough situations wherein I really had to put into practice patience, empathy and treat the customer with Love. **I developed the firm belief that if we could look beyond the normal practice of Customer Delight and Customer Satisfaction and treat our Customers as 'Gods' with Love rather than respect, the results were bound to be successful.** And slowly, I developed a healthy rapport and garnered co-operation from all sections in the Government. This also enabled us by turning around a few of the non-cooperative staff who later fell in line with the project objectives and worked as a team.

During one of the discussions with a key stakeholder and top official in the Government, which would determine if the deal would be made or broken, we were faced with a peculiar situation with the client. During the discussion, the client started off on a totally tangential topic on the subject of Geographic Information Systems and made it a critical success factor for our project. Instantaneously my mind flashed back to the day when in 2006, Swami had personally blessed one of our visiting professors to take up this advanced course which was a very niche field in India and was a topic by itself. We never knew how or why the course was introduced, but some of us opted for it thinking it might be useful in future. **And thanks to the knowledge imparted by Swami through the professors, I was able to manage a very tough Sheikh! I spoke confidently and the discussion was a success.**

Now, continuing the "Knowledge Management" story, at the end of our one month evaluation, we found that there were many similar initiatives running in parallel in the various sections of the Government. But due to internal rivalry and the race to get recognized by the Ministry, there was no real knowledge sharing happening. So I highlighted this to my manager and the director of our partner company and said that the real need, as opposed to their want, is a "Knowledge Management System" through sharing of knowledge.

We were then faced with a choice of either simply wrapping up the contract by providing the customer what they wanted (a simple reporting system) or giving them what they actually needed – a comprehensive Knowledge Management System. Given that this was our first consulting assignment in that part of the world, it would have been very easy simply to provide them with a reporting solution and walk away with the prized contract. But my heart and our team's collective conscience prompted us to abide by Truth - even if it meant losing the contract to other bidders. Also most of the work we did was out-of-scope from the project perspective.

As we prepared the recommendations report, and made the final presentation to the top management in Government, we confidently explained to them the truth of the current scenario and how what they wanted was not in line with their actual needs. We stressed on how, apart from IT based systems, through an environment of "sharing" knowledge, Knowledge Management could truly be developed. We also suggested use of Open Source Software that could lead to cost cuts and other benefits. At the same time, we also made it clear that we would only develop and provide a system along these lines as it was the most appropriate solution that would provide them with tangible benefits in the long run. We told them we did not mind losing the contract to other vendors who would probably provide them with a reporting system and left the decision to the Ministry.

The client was highly appreciative of our transparent method of execution and commended our sincere efforts to bring about a radical change across the Government through our actions. They acknowledged being awakened to the reality of the situation and complimented us for having taken extra steps and efforts to ensure that we addressed their real need.

Though we initially did not hear from them post our final presentation, we were sure that our adherence to Truth would see us through. And sure enough, in about two months, the client approached us again, requesting that we take the project ahead for them. It was Truth that triumphed. We were satisfied to the brim, thanks to the confidence we had in our inner selves. From Self-Satisfaction, we move on to Self-Sacrifice.

Self-Sacrifice – Leave Everything to Him

During my second trip to the same African country, a few more lessons that I learnt at the Lotus Feet were put to practice. I tried to understand, through my conversations with the local workers and laborers, what was driving the youth of this country to take to vandalism, crime and hooliganism. I learnt that though it was an oil-rich country, there was a huge divide between the rich and the poor, due to asymmetry in the wealth earned through the distribution of profits. Hence, on the one hand, one could see excellent development in certain parts of the country, while there was a stark contrast visible in the basic living conditions of the people on the street, who were mostly disease ridden, poor and barely managing to survive. This had instigated corruption at all levels of the Government.

Less Luggage, More Comfort

During my return trip, at the International Airport, I was in for a big surprise. I saw no automatic luggage/ security scanners there. A serpentine queue of men and women was lined up at the checking counter to get their baggage manually rummaged by a handful of security personnel.

To my utter dismay, I also noticed certain people bypassing the main line by paying a few hundreds or thousands in local currency, and directly proceeding to the check-in counter. I ignored repeated requests of the security personnel to "oblige" them in a "friendly" way, and save time for the waiting passengers. The level of aircraft safety was seriously questionable given that anyone could carry in anything for a few thousand currency notes.

Ignoring the requests, I moved on confidently to the check-in counter and in a non-controversial, suggestive

manner apprised them of the security situation. The check-in staff of the leading airline I was about to travel by just shrugged it off, saying it was a pretty "normal" affair in this part of the world. Not only that, they shockingly demanded from me five hundred US dollars in return for a boarding pass citing "excess baggage" as the reason.

She even handed over a memo and confiscated my boarding pass saying till I paid up, I would not be allowed to board the aircraft. I was really in a dilemma as I had to make it to Dubai the following morning, and my conscience would not give in to paying bribes to the airport personnel.

Also, there was increasing pressure from a queue of waiting and impatient passengers behind me to move on, while the check-in staff in front of me was making it extremely difficult by demanding a bribe. In such a situation, I prayed to Swami to show me some light through His Teachings and separated myself from the queue moving my luggage to a corner. As I opened my luggage, I traced the reason for an excess for baggage to a number of instant cook vegetarian food packets that I was carrying along with me, since I was strict vegetarian. Also I had purchased gifts and artifacts for friends and family, and normally this level of excess baggage was not a serious concern for most airline companies.

As if an answer to my prayer, a short red African porter wearing a red dress walked up to me, and said "Indian, Indian". Thinking of him as another corrupt airport staff, I continued to ignore him till he bellowed to me a reminder of Swami's Teaching "Less Luggage, More Comfort". It was an instantaneous wake-up call that in life as well as travel, less luggage led to more comfort. The porter told me that this was a major worry for most passengers and that the corrupt airline staff would not let me board my flight unless I paid them handsomely.

It was almost as if Swami was giving me a key message to offload my burden - the food packets and gifts - and I decided to offload most of my baggage. I understood that this was His way of making me give away all my shopping items, presents I purchased, to the poor airport personnel. I called the security body guards who had accompanied my car to the airport and did what we do in most Sai Centres – "Narayana Seva" in an African context! **While distributing my stuff, I also realized, many of these poor staff had not eaten food for some time now and they were more than pleased and touched at my gesture. I also fondly recalled the Grama Seva we conduct by giving food to all and ensured that while giving away the food packets and gifts I had, there was the same intensity of love expressed as Swami had taught us during the Grama Seva. I distributed everything extra and felt lighter and happier in having acted as a volunteer in an unexpected but mini 'Narayana Seva'. But what happened next was amazing.**

Moved by this gesture, the porter who had initially approached me, went up to the check-in staff, had a long heated discussion with them and finally, ensured that I got my boarding pass from them without paying any bribes.

I felt it was really Swami's own way of testing my resolve to stick to Truth, while imparting an important lesson in "Less Luggage and More Comfort". Only after we sacrifice, can we realize the "Self". And this is how that realization dawned on me.

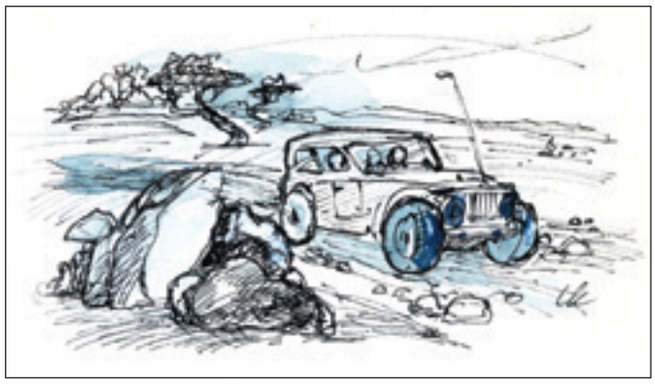
Self Realization – The Self Triumphs, Come What May

On my second trip to the African country, which I had truly begun to consider as a "God-forsaken" land, I had some unexpected and interesting experiences which proved my perception as being totally incorrect.

Fortunately in this trip, I was also accompanied by one of my classmates from the Sri Sathya Sai University, who had joined my company. On reaching Africa, we decided to spend at least one weekend visiting the local Sai Centre and after searching for the Centre addresses on the Internet, we found the address of one and decided to visit it.

We set out on a bumpy road that resembled the good old Wild West kind of dust roads to the place of our

"discovery". It was a distance of 4-5 kms from our hotel suite on the Highway and as we drove across the terrain with our security guard in the front seat of the cab who was himself grumbling about the bad road, poor weather and the sorry state of law and order, we wondered if we had taken the right decision, and that too on a lonely Sunday afternoon.



Moreover, before we left, we had told our concerned team mates in our hotel not to worry about us as we were off to "see our alumni" (read Sai devotees!). It was not that we did not want to discuss Swami with them, but we did not want to be dissuaded from making this much awaited visit to a Sai Center, and Sunday was the only free day we had. We were also confident that He would take full care of our onward and return journey from the Center.

Before we left, we had promised our colleagues that "our alumni" would also drop us back, and as we said this, both of us prayed to Swami that He should arrange a safe trip to the suite from the Center as it would be late night when we returned, and it was our first ever trip outside in that difficult country.

The altar at the Sai Center that Karthik visited in Africa

We arrived at the Sai Center to find a beautifully decorated altar with a life size statue set of Lord Krishna and Rukmini with *Guru* Nanakji's pictures on both sides and Swami's photo at the centre. We were then asked to speak about our experiences and for the next half hour we recalled our beautiful experiences with Swami during our MBA days. **But imagine this! After our talk, we were suddenly approached by a couple of our Sathya Sai alumni brothers in the Center (Ravy and Mahesh from Puttaparthi and Brindavan)!** It was definitely His doing; it was He who prompted those words when we said we are off to see "our alumni". And we spent the rest of the evening with them talking about Swami. And what is more, the alumni brothers were also kind enough to ensure that we were safely dropped back to our hotel later in the night. As Swami says, you take one step towards Me and I will take a hundred towards you...

I remembered an interview when Swami had said to me - "Today you are physically near, tomorrow you may be physically far"... I did not realize far would mean as far as this African Nation! At that moment, all of us around Swami had scrambled and begged to Swami to remain dear to Him forever, and He so sweetly consented - "Yes, you will all be dear to Me forever." Perhaps this visit was just a reminder of that promise.

When we have confidence in Him, He never ever fails us. And through these little instances of His Presence and Grace, He strengthens our inner self to such an extent that we become as fearless and as loving as Him. From Self-Confidence, holding His Hand, we easily reach the state of Self-Realization. But everything starts with faith.

Illustrations: Ms. Lyn Kriegler Elliott, New Zealand

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI Part 39

(Continued from previous issue)

ACT XIII - SCENE 3

After this scorpion incident, there was a great change in Sathya. He seemed withdrawn and lost in spiritual contemplation. Sometimes, He would speak of places and pilgrim centres He had never visited and give graphic descriptions too! Though He had never been to Shirdi, He would speak about that place.

Sathya continued to go to school but brother Seshama Raju was much worried about the change that had come in Him. Seshama wrote a letter to his parents about these changes. And then……

The scene is Venkama Raju's house in Puttaparthi. Kondama Raju is also present.

VENKAMA RAJU: Our Seshama has written a letter.

EASWARAMMA: Is that so? What has Seshama written?……. What does he say about Sathyam?

VEKAMA RAJU: Easwari, it seems Sathyam was stung by a scorpion.

EASWARAMMA: What did you say? Sathyam bitten by a scorpion?! My God! What happened? How is He?

VEKAMA RAJU: Don't get excited Easwari, nothing will happen to Him.

SISTER: Scorpion bite is itself very dangerous! Father, can there be a greater danger?

VENKAMA RAJU: Don't get worried, my dear. Snakes and scorpions are common in villages, and it is natural for them to bite.

EASWARAMMA: Are you suggesting that being stung by a scorpion is a natural occurrence? How lightly you speak! If my child is bitten by a scorpion, will I not feel anguish?

VENKAMA RAJU: Easwari, do I also not feel agony? But tell me, what can we do? He is there and we are here.

EASWARAMMA: Has Seshama written anything about how Sathyam is now?

VENKAMA RAJU: After herbal treatment by the doctor, Sathyam is moving about normally. But……

EASWARAMMA: But? What has happened? What does Seshama say?

THE TWO SISTERS: Father, what happened?

VENKAMA RAJU: There is a peculiar change in Sathyam's behaviour. Apparently He speaks a lot to Himself, recites the Puranas, keeps waving His hands, and speaks generally in a philosophical manner.

EASWARAMMA: Let's go to Uravakonda immediately! I HAVE to see my Sathyam! It does not matter if He does not study further. It is enough if my child is with me!

KONDAMA RAJU: My dear, there is no need to be so agitated. Scorpions and centipedes cannot do any harm to Him. Sathyam is born for a special purpose. He is beyond all these worldly disturbances.

VENKAMA RAJU: Easwari, don't you realise that right from the beginning, our Sathyam has always been different from the rest? That is His nature.

EASWARAMMA: I don't know about all that. I feel very frightened, and I have to go to Uravakonda immediately! I have to see my son, I have to see Him!

KONDAMA RAJU: Alright my dear, alright. Go and come back. Over there, they too must be scared; so, go and pay a visit…….Please go.

SCENE 4

Seshama Raju's house in Uravakonda. Sathya has regained consciousness.

SATHYA: Poison entered and drove out illusion. Worldly bonds and attachments are obstacles to the higher worlds. The body is temporary, and the Atma alone is Eternal!

SESHAMA: He is speaking in a most strange manner – must be the result of the poison. Although speaking queerly is not new to Him, today His speech is full of high philosophy.

SUSEELA: You wrote to your mother and father but they have not come yet. So why don't you write again and send the letter through someone?

SESHAMA RAJU: I was thinking the same, and shall do so immediately.

SATHYA: There is no need to write the letter; in half an hour, the lady of the house will be here.

SESHAMA RAJU: The lady of the house? Whom are You referring to in that manner?

SATHYA: The mother who gave birth to both of us is the lady of the house.

SESHAMA RAJU: Our mother?……. How do You know she is coming soon?

SATHYA: Well, that's the way it is!

Venkama Raju and Easwaramma come to Seshama's house.

SUSEELA *[to Seshama]*: Mother and Father are coming, exactly as Sathyam said!

SESHAMA: Mother!

EASWARAMMA: Seshama!

SESHAMA RAJU: Mother, come. He is over there. Father!

VENKAMA RAJU: Sathyam, what happened?

EASWARAMMA: Sathyam my boy, how are You feeling? Where did the scorpion sting You? Did it pain a lot?

SATHYA: Mother, the pain is for the body and not the mind. For the mind, everything is an illusion; you too are an illusion!

EASWARAMMA: My boy!

SESHAMA RAJU: Sathyam, that is not an illusion; that is our mother!

SATHYA: Mother and father, brother and sister, all are the children of God and all are same to Me.

EASWARAMMA: Sathyam! What are You saying!

SATHYA: *Sathya* [Truth] is My Name, *Dharma* [Righteousness] is My Body, and *Prema* [Love] is My Form!

SESHAMA RAJU: Mother, now you have heard all His great philosophy! This is the way He speaks.

EASWARAMMA: Sathyam, unlike other people, I only thought that You were different from the rest. But what is this? You are speaking of things far beyond Your age! What has happened to You my boy?! Seshama, what's all this?

SESHAMA RAJU: That's the effect of the poison, mother; but don't worry, for it will all go away with the medicine.

EASWARAMMA: No, no! I will take Sathyam with me to Puttaparthi, and have Him treated there. I will not leave Him here. I cannot leave my Sathyam here!

SUSEELA *[to husband]*: It is better to do as your mother says. Perhaps a change of place would do good.

SESHAMA RAJU: Mother, what you say is true. Do as you wish.

VENKAMA RAJU: Seshama, make arrangements immediately for our return journey.

SESHAMA RAJU: Yes father.

SCENE 5

Sathya is back in Puttaparthi in His parent's place. The whole family is gathered there. Kondama Raju is also present.

EASWARAMMA: Venkamma, Parvathamma, I have brought Sathyam home!

KONDAMA RAJU: My dear, you have brought Sathyam with you?

EASWARAMMA: Yes, father-in-law.

VENKAMMA [sister]: Well brother, are You alright?

SATHYA: I am OK, sister.

VENKAMMA [sister]: Where did the scorpion sting?

SATHYA: On the leg.

PARVATHAMMA [sister]: Is it paining now?

SATHYA: No, the pain went away long ago.

VENKAMA RAJU: But there is a mysterious change in His behaviour – He is talking too much philosophy!

KONDAMA RAJU: It was so right from the beginning, wasn't it?

VENKAMA RAJU: Tomorrow, we must have Him examined by a good doctor.

KONDAMA RAJU: Come here and take this fruit. It is *Praasadam*.

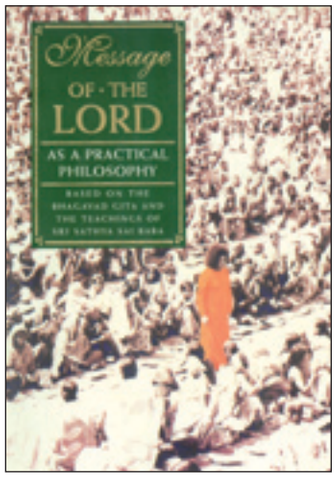
SATHYA: Grandfather, do you know what this fruit symbolises? The outer skin represents *Maya* or illusion.

The fruit inside represents the human body, and the sweet taste represents the *Atma*. *Maya* engulfs the body and eclipses the *Atma*!

(To be continued)

MUSINGS ON AVATARS
Part 1
By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Dear Readers, for the last 40 issues, between 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 last month, from this issue onwards, we are pleased to present a new series on "Avatars" or Divine Incarnations. These are 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.



Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. Starting this month, I intend to present a series of articles meant mainly for those who are not familiar with Indian mythology or Puraanas as we refer to them in India. Basically, these articles would revolve around the stories of Lord Rama and Krishna, whose names must undoubtedly be familiar to all readers, including those from overseas.

In presenting these articles, I wish to make an apology right at the beginning to Indian readers, many of whom might consider that my presentation is not adequate and lacking in many respects. I readily agree that my presentation is a rather simplified one. However, I have taken the liberty making it so, because my aim is to get across to the unfamiliar reader, the essential aspects of the two great Avatars, Rama and Krishna. I am confident that despite their shortcomings, these talks would help those unfamiliar with the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha to understand better the numerous references that Swami makes to these great epics in His Discourses. I should also not omit to mention that Swami has not only narrated the stories of these earlier Avatars extensively, but has also written about them in His Ramakatha Rasa Vahini and Bhagavatha Vahini, to name just two books. I do hope that this series would induce readers to refer to these sources for greater clarity and inspiration. With these caveats and introductory remarks, let me get on with the job.

'I Incarnate from Age to Age'

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna refers to the repeated Incarnations or the Avatars of Lord Almighty. According to the scriptures of India (Bharat), there have been several Avatars. In the very early ones, the Lord did not assume a human form; it was only later that He began to assume the Human Form. My focus would be mainly on the Rama and the Krishna Avatars, in both of which, the Lord came down with a Human Form.

Although God has incarnated many times – one really does not know how many – according to a common tradition, one counts only ten Avatars, all of which are supposed to be Incarnations of Lord Vishnu. You might be aware that Divinity has a three-fold aspect, related respectively to Creation, the sustenance of Creation, and finally the dissolution of Creation. According to folklore, these three aspects are managed by three Gods/deities/aspects, call it what you wish. They are respectively, Brahma [who is in charge of Creation], Vishnu [who plays the role of the Protector and Sustainer], and Shiva [who takes care of dissolving Creation]. Many religiously believe in this triune, but, as Swami reminds us, the Supreme is Formless, and as such, attributing specific forms like Brahma, Vishnu, etc., is largely a matter of convenience and may even be tradition.

How Does God Become an Avatar

The question then arises: "In that case, what is it that incarnates?" *Vedanta* gives a clue and Krishna confirms it in the *Gita*. Krishna says it is essentially the Unmanifest Divinity that is beyond Space and Time and which is Formless that assumes a particular form for a particular purpose. That Unmanifest Divinity is also referred to as

Supreme Consciousness. In other words, at the highest philosophical level, God is Supreme Consciousness. And a projection of the Supreme Consciousness in some form on to space and time, and for the specific purpose of preserving *Dharma* (righteousness), is what really constitutes an Avatar. Since every projection on space-time has a form, when God incarnates as an Avatar, clearly the Avatar too has a Form. Maybe I should add a few more remarks to supplement the above.

You see, when God creates the Universe, it is not as if He moves from one plane to another. Let us say there is a tree and there is also sunlight. The tree would naturally cast a shadow; as a result, we then have both the tree as well as the shadow. The tree is the totality while the shadow, being a projection of the tree on a two-dimensional plane, has features related to the tree. Thus it is that in the shadow we see bits and pieces of the trunk, the branches, the leaves, and so on. Of course, all the details in the original tree are not seen in the shadow. Similarly, when God creates the Universe by projecting Himself, all aspects of His Divinity are not fully evident in this projection. That applies to some extent to the Avatars too. For example, God is Eternal but in Creation, every entity that is born, including the Avatars, disappears later due to natural processes.

The Ten Avatars of Lord Vishnu

To repeat, as Krishna explains, the Universe is a projection of the Absolute, Eternal, Formless God on space-time. Further, all the diversity we see is a trick of the Divine Shadow Play; that is, on the stage called space-time, The One appears as many! You would surely agree that just because the shadow is there, the tree does not vanish or cease to be. This is a very important point, and it is to stress this that Krishna essentially tells Arjuna,

"Arjuna, in the ultimate analysis, I am what I am, Unmanifest Divinity, that is Absolute, Eternal, Attribute-less, and Formless. A portion of My Unmanifest Divinity is projected on the Universe, where I cannot be directly seen but certainly experienced. In addition, whenever required, I also appear in a special form to play a direct role Myself. It is such Incarnations that are called Avatars. All these diverse projections constitute an infinitesimal part of Myself, which is truly Infinite.

Let Me assert that when I make an appearance as an Avatar, it does not mean that I abandon My Absolute aspect and put in an appearance here on earth; not at all. Just as the Sun is always there while sunlight is present sometimes and absent at other times, I come and go as an Avatar, many times, even while My Eternal aspect always is."

That is the essence of how Krishna explained it all to Arjuna. I guess I have given enough of a background to set the stage for what follows. While my main focus would be on Rama and Krishna, I shall, for the sake of completeness, start with a brief overview of the ten Avatars of Vishnu. I am aware that this point of view can be disputed and many questions also raised. To go into all of them would distract me from my present purpose; I shall, in my introduction, restrict to giving just a cursory overview of the ten Avatars, as I have heard it narrated.

Just to clarify once more, my main objective in the present musings series is to focus on the story of Rama and Krishna. However, for the convenience of many readers, I shall embed that narrative within the framework of the ten Incarnations of Vishnu that one traditionally speaks of. So, now onto a brief overview of the ten Avatars of Vishnu, as is popularly believed. By the way, I shall often

use the words Narayana and Vishnu interchangeably, though there might be some technical disapproval of that.

An Overview of the Ten Avatars

Matsya Avatar

Matsya Avatar

As you might know, according to legend, every time the Universe is dissolved, there is supposed to be a Great Flood or *Pralayam* as it is referred to. Apparently, the last time the Universe was dissolved, the *Vedas* got drowned in the *Pralayam* and sank deep into the waters. A new Universe had to be created, for which purpose, Brahma, the Creator, needed the *Vedas*. Vishnu was then given the task of retrieving the *Vedas*, which He did by assuming the form of a fish and descending into the waters. This Incarnation of Lord Vishnu as a fish is known as *Matsya Avatara* [*Matsya* means fish]. Basically, this Incarnation was for a rescue operation, and had nothing to do with getting rid of the evil doers. However, let us not forget that what this tale reminds us is the importance of *Vedas* for the sustenance of *Dharma*; in other words, for the Universe to exist and be sustained, *Dharma* is essential – that is the broad message.

Koorma Avatar

Koorma Avatar

Next came, the *Koorma Avatar*, in which Lord Vishnu assumed the form of a tortoise. What for? To give the newly created Universe support. Even today, many believe that the earth rests on the back of a tortoise. I personally think that the real message is that it is the Lord who really supports and sustains the Universe.

Varaha Avatar

Moving on, we come next to the *Varaha Avatar*, where Vishnu assumes the form of a boar. This is the first time we see the Lord actually engaged in eliminating the source of evil, and I shall come to that story soon for it is intimately related to the story of Rama and Krishna.

Varaha Avatar

Narasimha Avatar

The fourth Avatar of Vishnu is the *Narasimha Avatar*, and that story too will come up later, like that of the *Varaha Avatar*.

Vamana Avatar

On now to the fifth Avatar, which is the *Vamana Avatar*. Here Vishnu appears as a small Brahmin, a dwarf almost. There was an Emperor named Bali, who went on a conquest spree. Wanting to rule over all the three worlds [it was customary to talk of three worlds in those days] Bali decided, in accordance with the advice of his *Guru* Sukracharya, to perform a grand *Yajna*. In those, days, whenever a big wish needed to be fulfilled, the person with the desire performed a *Yajna*. At the end of the ritual, some God or deity was supposed to appear whereupon one duly made the request. Bali wanted the Lord to appear and grant him the boon that would ensure for him the rulership of all the worlds. Naturally, this ambition of Bali worried the *Devas* who ruled the

Vamana Avatar

heavens; they obviously did not want to come under Bali, an earthling. So they appealed to Lord Vishnu to do something, which of course He agreed to. And what did the Lord do? He incarnated as a diminutive Brahmin. Why? Ah, that is where the story lies!

Now when a *Yajna* is performed, priests and Brahmins gather there in large numbers because the one who performs the *Yajna* invariably gives away a lot in charities. For Brahmins, it is a good time to receive gifts! So when Vishnu appeared as a small Brahmin boy and joined the crowd, nobody saw anything peculiar in that; except Sukracharya, the *Guru* of Bali.

It was time to offer charity and distribute gifts, and Emperor Bali gave to each Brahmin what was asked for, which was always reasonable and within bounds. Came then the turn of Vamana, and the Emperor asked the standard question, "Oh Brahmin, ask what you want and I shall give accordingly." Sukracharaya who knew what was to happen, cautioned Bali. He whispered, "Emperor, beware! Do not make any such blanket promises!" The Emperor shook his head and said, "No, I have given my word and my *Dharma* requires me to adhere to it." The *Guru* was dismayed but did not give up and said, "But Emperor, if you grant what this Brahmin asks for, you are finished."

Before I carry on with the rest of the story as traditionally narrated, I must make a special reference to the way Swami tells this story, which He often does during His Onam Discourses. Onam is a festival in celebration of Emperor Bali. According to folklore, Bali ruled in that part of India called Kerala, and every year on Onam day, Bali revisits his old country to be with his people. Swami says that *Guru* Sukracharya not only cautioned Bali but actually told him, "This is no ordinary Brahmin; this is the very Lord Himself, disguised as a dwarf Brahmin, out to thwart your ambition, at the request of the *Devas* or the demi-gods. Do not therefore agree to give what He asks for." Swami says that Bali told his *Guru*, "Normally, one asks the Lord to give to us; but today, it is the Lord Himself who is asking to be given. How fortunate I am to have the chance to give! It is a privilege to have my hand above giving, and that of the Lord below receiving!" Swami adds, "Bali had his priorities right; when it comes to choosing between man and God, one must always choose God. Bali had to decide whether he was going to accept his *Guru's* advice and go against his word, or keep his promise, rejecting the *Guru's* advice in the process. Bali chose wisely, and as a result, the Lord blessed him so that he could return once every year to reunite with his people and share their merrymaking.

To complete the story as usually told, when Bali agreed to give what Vamana asked for, the Brahmin said, "Oh Emperor, I do not want much; I just want what three footsteps of mine can cover." Bali agreed and Vamana took the first step. With that, Vamana covered the whole earth; Bali had to surrender it to Vamana. Vamana then took the second step with which he covered the whole sky; that too was surrendered to Vamana. The Brahmin then said, "I have still one more step left; where do I put my foot after taking the step? The earth is no longer available nor is the sky. What do you have to say?" Bali said, "You may put your foot on my head." Vamana did that and that was the completion of the conquest of Bali. So the story usually ends, with Vamana, the victor, and Bali, the loser. Swami however says that Bali did not lose at all; rather, he achieved perfect surrender and total redemption thereby. So what is the bottom line? Offering the head for the Lord to put His Foot on implies total surrender. Surrender to the Lord as Bali did – that's the implied message. So much for the story of Vamana, the fifth Avatar.

Parasurama Avatar

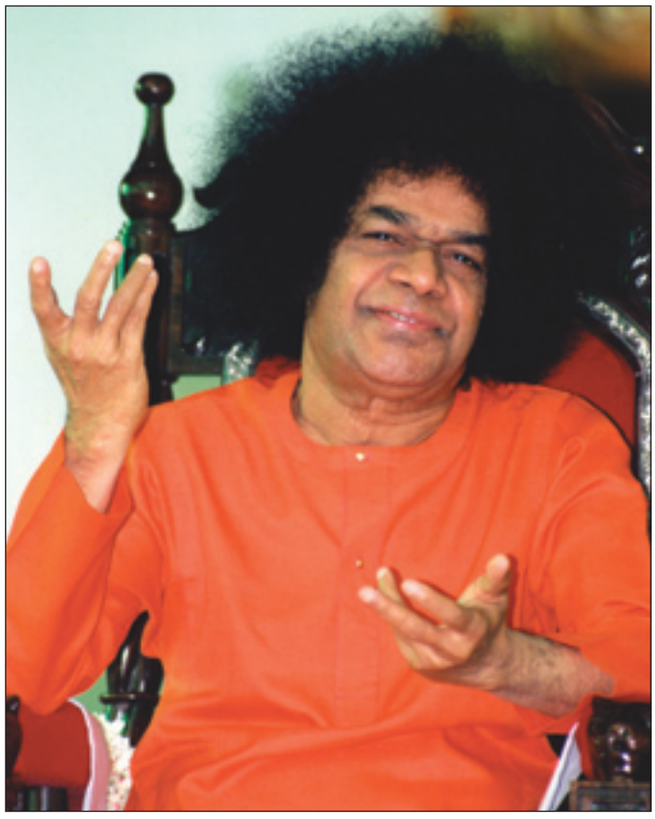
Parasurama Avatar

Technically, the sixth Avatar is supposed to be Parasurama, concerning whom there are many versions of the story. What makes this Avatar even more difficult to understand is that Parasurama and Rama have a confrontation! Avatar versus Avatar? I know that there are many interpretations, but since I am not able to understand them myself, I would be less than honest if I tried to relate any of those stories. I should not, however, forget to point out that Swami has described the meeting between Parasurama and Lord Rama, and its tone is very different from what is normally offered. The gist of it is that when Parasurama gave Rama his bow, Parasurama formally transferred an aspect of the Divine that was with him to Rama, to complete the Divine aspect of Rama.

The Next Four Avatars

This brings us to the seventh Avatar, Lord Rama, whose story is narrated separately. Later, the Lord incarnated again as Lord Krishna, making it Avatar number eight; that story would be narrated in detail later; which leaves two more to complete the score of ten. Buddha is taken to be the ninth Avatar, while the tenth Avatar is supposed to incarnate in this the Kali Age, now running. The tenth Avatar is called the Kalki Avatar, and is supposed to come on a horse.

Many religiously believe in this chronology and for such people, Swami would not count as an Avatar. For me, and I guess for many like me, this acceptance or rejection does not matter. Swami is here, and we all accept Him as an Incarnation of God, not for this or that technical reason, but because verily He is the Embodiment of *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti*, *Prema* and *Ahimsa*. That is what a Poorna Avatar is supposed to be; that is what Rama was and it was the same with Krishna. Thus, along with Rama and Krishna, Swami occupies a special place in



human history, which is why I am offering this overview of Rama and Krishna Avatars for the benefit of those who are not familiar with those aspects of His Story. Incidentally, allow me to quote what Gandhi said about God. He said, and I quote from memory,

"He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect. God to be God must rule the Heart and transform the senses."

That is what Gandhi said; does not that definition fit our beloved Swami perfectly? I think it does and that is why I have no problem in accepting Swami as God personified. Whether or not Sai fits into the traditional book-view is for others to worry about!

Let me move on. Now that I have given you the overview of the ten traditional Avatars of Lord Vishnu and the place of the Rama and the Krishna Avatars in this scheme, I should logically go straight to the story of Rama. I shall not do that and with good reason. According to the folklore, it so happens that the stories of Rama and of Krishna are tied up with the stories of a couple of Avatars that preceded these two. Why? Thereby hangs a tale and it is to that I shall now turn.

Hiranyaksha's Destruction by the *Varaha Avatar*

It all starts with the Rishis or Sages Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana and Sanatkumara making a trip to Vaikuntam, the Abode of Lord Vishnu, often hailed as Narayana. As they were about to enter the Lord's chamber, they were rudely stopped by two guards named Jayan and Vijayan. (Swami has clarified that Jayan and Vijayan did so because they felt that the Rishis were not properly attired.) Feeling deeply insulted, the Rishis cursed the doorkeepers to be born on earth where they would be far away from their beloved Lord. At this stage, Lord Narayana Himself came out to investigate the commotion outside His chamber. Seeing the Lord and fearful of being banished from His Divine presence, the two guards fell at His feet and begged for a waiver of the curse of the Rishis. Narayana replied, "I am sorry the curse has to stand but you have a choice. You can either take ten births as virtuous men before returning to Vaikuntam or three births as evil beings full of hatred for Me. In the latter case, I shall kill you both in every birth of yours, and finally in the *Dwapara Yuga*, both of you after annihilation would come back to Me. The choice is yours."

Jayan and Vijayan thought that ten births would keep them away too long from Vaikuntam and therefore settled for three births, even as evil beings full of hatred for the Lord. Thus it was that Lord Narayana had to incarnate several times for destroying the earthly forms of His two guards.

Lord Vishnu

Let us now follow what happened when Jayan and Vijayan were born three times, as demons. In their first such birth, they were born to Sage Kashyap via Diti, one of the Sage's wives. These two demons were named Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashyapu. To get rid of these two demons, the Lord had to incarnate twice; on now to the story of the first of two such Incarnations.

By intense worship of Brahma, the Creator, Hiranyaksha gained several boons that conferred great powers. Feeling arrogant and immensely puffed up, Hiranyaksha then went on a rampage, conquering and harassing. As a part of this campaign, Hiranyaksha entered the nether world and challenged its chief Varuna to a battle. Varuna pleaded that he was not really a worthy opponent and that the only one who could give a good fight was Narayana. Thus Lord Narayana Himself became a target for Hiranyaksha. I suppose you see here an allegorical reference to modern man, who, flushed with his numerous scientific and technological successes, is now questioning the very existence of God from whom he has come. What this mythological story tells us is that, what is happening now is merely a re-run of an old episode!

To get on with my narration, *Varaha* is the Avatar of Lord Vishnu when He came to save Mother Earth from demon Hiranyaksha. Hiranyaksha was huge and all beings trembled before him. Even Brahma, the Creator, could not subdue this demon. Going on a conquest spree, Hiranyaksha invaded the heavens forcing the Gods to take shelter in caves. I have already mentioned that Hiranyaksha also frightened the wits out of Varuna, the ruler of the nether world. Hiranyaksha now turned his attention to Earth, then ruled by Manu. The demon snatched the Earth away and took it to the bottom of the Ocean, making life on earth impossible.

Manu and his wife fled and threw themselves at the feet of Brahma. The Creator was deeply concerned and said, "I cannot personally destroy this wicked demon because of a boon I have granted him. But he is not safe from the might of the Lord. So let us appeal to Lord Vishnu."

Brahma then meditated on the Lord, and from Brahma's nostril there fell a tiny boar [*Varaha* is the Sanskrit word for boar]. It was the Lord appearing in that form. The moment the boar appeared, it instantly grew huge in size. With a mighty roar, the boar leapt into the air, and dived into the Ocean to bring the Earth up.

Meanwhile, Hiranyaksha was going round in search of Narayana so that he could challenge Him. On the way, he met Sage Narada who readily obliged the *Asura* with information concerning Narayana's whereabouts. Narada said that Narayana had assumed the form of a boar so that He could lift the Earth with His tusk from the bottom of the ocean. Incidentally, on the ceiling of the Poornachandra Auditorium in Prashanti Nilayam, there is, among the many illustrations there, a depiction of Narayana in the *Varaha Avatar*. Narada added, "Narayana is just about to surface from the water, and if you hurry you can catch Him". For those of you who do not know, Sage Narada is a great devotee of Narayana, constantly wandering amongst the three worlds, singing His praise. Narada is popularly referred to as a great troublemaker, but that of course is an uncharitable description. In actual fact, Narayana makes Narada play that role as a part of His great Drama!

Hiranyaksha rushed to where Narayana was (in the form of a boar), and challenged Him. A prolonged fight ensued, witnessed by the *Devas* or the Gods of heaven, the sages, etc. Among those present was Brahma, the Creator (and son of Narayana). Feeling anxious for the Lord, Brahma (who earlier had granted the boons which made Hiranyaksha powerful) pointed out to Narayana that it was then the sacred hour of *Abhijit Muhurtam* and this therefore was a good time to finish off the *Asura*; a delay would mean the onset of darkness when annihilation would be more difficult since *Asuras* gained strength in the dark. The Lord smiled as if to say, "I am Time itself, and this son of Mine is trying to teach Me about the right time to do things!" Anyway, responding to Brahma's wish, He immediately destroyed Hiranyaksha.

The Varaha Avatar...

Mission accomplished, The Lord returned to Vaikuntam to await the moment when another Incarnation would be necessary, this time for the destruction of Hiranyakashyapu. For long, I used to wonder why the fight between *Varaha* and Hiranyaksha took so long, when the Lord was supposed to be all powerful. It was

...Rescuing Mother Earth

only later that I realised that Hiranyaksha taking the Earth away is symbolic of humanity being hijacked by evil forces, and that to rescue humanity it takes a long fight over evil. Given today's circumstances, I am sure you would agree with my broad view of this allegorical story.

Hiranyakashyapu's Elimination by the *Narasimha Avatar*

This brings us now the story of how the Lord took care of the second demon, Hiranyakashyapu. If you happen to look at artists' rendering of Hiranyakashyapu, you would find the features to be entirely human, a reminder of the fact that it is not the bodily features that are demonic, but the behaviour. Anyway, to get on with our story, Hiranyakashyapu had but one desire - to be invincible and to be the lord of the three worlds. And in order to achieve this, he did intense penance to propitiate Brahma, the Creator. Pleased, Brahma appeared before Hiranyakashyapu, permitting the latter to ask for boons. Hiranyakashyapu said: "I do not want to die. So grant me that no creature of yours (i.e., in Creation) will cause my death. Death shall not come to me inside the house nor outside; not during day nor night; not on earth nor in the sky ..." Smilingly, Brahma granted the request. Confident that he had insured himself against all possibilities of death, Hiranyakashyapu promptly launched a campaign of conquest and soon became the master of the three worlds, exactly as he had once dreamt.

Hiranyakashyapu had four sons of whom the youngest was Prahalada. Though born an *Asura*, in nature and temperament he was the just the opposite - gentle, sweet, full of kindness, in short, totally *Sattvik*. At the age of five, Prahalada was placed under tutors for receiving education. Traditionally, the instruction would include both the secular and the spiritual, but hating Narayana as he did, Hiranyakashyapu gave strict orders that Prahalada must be taught to worship only him (i.e., Hiranyakashyapu) as the Supreme Lord and not Narayana. However, swept by his devotion for Narayana, Prahalada refused to accept his father as the Supreme One. Infuriated, Hiranyakashyapu tried his best to frighten Prahalada, but finding that threats did not work he ordered that Prahalada be killed. The young Prince was totally unperturbed. Constantly chanting *Om Namo Narayanaya*, he faced all dangers. Many methods of killing him were tried, such as crushing by elephants, rolling from mountains, drowning in the sea etc., but every time Prahalada had a miraculous escape.

Exasperated, Hiranyakashyapu sent for his son in an effort to persuade him once more. But it was of no avail since Prahalada would acknowledge no one but Narayana as the Supreme Lord. In desperation Hiranyakashyapu said, "I am the ruler of the three worlds and so I should be your Lord. How can you give that status to Narayana? Where is this Narayana whom you are constantly worshipping? I don't see him." Smiling, Prahalada replied, "Father, He is everywhere." Eyes red with anger Hiranyakashyapu mockingly asked, "Is He in this pillar?" Prahalada replied, "Yes, of course". "In that case," roared Hiranyakashyapu, "see what I do to Him". So saying he kicked the pillar.

Immediately, a thundering noise of terrifying intensity was heard. The pillar split into two and from it emerged a weird creature, half human and half lion - Narayana had come in the form of *Narasimha* (man-lion). Such a creature did not belong to Brahma's Creation. Suddenly Hiranyakashyapu remembered the boon granted by Brahma. No death from earthly creatures for sure but was he safe against this one? He looked around and discovered that it was neither day nor night; it was twilight, again a bad omen. Meanwhile, Narasimha

Lord Narasimha

lifted Hiranyakashyapu and carried him to the doorstep - neither in the house nor outside! Sitting there Narasimha placed the *Asura* on his lap - neither on Earth or in the Sky - and proceeded to tear him apart and, as a gory finale, removed his entrails and wore it as garland. Hiranyakashyapu was dead and Narayana's mission was over.

It may be noted that in both the Avatars discussed above, the Lord did not assume a human form; nor did the Avatars fall in the category of Poorna Avatar. They were instead, *Karana* (functional) Avatars.

Swami has commented that Hiranyakashyapu was a great scientist and behaved very much like his counterparts of today, i.e., in denying the existence of God. What about Prahalada? Was it right on his part to disobey his father? After all, do not the *Vedas* declare that mother and father are God? About this, Swami says that elders must, of course, be revered but if anyone comes between an individual and God, then God has priority. Thus it is that Prahalada, applying fundamental discrimination, placed God above his father. Similarly, as we saw earlier, in the *Vamana Avatar*, Emperor Maha Bali placed God above *Guru*; and, as we shall soon see, in the Ramayana, Bharata chose God above mother. Swami has also pointed out the inner significance of the other aspects like the kicking of the pillar. The pillar represents ignorance, and when ignorance is destroyed, Knowledge shines forth.

That brings me to the end of this first instalment. Next time, we shall pick up the story from where we are leaving now. I do hope this article was of some use. Do write to us at h2h@radiosai.org and tell us what you think.

Jai Sai Ram.

(To be continued)

WHEN A HEART BEATS WITH LOVE...

This is the story of a brave heart, Mr. Mihira Kumar Mishra, from a remote village of Orissa, who found hope and light in Baba's Hospital in the darkest hour of his life, and having received this divine gift has now transformed his life into a saga of selfless service.

Born in Backward Bhagawanpur

As an infant, when he wailed, his mother never picked him up and held him close to her bosom. When he cried out of hunger as a baby, she did not take him onto her lap and feed him. Or when he fell while trying to walk as a toddler, she never rushed to lift him up and stop his tears with her caresses. "I do not know what mother's love is," says Mihira Kumar Mishra.

Mr. Mihira Kumar Mishra

It was such a tragic twist of destiny for this village boy that the one who gave him birth never acknowledged or realized his existence, let alone loved or cared for him. Right from the time he was born, his mother was mentally challenged – she lived in her own space and time, in her own way. And his father, though a concerned parent, was a man of little means; he taught small children in a nearby school. His village was obscure and poor, a perfect example of under developed India. There was only a muddy and patchy pathway to connect their rural habitation to the world. Almost every family in that hamlet worked in the fields through rain and heat, cold and storm, as farmers or labourers. Their settlement was known as 'Bhagawanpur', meaning 'Land of God'. The origin of this name is unknown but what is certainly evident is the complete dependence of the simple village folk on God and Nature to come to their rescue at every adversity just like Mihira's father, Kshetra Mohan Mishra did.

Kshetra Mohan underwent all the trials with fortitude and faith in God. It did not matter, if Sulochana had lost her mental balance, she was still his wife and he cared for her like every loving husband would. He laboured hard to raise his only son, the apple of his eye. He toiled and saved to provide for his wife's medicines and his child's every need. Fortunately there was help from Mihira's uncle; still, being a single parent with an indisposed wife and grossly inadequate income was never easy. But Kshetra Mohan continued with courage and perseverance until one event almost broke the limits of his emotional endurance.

Blighted by a Diseased Heart

When Mihira was five years old, he suddenly developed unrelenting fever and cold. Kshetra Mohan took him to the Primary Health Centre, located more than 15 kms away, but the medicines prescribed there provided no respite whatsoever. When the problem persisted, the disturbed father took Mihira to Cuttack, one of Orissa's biggest cities. The doctors of a reputed hospital there checked him thoroughly and finally delivered a definite diagnosis. When Kshetra Mohan heard their verdict, his

Bhagawanpur is a remote village 50 kms from Angul District, in the state of Orissa

heart could barely beat. He could not accept that his 5 year old dear one was actually suffering from a serious cardiac ailment. The only glimmer of Grace in that hour of gloom was that the cardiologists did not advise immediate surgery. If they had, Kshetra Mohan could have perhaps collapsed out of anxiety, as there was no way he could have mobilized the required amount to save his son.

From that day onwards, Mihira had to be continuously on drugs. Even though he was not as active as his counterparts in school, he had enough stamina to do everything he wanted, except play outdoor games or lift heavy weights. Kshetra Mohan managed to buy the medicines for his son every month, and every year he took him to reputed hospitals in Cuttack or Bhuvaneshwar (the capital of Orissa) for a routine check up.

"The people of my village are very poor. Just like me, they cannot afford huge expenditures for their treatments. So I decided to take all the suffering people of my village to Baba's Hospital...This is my way of showing gratitude to Baba for giving a new birth," says Mihira, who is now 38 years old. And in the last six years he has brought twenty-three patients from his area and surrounding villages for treatment to Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospitals, both in Puttaparthi and Whitefield.

It all seemed under control until 1988 when the doctors in SCB Medical College in Cuttack advised that Mihira should be operated upon immediately. "Without surgery, his health will only deteriorate from now on," they said. Kshetra Mohan was panic stricken. He prayed and pleaded for funds from relatives and friends, but with little success. He had endured too much stress till then and could not take it anymore. He had lost the battle in his mind and in the same year his body too gave away. He became terribly sick with jaundice and with no proper diagnosis and treatment available in the remote village, he breathed his last. It was too much and too sudden for Mihira. He was 18 years old then but cried pathetically like a baby who has lost his mother; he was inconsolable. At this time, his uncle and grand parents came to his rescue, but it took a long time for him to come out of the shock. Nursing his deep emotional wounds, he forgot about his heart surgery. But his health was on a downward spiral.

Often his body's temperature shot to 102° and 104° F and he was as weak as a dying man. But somehow, he came through it. He consulted specialists and changed his medicines frequently. That is the only option he had as surgery for him was a pipedream. In 1999, he contracted a serious infection and became so sick that his uncle rushed him to Kalinga Hospital, Bhuvaneshwar. He was bed ridden for three months and at that time was administered 20 injections per day, one every hour, to stabilize his condition. The doctors again insisted on immediate surgery and even informed him that two valves in his heart were now almost defunct. But there was nothing Mihira could do. Thanks to the school authorities, he could secure his father's job soon after his death, but his income was just enough to keep his flesh and bones together, given the huge expenditure on medicines he had to incur every month. Mihira had now resigned to his cruel fate. It was the darkest hour of his life. And it was at this time that God chose to confer light, hope and grace on him.

The End of His Years of Anguish

Someone told his uncle about Bhagavan Baba's free Super Specialty Hospital in Puttaparthi and in a few months, Mihira was in the outpatient department of the Hospital along with his uncle. He went through the

The altar at the entrance of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Bangalore

battery of cardiac diagnostic tests, his diagnosis was confirmed and he was sent home with medicines and lots of advice, after putting him on the waiting list for surgery. In January 2002, he was invited by Baba's Super Specialty Hospital in Bangalore to come prepared for surgery. And once and for all, his disease of nearly three decades was fixed. He underwent an open heart surgery for ASD closure (closing the hole in the heart) and MV Repair (repairing the Mitral Valve). And the relief and joy on Mihira's face after the operation was beyond this world. "Baba's Hospital is a Temple…how could I have ever arranged lakhs of rupees for my operation? Besides, I can never forget the love that the staff and doctors showered on me here so generously…my life has been saved by Baba. He has given me a new life." Mihira's voice was choked with emotion.

His Heart Now Beats For Sai

A beautiful and moving end to the story, isn't it? But, actually, this is only the beginning. Because Mihira's story has similarities with many other such accounts of patients treated in Baba's Hospitals only till this point. One would think Mihira would spend the rest of his life peacefully and with minimum problems. Yes, it is true, but it is only half the truth; the other half being, Mihira is, at the same time, extremely busy empathising with the problems of many other fellow brothers and sisters and removing their pain.

"The people of my village are very poor. Just like me, they cannot afford huge expenditures for their treatments. So I decided to take all the suffering people of my village to Baba's Hospital…This is my way of showing gratitude

Preparing certificates, Vibhuti and Blood Donation Books to be given to every donor

With joy people lined up to offer their 'liquid love'

to Baba for giving a new birth," says Mihira, who is now 38 years old. And in the last six years he has brought twenty three patients from his area and surrounding villages for treatment to Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospitals, both in Puttaparthi and Whitefield. For the rural folk in that region, Mihira, who was once pitied upon by everyone around, is now their 'angel' – a great source of inspiration and support. The whole character of little Bhagawanpur has changed in just five years. Now you find there a vibrant Sai Group which, apart from

You are in safe hands!

Warm and reassuring smiles

doing regular Bhajans, has undertaken many notable service projects. **One recent initiative being the Blood Donation Day organized on September 16, 2007.**

The planning for this endeavour started three months in advance as the inspired youth led by Mihira, who is now the Sevadal Coordinator of the Sai Group, created awareness about the camp in all nearby villages through posters, meetings and personal appeals. Their team to handle the Blood Bank had five technicians, two assistants and one doctor. The venue was the rural village of Rasol, a few kilometers from Bhagawanpur, and they left no stone unturned with respect to organizing the camp. With a Registration Counter, Blood Collection Room, Counseling Room, Rest Room, Waiting Hall and the like set up in a school building, it was the best that could be planned in that remote and backward region.

The Youth had expected to collect a maximum of 50-60 units of blood. But as the registration count went up from 40, 50, 60 to 100, they were overwhelmed. At the end of the day, they had 105 units! Such was the sense of sacrifice and love that filled the ambience that all the teachers of the school too volunteered to donate. The CDMO and Blood Bank Officer of the District Head Quarters Hospital were so surprised by the selfless service that they now have the name of the Sai Organisation displayed on a big board in the District Blood Bank Office.

It was truly a Festival of Liquid Love and everybody chipped in to contribute in his or her own way. The Sai Volunteers from the nearby town took care of the donors by offering them proper counseling; others organized video programs based on Sai and His Love to be shown to the people waiting in the Hall; while a third group distributed certificates, Vibhuti and a Blood Donation Book to every donor. A youth, Surya, who had come only to offer service at the camp was so moved by what he saw that he ended up being a donor, and said, "Now, I will donate blood every year to save others' lives. It is such an ennobling experience."

And this is not the only activity that Mihira and the team of Sai Youth are engaged in. Mihira, apart from being the Sevadal Coordinator, also takes Bal Vikas classes for the children of his village. **Recently, he, along with others, also organized a Teacher Training Seminar based on EHV which had 200 teachers participating to learn about Human Values and their application.**

Love permeated the atmosphere....

Some of the 200 teachers at the seminar

The organisers of the camp

The State President of Sai Organisations, Orissa

Thought provoking questions from the participants

It was as interesting as educating

Children display their knowledge of EHV

Mihir inspiring through his erudition.

Actually, Mihira has conducted two such seminars, one on August 6, 2006 and another on September 30, 2007. The heartening fact is that, aware of the noble work being done by Mihira and the Sai Youth, the Deputy Inspector of Schools of that region instructed all the school teachers to participate in this programme. **Mr. Mayadhar Pal, a participant teacher, after the programme, said, "I thought you wanted to preach us about Sai Baba. But I now know how mistaken I was. This seminar has touched me a lot. Right away I will try to start implementing all these precious human values in my school."**

The adults discuss issues with an open mind

Mihira and his Youth team, inspired by Bhagavan's mega service projects, are never satisfied. **They are always looking for avenues to do more and on the anvil are many exciting projects apart from regular medical camps, poor feeding and providing basic amenities in the 16 villages surrounding Bhagawanpur. While all this goes on, Mihira's principal passion of bringing patients to Baba's Hospitals never stops. His life, today, is a candle that has not only given light and warmth to many but also has kindled the spark of Divine Love and selfless service in the hearts of hundreds.**

– Heart2Heart Team

We are grateful to Mr. R R Sar, the District President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Angul District, Orissa, for his active support in making this article.

PRASHANTI DIARY
Chronicles of Heaven on Earth

January 28, 2008 – Programme by Delhi Youth

January 28 was to be a special day for the youth who had arrived from Delhi. Swami had agreed for their song programme entitled, "Prema Arpan". The marble blocks had been occupied partly by the Delhi youth and they waited patiently with a prayer on their lips. Swami arrived for Darshan at about 5:15 pm. He went for the complete round and then alighted near the interview room. He was beaming smiles when He took His place on the stage which gave hints to all of how beautiful an evening it was going to be. He saw the singers seated right in the front and like a child asked," Are you going to sing?" When the reply was an affirmative, He asked them to begin.

Two lads went up on stage with a card and rose. After obtaining personal blessings on behalf of the whole group, they returned to their places and the songs began. The first one described Swami as being everything for everyone; He, who pervading everything brings joy to all. Two more songs followed which were filled with descriptions of His magnificence and glory. All the songs were set to lively tunes and the selection of the instruments being played was unique and interesting too. These were all achieved, however, with one keyboard. Though an almost confusing array of instruments is available as choices on the modern keyboards, they chose the most apt ones which added the right flavour to the songs.

An Offering of Love...

....dedicated at His Lotus Feet

The fourth song was a Qawwali for which a few members of the group went on their knees to sing, with the traditional clapping and swaying from side to side. Swami was a bit amused at the sight of the different swinging actions being performed in front of Him. He once even jokingly asked them to sit down and sing! A few songs later, Swami asked them whether they were through and they replied that there was one more song. Call it a coincidence or a small miracle, but there is one observation that the regular attendee of music programmes in Puttaparthi can make if he/she is a little attentive: Many times a group of singers perform and somehow as they sing their penultimate song, Swami seems to ask them, "Is it over?" The invariable reply is, "Swami, one more!" And then He nods in agreement. This little drama that takes place on such a regular basis is so full of meaning.

For one, it is direct proof of Swami's omniscience and if this is fully grasped, it becomes evident that the performance is superfluous as far as Swami is concerned, but He still does it out of His Love for His children. At times when He has surprised His students to perform suddenly out of the blue, that question acts as a balm that the test is nearing its close while everyone in the audience are amazed as they think, "These students are marvelous; Swami asked them to sing and they are so ready. They could go on like this for hours but they stop because Swami says so." Little do they know of Swami's motherly pride and affection that is behind that innocent question. On other occasions when there is a line up of singers and performers of the highest calibre waiting to perform for Him, that question is a gentle way of

ensuring that all get a chance to present their devotion without getting "hurt" in the human way that they did not get the chance to offer all their wares!

The qawwali begins.....

"Oh Lord! Delhi is waiting for you"

The last song was the adaptation of the bhajan, "Aana Hi Padega" which the youth sang inviting Swami to Delhi. At the end of it Swami blessed the youth with *abhayahasta*. He called all the singers and materialized Vibhuti for them. Then He asked for white safari pieces to be presented to all the performers and later went into the interview room. When He returned after a short while, He had *sarees* for all the ladies who had also been sitting as a group. To their great joy, Swami asked them too to sing. They sang a few bhajans after which Swami asked, "Mana Pillalu Ekkada? (Where are our children?)" The students came out in a flood and then began a unique bhajan session with the traditional *Aalaaps* being sung before the bhajans. After four bhajans, Swami received *Aarthi*, blessed *prasadam* to be given to all and retired for the day.

January 31, 2008 – "Bhaktha Meera" by Higher Secondary School Boys

On January 30, Swami surprised the students of the 11th class of the Higher Secondary School when He entered

the Bhajan Hall and asked, "Where is the Meerabai drama?" The students had prepared the drama and had asked Swami for an opportunity to present it before Him the previous day. And then all the drama boys had gone rushing into the Hall and the Kind Lord blessed them all with His divine words and *Paadanamaskar*. So, as per His wish, the students had come prepared with the drama on January 31 and the stage had been set.

Swami arrives at the actors' "assembly point"

The "Krishnas"and "Meeras" are scrutinised...

Swami came out for Darshan at about 5:00 pm. He completed the rounds and went into the Bhajan Hall after alighting near the interview room. All the students

received Him in all eagerness and Swami immediately began interacting with them. He even checked the costumes of the 'Krishnas' and 'Meeras' (There were more than one Krishna and Meera – one little and one older of each character). Looking at one richly dressed boy on His left, He asked, "Who are you?" "Swami, I am a king," he said and stood up in a very regal and majestic manner. Seeing that, Swami smiled and the boy too bowed down from his royal gait and smiled folding his hands. Swami then remarked that Lord Krishna had been made a little too dark and asked for the make-up boys.

All the costume department boys and teachers came forward and the question turned out to be an excuse to shower His Blessings on all of them. Swami made it a point to ask almost every boy in costume what his role in the drama was. Each one introduced himself - 'Akbar', 'Tansen', 'Rajguru', 'Meerabai's maids' and 'saints who influence Meerabai' and so on. Seeing 'Akbar's daughter' standing at a distance, Swami enquired who 'she' was. 'She' came front and Swami called out, "Aye Akbar! This is your daughter. Take good care of her, else bad friends will spoil her!" Everybody broke into laughter. In this manner, He spoke to almost all the characters and blessing them all, He enquired about the duration of the drama. They replied, "Swami, 50 minutes." Swami then came to the stage from the Bhajan Hall.

The sets for the drama had been arranged and they looked grand. Swami waited for all the children to get ready and then the drama began. It started with a troupe of performers arriving to the king's court with the desire to perform a play on the great devotees of Krishna, Meerabai in particular. The story depiction begins with

Special concern for His "lady" devotees!

"Akbar, take care of your daugter"

little Meera being gifted with the idol of her darling Lord Krishna. She spends a happy childhood playing with the idol and always feels the presence of the Lord in her life. Soon she is married into the Sisodiya family. There her worship to Lord Krishna is not taken favourably as they feel that the traditional deity, Durga Maa, is being slighted. But for Meera, Krishna is the very life breath. Meanwhile, the great singer Tansen, cures Emperor Akbar's daughter of a very serious disease through the sheer power of his music which wins the Lord's favour.

Meera meets the Love of her life...

...then begins the divine romance

Meera spurns the concept of animal sacrifices

Akbar's daughter healed by prayer alone

But he tells Akbar that there is a voice that is divine as it sings only for the Emperor of the Universe. He takes the emperor in secret to the temple where Meera is worshipping Krishna.

Witnessing the Divine Love that Meera had for Krishna and hearing her singing while dancing, Akbar is lost in divine fervour. He gifts Meera a pearl necklace in the name of Krishna which she accepts and puts around the idol of her beloved. This act is espied upon and the complaints to the emperor about Meera are on the rise. He orders

They are not recognised in their plain clothes

poison to be given to Meera and it turns into nectar. The crowning moment of the drama, was preceded by a song which literally struck a chord in everyone's heart and filled the entire hall with feelings of intense longing for the Lord. As the song, "Darshan Deejo Aavo Pyaare" began, Meera opened up her heart to the Lord. Swami too at this point was very engrossed in the song and the feelings. The boy who was delivering Meera's voice too seemed overcome with emotion as his voice began to choke. Everyone including Swami seemed to be identifying with Meera's pangs of separation from Krishna. Swami was very touched as the song concluded with the appearance of Lord Krishna. A huge applause of joy and celebration erupted all around the hall. The drama ended with the famous Dandiya Raas (dance) of Krishna with Meera offering herself completely at his feet. Swami immediately called Meera to come up the stage and materialized a beautiful gold chain with a pendant for 'her'. The Lord accepted His devotee when she gave herself up entirely to Him.

Akbar and Tansen enraptured by Meera's devotion

Poison offered as Charanamrit...

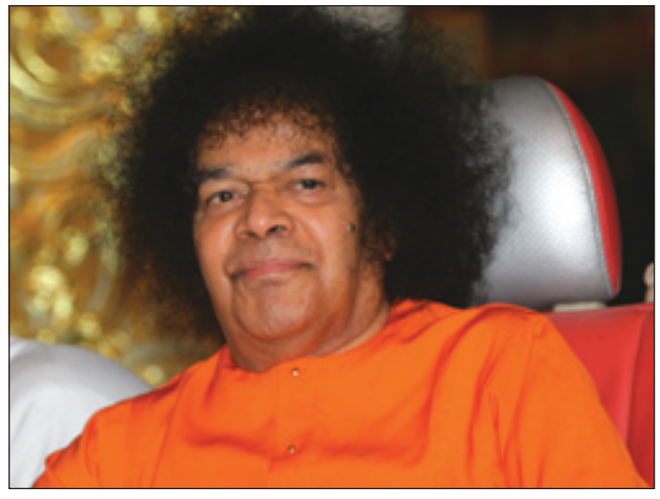
Final salvation at The Feet

What followed next was the Lord giving Himself entirely to His children. Swami posed for photos with the boys in small groups of 5-6. Blessing all the boys with *prasadam* and *Abhayahasta*, Swami received *Aarthi* and left.

February 9-10, 2008 – Adilabad Parthi Yatra

"We come from a remote place. We have never seen such glory, or grandeur, and more importantly, we have never seen a living GOD…we have never experienced such love before," expressed those group of devotees. There was innocence in their expression, honesty in their eyes, and simplicity in their appearance. They belonged to a very remote village bordering Maharastra in the district of Adilabad, Andhra Pradesh. On the eve of November 23, these villagers had performed a special milk *abhishekam* to the Shiva lingam of their temple which was later distributed as *theertham* (consecrated liquid). But the quantity was insufficient and many could not receive the holy *theertham*. However, they accepted it as the will of their Sai Shiva and the temple was locked for the night. In celebration of their beloved Sai's Birthday, the whole village gathered around the temple in the wee hours of November 23. As the temple doors were opened, the whole village stood shocked. There were two pots full of *theertham* right in front of the lingam – It was Sai's Birthday gift to His devotees! The same night the whole village was soaked in complete darkness as there was an unusual power cut. Then suddenly they found the 'Sai *Kalashams*' (sacred containers) installed in all the houses emitting a soothing glow. As part of district wide 'Satya Sai Vrata' programme, many devotees offered a single rice grain into those *kalashams* (containers) while chanting each of the 108 names of Sai for 82 days. They had never witnessed anything of this sort before. They felt blessed; they were proud for they felt that they have been chosen by 'God' to witness His power. As they came to Puttaparthi they realized that the 'strange things' of their village were appallingly insignificant when compared to the Love of their living God.

They were part of 2500 devotees from Adilabad district who had come to Puttaparthi to catch a glimpse of their Beloved Swami. The Adilabad group consisted of individuals of different ages and belonging to varied economic classes, yet they were united by the single desire of experiencing the Love of their God. They had traveled in 35 buses to reach Puttaparthi on February 9. They had prayed for more than a year to see this day materialize. Some had visited around 600 remote villages of the district and served the needy villagers, others did "Vratam" for 82 long days, some circumambulated 108 times for two months around Sai temples, yet another group organised special spiritual sessions in all the towns of the district, and some others simply pined….. but all of them yearned to be admitted on to the soil of Puttaparthi on that day.



"…more importantly, we have never seen a living GOD…"

On the afternoon of February 9, as Swami sat in the hall for the music program of these devotees, someone from the group expressed, "Swami we have come not to seek favors from You. We have come to experience the bliss of Your Darshan and carry back Your Form in our hearts. Swami, all that we seek is You and Your love alone." Swami in response lovingly called the young District President and said, "I am coming to Adilabad within a year." This was followed by the devotees of Adilabad offering their feelings in the form of songs; amongst them was also a blind singer. He said, "Like the

rest, I may not be able to see the beautiful form of Sai, but through my music I shall experience His touch." And then he sang. It was a ceaseless flow of melody. Good melody might elicit appreciation from Swami, but the feeling behind the melody draws response from Him. As his songs came to an end, a visibly touched Swami called the District President and said, "I will felicitate this singer tomorrow." As the program came to a conclusion Swami asked for the "Ghatam" player and materialized a beautiful chain for him.

Cannot say who is happier of the two!

A chain for the ghatam player!

On the morning of February 10, Swami had permitted the devotees to sing bhajans in Mandir. In the evening, they offered a drama entitled 'Sri Sai Vaibhavam'. Everyone sat in readiness for Swami to arrive. Swami came at about 5:05 pm in the car. A thrill seemed to course through the crowd and they expressed it by clapping out loud. Swami took His seat towards the ladies side of the stage and then began the initial formalities.

To a viewer who always sits and sees the programmes as they happen, the initial rose offerings and card showing may seem like "formalities". But these are opportunities of a lifetime for the people concerned. In that short moment, every time, more than just a rose or card is exchanged! What goes on there is best understood by a heart that has longed for God and received His never failing Grace when that longing intensifies. The devotees came forward and received His blessings. The main actors of the drama about to be staged also came forward and made their offerings. A special silver lamp was brought forward and Swami lit it to mark the auspicious beginning of the programme.

The drama director with The Director

The card is presented

The drama began with the entry of King Krishnadevaraya into his court with his nine gems - poets and musicians of great acclaim. They begin a discussion on how their kingdom is blessed as God has chosen to be born there. The discussion that prevailed in Telugu was so full of alluding alliterations, funny puns and rich poetry that even those with a faint acquaintance of Telugu were able to enjoy the musical flow and the sounds of the language. Many of Swami's rich Telugu poetic compositions were presented as the King kept throwing one challenge after another at the poets.

For instance, when the king asks a poet to compose a poem with four words that rhyme but have no apparent connection, the poet comes up with a thought provoking poem about the human body which is a repository of

Telugu flow at its best

Welcome to all the poets

One of the colourful dances that lit up the evening

diseases. Having such an ephemeral body, foolish man, why do you not seek the permanent and ever blissful Lord? When the question as to what can be offered to the Lord comes up, the answer is that we are incapable of giving anything to the Lord who has in fact given everything to us. The best we can do is to offer the Love that we have been gifted by Him in our hearts back to Him. Some of the poems were a sheer connoisseur's delight as they were entirely composed of single letters - "ka" and "la"! While it was the sheer brilliance of poetry for the ones with knowledge of pristine pure Telugu, it was musical for all the others! Everyone enjoyed it all the same. There was also the famous, "Ye Aav Ra Ba Va" by Tenali Ramakrishna which is a statement containing the same meaning word from five languages and yet making complete sense as a sentence on its own too! As Swami narrates it, it literally means, "Which cow brother-in-law?" But broken further, 'Ye' in Marathi, 'Aav' in Hindi, 'Ra' in Telugu, 'Ba' in Kannada and 'Va' in Tamil - all mean "come"! The king himself, not to be left behind, conjured poetic magic with the poems he recited.

The grand finale came as all the courtiers jointly sang the glories of Swami and then the king felt sad that he is unable to be with the Lord who is gracing his own land. At that time, the Shiva lingam in the royal court hall turns and in it is Swami - come to grant darshan for the pining king! The entire drama had been tastefully laced with songs apt for the topics being discussed and these in turn had been well tuned for dances. The dances and songs took place as though in the royal assembly hall itself. Throughout the drama, Swami seemed so involved that every time a thumping statement was made, He would nod vehemently, and each time an emotion coursed through the king or the courtiers, it seemed to pass through Him too. As the drama concluded, Swami called the boy, who acted as the King Krishnadevaraya,

Krishnadevaraya regales everyone with his poetry

The popular Shivatandavam dance

Krishnadevaraya is blessed with a chain!

Swami on the special *Jhoola* (swing)

to come forward and created for him a chain with a beautiful Shirdi Sai Baba pendant on it. He put it around his neck even as the final dance sequence was on.

As the first programme, an offering of Love by the devotees unto their Lord, concluded, the second programme - the shower of Love by the Lord – began! Swami sat tapping His Hands rhythmically for the concluding song, and as that concluded, He smilingly blessed all of them. Then they brought a *jhoola* (swing) on which they invited Swami to sit. Swami agreed and went down the stage. He posed for pictures with all of them, and then it happened - a dam seemed to burst somewhere and there was a flood of tears all around. The children were crying profusely calling out, "Swami ... Swami..." It was such a spontaneous outburst and it built up in momentum and volume. Swami was looking all around and the Mother amidst hundreds of Her children was trying to tell everyone why they must not cry. He wiped the tears of some of the children and He too shed tears along with them. The scene was most touching and it reminded one of what happens in life. All of us cry for various things, but when we cry for Swami, He is there to wipe our tears and share in our sorrows and joys alike.

Swami then got up from the chair and walking up to the *jhoola* (swing), sat on it. He was beaming smiles drinking deep of the devotion of all His children from Adilabad. Almost every member of the troupe took the opportunity of *Paadanamaskar*. After about ten minutes with all of them, Swami returned to the stage.

It was about 7:20 pm and everybody thought that surely He would now receive *aarthi*. But the Lord asked for His mike to be brought! The next ten minutes were a shower of pure Grace and Love as Swami directly addressed the devotees without any translation. He said that He was very happy with the programme that Adilabad devotees

The Vishwaroopa with Swami in the centre

Swami is so happy that He decides to address the devotees

had put up. The acting and dialogue delivery were all from the heart and that King Krishnadevaraya acted very well. Swami had never seen such a performance in Prashanti Nilayam ever before. Such dramas must be encouraged and be shown to people everywhere. Swami's heart had been won and the devotees have given immense joy to Swami, He said.

Any praise or appreciation anyone would have wanted to shower became totally superfluous as Swami literally sang the glory of their devotion and happiness. He concluded by saying that one must never give up singing bhajans, for that alone is the thing that confers joy. He sang, "Hari bhajana bina…" which everyone followed enthusiastically. As this concluded, Swami asked them to continue singing bhajans. Then were brought *sarees* and white safari pieces! And the white cloth pieces were in two sizes to cater to the elders and the children. As the bhajans went on, Swami called each one and gifted personally the *sarees* and safari pieces along with the prized *padanamaskar*.

Sarees for the girls...

...and white cloth pieces for the boys

The combination of talent and humility is the most potent one to win the Lord's heart. The drama had demonstrated both these virtues in abundant measure and Swami visibly was extremely pleased with the effort. He stayed till 8:05 pm blessing all the participants! He then received *aarthi* and left, leaving everyone with joy and devotion lingering in their beings.

February 12, 2008 – Chants by Buddhist Monks

A bedecked Sai Kulwant hall awaited Swami's arrival in the afternoon on February 12 as the entire marble block was filled up by Buddhist monks, who have now made it an annual ritual to visit Puttaparthi at the beginning of their new year to pray in the Divine Presence. On either side, the Buddhist devotees wore their most colourful dresses to appear as a splash of rich colour to their dear Lord.

The Buddhist monks assemble for the chants

It is red decorations everywhere!

Swami came out for Darshan at about 5:25 pm. He went for a complete round in the car and as He passed by the marble blocks, His entire attention seemed to be on the monks. He then alighted from the Car, came straight onto the stage, and asked for the chanting to begin. A girl and a lad stood up with mikes in their hands. They sported huge smiles, delighted at this opportunity to speak in front of Swami and Swami too reciprocated with smiles. The Vedic chants ceased to give way to 'sister

Offering of silk scarves at His Lotus Feet

Getting the token talismans blessed

chants' that were about to begin. Before that, however, a plethora of traditional items were taken to Swami for His blessings. He blessed each and every one of the items with utmost joy and beautiful smiles.

Then the children started the compeering. They explained the importance of each traditional and sacred item and revealed the significance of the chants that would be chanted. The medicine Buddha Mantra was a prayer to Swami to heal Himself. Swami sat with a charming smile

The "Medicine Buddha" mantra is chanted

Next is The White Tara mantra

that seemed to say, "I am perfectly fine! But, you pray as your heart desires and I shall respond!" The chanting was accompanied by Tibetan trumpets, drums and cymbals. The deep throated chants cast a kind of different mood in a place that has been the recipient of high pitched Vedic chants over the years. There was also the chanting of the "White Tara Mantra". The Buddhist hymns went on and at some critical junctures, jasmine flowers were thrown up in the air and bells rang out adding rhythm to the procedure. The specially composed, "Bhagavan Baba Eternal Mantra" was also chanted.

The traditional "prayer wheel"

...and the special bell

In between, the two young comperes explained the general purport and import of the proceedings being carried out. Towards the end, the monks got baskets full of talismans blessed by Swami, after which they went about distributing them to everyone assembled. Swami also blessed the *prasadam* specially packed for

Prayer and worship to Swami....

...for Swami's health!

the occasion to be distributed to all. He was all smiles and blessings towards the monks, especially towards the lad who was anchoring the proceedings.

After that, Swami received *arthi* and as He left for the car, He conferred the Divine *Abhayahastha* on all. Then He retired for the evening.

February 13, 2008 - Chinese New Year Day

The whole of Prasanthi Nilayam seemed to have donned red vestures. The devotees from Indonesia, China and Malaysia had all gathered to celebrate the holy Chinese New Year in Swami's Physical Presence on February 13. The preparations had been made on a grand scale. A colourful and cheerful procession had been arranged to lead Swami from His Residence to the Sai Kulwant Hall. A beautiful and ornate altar with Buddha had been made on the stage to mark the occasion.

The minute Swami came out of Yajur Mandir, there was an explosion almost! Oriental trumpet blasts and Chinese drum bongs reverberated in the whole hall as two stately lions sprang up majestically forming the pilot of the welcome procession for the Lord. Lamps and the devotees' hearts alike lit up. Very soon a thrill of joy and surge of devotion coursed through the whole assembly as it came to be known that Swami was coming on the chair. One could not have hoped to welcome the New Year in a better fashion. Swami seemed to continue exactly where He had left off yesterday! He was beaming and the His smiles were spread all around. As He completed the ladies side and moved on to the gents' side, the welcoming procession with the lions reached the central marble block.

Swami went around the densely packed gents' side and as necks craned to catch a glimpse of Him, His Right Hand went up frequently in benediction to all. Taking a round of the portico, Swami came onto the stage and lit the candles to be placed in the specially decorated altar. Sitting on the ladies side of the stage, He asked for the programme to begin. The Veda chanting ceased and the drum beating reached a new crescendo. The lions came up front and displayed the famous acrobatics of

With Love from China!

The leaping lions' offering of Love

The lamp for the Buddha altar is lit

the renowned lion dance. They ended with a stretched out standing salute to Swami and were accorded a huge round of applause. A whole lot of traditional items were presented to Swami and He very smilingly blessed each one. The first item of the evening was a performance by a lady on a very ancient Chinese traditional instrument. She came up to Swami and offered a rose with her salutations, and then she began. The instrument was very rich and filling all by itself. The melody seemed to transport everyone into some ancient Chinese empire -

The modern instrumentalist on an ancient instrument

say to the decked corridors of the Ming dynasty! The sight to behold was also rich and colourful. Swami sat – as an Emperor on His Throne - and all around, the tapestry, lamps and festoons built up a vibrant atmosphere.

During the last Chinese New Year, Swami had asked, "Where are the Chinese?" The truth was that though Malaysian and Indonesian Buddhists had gathered, devotees from mainland China were few. So the announcer said and proclaimed, "Now we have an original Chinese quintet performing for us." The five of them offered their salutations to Swami and then began playing on the instruments, which looked like modifications of the violin. There was a Xylophone like instrument and the tambourine. They played popular Sanskrit and Chinese bhajans and received Swami's and the crowd's appreciation.

The final and major programme of the evening was a drama depicting the ancient values of the Chinese

Blessings to begin the programme...

The performers offer their salutations to Swami

The Chinese quintet performs

culture. But before that, there was a short talk by Mr. Billy Fong, President of the Sathya Sai Baba Central Council of Malaysia, which highlighted all the service activities that were being undertaken in the respective Sai Samithis of the different regions. Commendable service had been rendered in village service, education and health. A PowerPoint presentation was also made depicting the various facets of the above mentioned service activities. At the end of the speech, a book was brought up to Swami and Swami most lovingly and graciously signed it! After that, a drama entitled, The Eyelids Protect the Eye' commenced.

The drama, depicted the true story of Tan Ah Lek, a Malaysian devotee of Bhagawan Baba who embodied the values of courage, love and filial piety towards his mother and firm faith and love for God. Even as a child, Ah Lek lost his father and his mother brought him up according to the ancient Chinese traditions and instilled in him many values by narrating inspiring stories of great persons of Chinese heritage. The drama beautifully portrayed three such stories as flashbacks.

One day, Ah Lek's mother is injured when the gas tank in their house bursts in to flames. Upon hearing his mother's cries for help, Ah Lek rushes to the kitchen and rescues his mother, but in the process, sustains fatal burns. After a few days, Ah Lek's mother recovers, but Ah Lek is still in a critical condition in the hospital. This news soon spreads all over the country and all the Sai devotees come together to pray fervently to their Lord Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba for succor. And by

Always there for his mother....

"Mother is the form of God, verily."

Bhagawan's miraculous intervention, Ah Lek recovers and lives to tell this moving story of how Bhagawan protected him and granted him a new lease of life.

As the drama concluded with a grand flood of colours and clothes, Swami seemed very happy. The final formation was so full of energy and enthusiasm. It looked marvelous and out of this world. Swami came down the stage and went directly to the actors. He saw the boy who had almost sacrificed his life for his mother, waved His hand

Swami wades into the grand flood of colours

Blessings galore for all present

and materialised a chain for him. Soon afterwards, He materialized another chain for another "ideal son" of the drama. He also spoke to many of them and blessed them. He moved through the entire group and they were all so thrilled and happy. They began chanting, "We love you Baba! We love you Baba!" Swami smilingly looked at them and kept telling, "I love you too!" The Truth of the statement that God is a pure mirror who just reflects our feelings was easily understood by all those who witnessed this loving spectacle. He granted group photos and almost everyone had the chance to touch His feet. He went back on stage and then blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed to all. He, then, asked for bhajans and needless to say, the volume and tempo of the bhajans sung were sky high. Swami kept rhythm tapping His hands. After 15 minutes of sheer enthusiastic ecstasy, Swami received *aarthi*, blessed all with *Abhayahastha* and retired for the day.

February 24, 2008 – Gratitude Offering by Brindavan Boys

The 3rd year Undergraduate students from the Brindavan campus of the Institute had arrived to Puttaparthi in keeping with a very noble and holy tradition - the Gratitude programme. Studying in Swami's college is such a boon and the blessings that shower upon the students is in such abundance that when it is time to step out of the University portals an overwhelming feeling fills the being of every student. As he/she nostalgically recalls the beautiful way in which Swami has been with him/her, guiding, guarding and sharing all the joys and sorrows, a smile streaks across the face and a tear courses down the cheek. The multifarious meanings and feelings carried by that single word 'Swami' become evident and the impending parting from the physical proximity of dear Bhagavan makes the heart feel as it has never felt before. The summation and external expression of all these feelings, thoughts and emotions is the Gratitude programme. The word "programme" has been used by the force of sheer habit. It is more of a personal and heartfelt conversation between the Lord and a devotee, a Mother and her child, a Guru and His dear disciple.

"The children have come...."

"The Mother has arrived!"

The students sat waiting for Swami to arrive. Swami came at about 5:15 pm and everyone sat up alert. Swami went around during Darshan and then as He came out of the car in the portico, He exchanged a few words with the warden of the Brindavan hostel. Then He came out, sat on the stage and asked for the students to begin. What took place over the next 40 minutes or so was the free flow of Love from both sides. The children just poured forth their Love and Gratitude and the Mother for once was at the receiving end! Songs of gratitude, love and remembrances filled the air as the boys sang out in unison. As they say, there are no barriers of language for Love. In fact, the different languages, like the various flowers in a bouquet, filled up the atmosphere with their own sweet scented fragrances as boys from

Speaking through Divine Eyes....

....expressions from the heart

Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Assam to Gujarat attempted to put into words the grandeur and bliss of their Love filled experience with their Swami. Feelings expressed in Hindi, English, Telugu, Tulu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Nepali, etc. were some of the flowers presented in the evening's beautiful bouquet.

There was a particular popular song which said, "Whatever the child ever feels, oh mother, you know it even before that feeling has been felt." The boy sang

Feelings and emotions pour out ceaselessly

it out soulfully and everyone watched this unfolding of Love with smiles of admiration. Stories of how Swami filled those desolate lonely hours with joy and mirth; of how He stood by His children in the most challenging of times; of how, though He was physically far away, He cherished them in His heart; and of how they felt Him with them every time they needed Him, were narrated with great love. Some of the students had lost their parents early in life and Swami had filled that void with His Love and Grace. There were also portions where the students celebrated the Truth that Swami was always there for them. There was a depiction from the Ramayana adding physical colour to an emotionally colourful evening.

It is, indeed, a very difficult task to capture what exactly happened in "programmes" such as these because many times, nay most of the times, it is a conversation between Swami and the child. The evening ended on a note of pangs of separation from the Lord as the students prayed to Swami to come to Brindavan. So strong was

The demon Vibheeshana is accepted by Rama

The dance of gaiety and celebration

A soulful prayer to The Lord

the pining and desperate the pangs of separation that Swami's eyes seemed to well up with tears. He said, "I will come. I will definitely come. I am also waiting to come." Banners in Telugu and English opened up. To the boy who so soulfully and poetically had expressed the drought in Brindavan due to Swami's physical absence, Swami materialized a beautiful gold chain.

He called out for Rama and Lakshmana and holding their hands, walked down the stage and then posed for what we may call 'family photographs'. He received letters by the dozen and almost every boy got a chance to take *padanamaskar*. Swami went on stage and again posed for photos with small groups of boys. As *Prasadam*, *laddoos* were brought, Swami personally distributed the sweet to each boy. Those *laddoos* must have been the sweetest for they were dripping with His Love and were gifted with His smile! Swami then gave the same to all the teachers from Brindavan who had accompanied the boys to Puttaparthi. After saturating all hearts with joy and bliss divine, Swami received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

– Heart2Heart Team

Dear reader, do you like this section? Does it help you? What improvements do you suggest to make it more informative and inspiring for you? Please tells us at h2h@radiosai.org.

The boy who was "chained" by Swami's love!

The "Family Photograph"

HOW THE BEATIFIC SAI BEWITCHED ME - PART 2

Interview with Dr. Jayalakshmi Gopinath

(Continued from previous issue)

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

Dr. Rajeshwari Patel (RP): Madam, did Swami ever reveal to you during this interview or at any other time, that He is an Incarnation of Shirdi Baba?

"I am the Vedas!" That was a resonant echo throughout the walls of Prashanthi Nilayam.

"I am the Scriptures. I am God. Take this opportunity. If you can understand what I am, well make best your chances here. Do not carp, criticize and lose this opportunity."

Jayamma: I could take this back to about 1954. In the New Mandir, Baba then was not giving public speeches. He would call people in small circles and just give them the special jewels of spiritual truths. And I would be one amongst them in that crowd.

There was one Brahmin elderly lady whose husband was a famous scientist. She started believing in Baba so much and we could see that transparent love she had for Swami. They came to Puttaparthi and at that time there were no rooms in the New Mandir also. Devotees had to get bamboo *thattis*, that is, bamboo strands made into a sort of slim wall, which could be used to make temporary shelters. Many people would help making this. That is how we used to construct places to stay in those days. There was nothing whatsoever, except the plain Mandir.

The Brahmin lady was very orthodox. And people were making fun of her. But she loved Swami a lot. She used to cook everyday and would be very fond of giving whatever she cooked to Swami. And she would do this observing *madi Acharam*, that is, strict rituals.

Swami resided on the right side of the Mandir. Only some people who were given permission could take the food up and His sisters would serve Him. After the lady cooked the food, she would walk up the steps and place it for His sisters to serve it to Him.

Swami played with her. He endearingly would come near her. He would put out His feet and say "Chesko" (offer salutations). She would say, "Ledhu Swami (no Swami)." She wouldn't touch Swami's Feet because of the *Madi Acharam*. Swami would laugh and indulge her! People thought: "How silly she is! Imagine not touching Swami's Feet? Could there be greater blasphemy?" She never bothered. She just observed her rituals most sincerely.

In the morning we had bhajans those days. Some of us would sit in the front and to my utter discomfiture, sometimes, Swami would make me sing. One day, this incident happened. It was Ekadashi. The Brahmin lady would fast the whole day and not take a drop of water. Observing "Madi" (ritualistic procedure), she sat apart.

Swami came and saw this lady sitting at a distance from others. He told the devotees, "Make place for her!" Though people were, sort of, mocking at her and belittling her as being extremely foolish, this is what Swami did! He is *Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi, Prema*! He

is an Embodiment of all these. How true He is! He told them, "Make way for her." He asked her to come forward and sit near His Throne on the ladies side.

The First Divine Declaration: "I am God"

And then, He continued, "Janakamma (the Brahmin lady's name), on Ekadashi Day, in the evenings, what were you doing earlier?" Then she said, "Swami, on Ekadashi day, I would go to the temples and there would be *Puranas* (scriptures) being narrated by some Pundits; I would go there and listen to it and return home once it is over."

"You don't eat anything on Ekadashi Day?" Swami asked. "No Swami." "Not even a drop of water?" "No Swami." "Alright," He said. "Today, I will tell you a *Purana*!"

That was the first time He was speaking to a large crowd. The table was brought and a mike was kept. He thumped the table, "I am the Vedas!" That was a resonant echo throughout the walls of Prashanthi Nilayam.

"I am the Scriptures. I am God. Take this opportunity. If you can understand what I am, well make best your chances here. Do not carp, criticize and lose this opportunity." He said it in such a solemn Voice.

Of course, we knew it within ourselves. But Baba had not declared it in public till that day. I can't forget it even today. "I am God Himself" that was another declaration!

RP: It was not at all a common feature at that time.

Jayamma: No, this was the first time He was speaking to a large crowd and He made the thumping declaration. If you and I stand on a platform, and say "I am the scriptures, I am the Vedas", we will be pelted with stones.

We were all dumbfounded and spellbound. We sat there looking at Him, not with full understanding of what He was, but absolutely stupefied of the tremendous Divinity that was there in front of us. We couldn't believe it!

Future Untold

RP: Did He reveal to you all about the future of what you are witnessing unfolding before you? I have heard that Swami used to tell the old devotees about events that are actually happening today.

He would say, "Seize this golden opportunity. A time will come when huge crowds will come to Prashanthi Nilayam and you will not have access to Me!"

"And still, more and more as time passes, you can only see the heads of humanity - you can hardly see Me! You may just be able to see a little of My Hair." And then He said "Still as time passes on, I may have to fly in the sky to give you all Darshan."

Jayamma: Yes, He has told us, sometimes, jocularly; sometimes seriously.

He would say, "Seize this golden opportunity. A time will come when huge crowds will come to Prashanthi Nilayam and you will not have access to Me!"

"And still, more and more as time passes, you can only see the heads of humanity - you can hardly see Me! You may just be able to see a little of My Hair." And then He said "Still as time passes on, I may have to fly in the sky to give you all Darshan."

Bala Gopala: The Divine with His Mother

RP: What are some of your memories of Mother Easwaramma and her relationship with her Divine Son?

Jayamma: I had a very close relationship with her; I am fortunate for the bond that I had with her. I consider it a Divine Blessing. Swami had given her a room in Prashanthi Nilayam and she was the only one, not even His Father, who could just walk up to Swami's room at any time. He would indulge her; it was so wonderful to see it.

Swami was always very troublesome as regards eating. He was such a poor eater. So, sometimes the sisters, whenever Swami would let them, would cook and bring it from the village.

The Divine's Parents

Swami would simply dodge them. He would not eat the food that was served! He would not come and sit at the plate. And even if He came and sat for a few seconds, He would eat so little, push this aside and that to another side, and sometimes, when the sisters got tired of coaxing Him, they would bring His Mother.

The Mother would say, "*Swami, Thinnu Swami. Enthuku Swami neevu thinnavu?*" She would cajole Him so sweetly for not eating, with all her Motherly Love and then He would eat a little.

Swami would go on indulging her. He would get lovely sarees and then all of them would be spread in the room. He would invite her and say "*Ra, emi kavali theesko* (Come, take whatever you want)." She could take whatever she liked. He would get her some jewels also. He would do everything to make her very happy.

In my opinion, Divinity was indebted to the Mother for giving Him this Divine Body. He has said, "My Life is My Message". Maybe, He was teaching us to revere our mothers in the same way.

Humble and Loving Father

Jayamma: He revered His Father also. The Father was a wonderful person, and I knew him. And of course, he could speak Telugu, but no other language. He had a provisions shop and he would diligently supply to the devotees the coconut and other *puja* items. Though my father didn't know much of Telugu, he took to him very much; somehow they used to communicate.

When we touched his feet, with such humility he would say, "Why do you touch my feet?" "You are the Father of the Avatar," we would reply. Then he used to say, "I do not know. He is great. He is for everybody. He is no more my son." This is the way he would speak, like a very simple person.

Celebrating the Divine

RP: You must have been present during the anointing ceremony. Can you share with us the experience?

The Annointing Ceremony

Jayamma: Yes, I have had a chance to celebrate Bhagavan on His Birthdays by anointing Him. In the past, on the birthday, we used to gather in the Old Mandir. It was a tradition where some elderly *sumangali* devotees (married couples) would come with plates of *kumkum* (vermillion), *haldi* (turmeric), flowers, fruits and clothes for the parents and go with a silver container which we call in Kannada *Chombu*.

The Mother would draw the water from the well and arrange the *Poorna Kumbha* (sacred coconut on a sacred vessel filled with water). In the procession, after the Mother and the Father, the elder brother and his wife would follow, and then would be the two sisters. After that came Janakiramaiah (Swami's younger brother) who was still a young bachelor. This was the hierarchical procession. They would have to be brought by the devotees with reverence along with the village band and the *nadaswaram* (music).

They would be ushered in to the auditorium. First, of course, would be the *Nadaswaram* and the band, followed by the lady devotees carrying plates of all sacred things and holy items. Behind them, Swami's Family would come and He would be sitting on the dais.

And at that time all of us could garland Him. All the devotees would be waiting with garlands in their hands. First the Mother would get onto the steps of the dais, along with the Father. There would be one elderly *sumangali* (married lady), holding a silver vessel of oil which had been boiled with various types of perfumed herbs. It was a sight to see!

Swami would bend down His head from the throne. First the Mother would take a flower, dip it in the oil and thrice she would place it on His head. Some devotees also could go and do this. My parents were called to do so as well. I had a longing to do it, but I didn't have the courage. But He called me "*Ra* (come)" and gave me a chance to anoint Him.

And the devotees one by one would go and garland Him, and each time He would remove the garland and throw it to the side.

He Makes Us Laugh

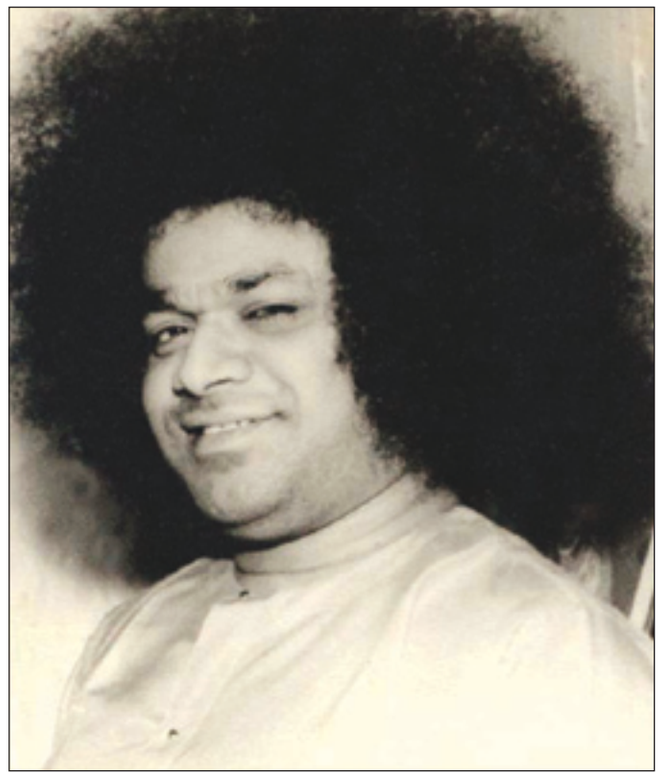
RP: I know from my contacts with you that you have a very fine sense of humour. Could you tell us some amusing incidents from your interactions with Bhagavan, His love for humour?

Jayamma: My father had a wonderful sense of humour, which we inherited. Bhagavan has a very fine and tremendous sense of humour. Let me share with you an amusing incident!

This is something that happened at home. In those days, in the early 1950s, Swami would come and stay with us when He came to Bangalore. We had a cook, a lady who was very good. She would cook the food with some help from mother. Swami used to eat it with so much of love, whether He liked it or not, we do not know.

She was a Brahmin widow. She came to us when she was 60 years old. Her situation was none too pleasant. Her hair was shaven off and she had to wear a red nine yards saree without a blouse. This was the custom and it was belittling to her.

As soon as she saw Swami, all the privations she had suffered in her life – humiliation and frustration - just melted and she sobbed. Swami consoled her. When He came, He would go to her and would talk to her. And she would, sort of, have these dry sobs. He said, "*Emi Neelu Leni tankilo?* (What happened? Is there no water in the tank?)", because she had dry sobs. Everyone laughed!



Challenges and Solutions

RP: Coming from a traditional background, did you have challenges when your family came to accept Swami. How did you overcome them?

Jayamma: As a child, being brought up by parents who are pious and religious, we listened to many stories of the Gods. Our own mutt Guru, would come for *Bhiksha* (alms), we would host them and they would do the *puja*, in a lovely aesthetic way, though ritualistic. From childhood to adolescence, this had seeped into me. Mother would get up early, light the lamp, make the *puja* ready for father who would do all that was required.

My father had a mind and a heart of gold. I remember him with so much love and gratitude. It was firmly registered in our minds, that God is a Supreme One. Everything goes on according to His Will.

When we came to Sai Baba, there were very die-hard opinions which got challenged from within our family. The question came from my uncles. "Can a Brahmin go

to somebody who is of a different caste and where such Brahminic rituals and rites are not performed? How can they go and worship Him?" My father had eight brothers. Ours was not very rigid, but it was a truly brahminical house. So that was the question asked of my father. And father of course, did not bother about it.

Once, our *mutt jeer* (head of the mutt) sent word through the *diwans* (emissaries) to see if the house is comfortable. Typically they come with a lot of entourage (many disciples). The house should have everything, including a well. At that time, in our sitting room, we had a big photo of Bhagavan Baba.

The diwan came, and he saw this large photograph of Bhagavan in the hall. In the hall they needed the place to keep a huge golden Mandir like object which had wonderful decoration. The hall was needed for the hosting.

He looked at the photograph and said in Kannada "*Rayare, Ee photo yarudu?* "Sir, whose photo is this?" My father said, "It is the photo of Sri Sathya Sai Baba."

"*Rayare, Swamigalu barthare, idhanu thegithubedi*" meaning, "Swamiji is coming, remove it." Father said, "*Nimigi yake adhu. Aa tharuvalla neevu nanna kelabarudhu – Nodu kolli* (Don't ask me these unnecessary questions)." He returned quietly.

The Swamiji came. He had to perforce keep the photo right under Bhagavan's picture and made a lovely *puja* with much devotion and in the *Madhwa* way where they keep a *Jhoola* (swing) for God. Then they sing these songs, which are very enchanting. They tie the bells around their legs for boy disciples and keep the thal in their hands, they jump in ecstasy and sing. It is a very wonderful sight.

After a number of days, before he was about to leave, he called my father closer to have a personal word with him. I was there then, my mother was busy elsewhere. As soon as father went near him, he continued, "You are the son of Bedi Srinivasa Rao, a staunch Brahmin of the *Madhwa* cult. How is it you are going to a *Dhaithya?*" (*Dhaithya* meant a demonic individual). My father listened to him and then asked him a question. "Swamiji, could you tell me to what caste Sri Rama belonged? To which caste did Lord Krishna belong? And who was Sabari who offered to Sri Rama the fruits she had tasted? Can you give me answers to these?"

"You are talking too much," the Swamiji said.

My father replied, "Alright, you are the head of the mutt. I will listen to you. But give me just one formula wherein I can distinguish a *dhaithya* from Divinity."

He was non-plussed and said, "Don't ask me unnecessary questions."

Swamiji was floored. To all of us, Bhagavan was God Incarnate. I am proud that I am the daughter of such a father!

RP: One last question. What is your message to newcomers of the Sai Fold?

Jayamma: Have faith, unswerving faith! Stop the vagaries of the mind which goes into unnecessary analysis because our minds are very limited. Stop the mind from unnecessary reasoning. Have faith; believe, accept and you shall see from day to day what bliss and happiness we derive, and how our character develops, where-in nothing bad can ever affect us. We can just crossover on to the shore of Divine Bliss.

RP: Madam, thank you very much for sharing your very rich experiences with Bhagavan. It was a privilege having you here.

Jayamma: Thank you Rajeshwari, Sai Ram.

DYNAMIC YOUTH CONFERENCE IN LUTON, UK: Sathya Sai Human Values Network Offers a Fresh Perspective

"Youth! There is nothing like youth. The middle-aged are mortgaged to Life. The old are in Life's lumber-room. But youth is the Lord of Life. Youth has a kingdom waiting for it…"

- Oscar Wilde

Every story begins with hope. This one was inspired by an event that took place a few weeks ago in a town called Luton, located approximately 30 miles north of London in the county of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom. It was a Conference of the youth, for the youth and by the youth. And the heartening aspect of this conference was that the Sathya Sai Human Values Network (SSHVN) was invited to participate and enrich the proceedings. Why was the conference held? What is SSHVN? And more importantly, how did they contribute to this community programme?

The Story Behind the Conference

The Youth Conference in Luton had a background. But first, let's get familiar with this large town of Luton in the South of England. Over many years, Luton has developed rapidly into an industrial town and has its own international airport. Its straw hat making industry dominated the town from the 19th century as did its car manufacturing industry in the 20th century. Known for its vibrant multicultural community, approximately 30% of its 186,000 people are from black and minority ethnic communities. And meeting the needs of such diverse communities has been the focus of many organisations, such as the Luton Council of Faiths (LCOF).

This voluntary body of people from different beliefs and cultures plays an active role in improving understanding and respect among the many religious and culturally diverse communities in the town. They work through educational institutes, legal and community organizations, and also support many community welfare initiatives. A recent example is 'Faith Woodlands' which

Luton, 30 miles north of London

aims to promote better societal health by engaging in activities that help to reduce social exclusion of older people, women and young people.

Three years ago, in September 2004, the town received unwarranted and downbeat media attention, thanks to a BBC News programme, which stated: "Luton voted Britain's worst town", Civic leaders immediately rallied round to defend the town. Cllr David Franks, Luton-born and bred, and leader of the Liberal Democrats at that time, indicated that one of the measures of a community's general level of happiness is how often people volunteer for community service and that Luton has a huge number of voluntary groups. Similarly, other individuals spoke out. James Ridgeon said, "I am Luton through and through…We are very multi cultural here and we spread the word of peace and happiness." Another Lutonian, Ashraf,

The clock tower of Luton town hall

asserted, "Luton is a lovely place to be. There are people from all around the world in this small humble town. Luton is so lucky to be so colourful of life."

From then on, the Luton Council of Faiths has been more active in organising activities that promote harmony and camaraderie in the community. Their most recent initiative, in December 2007, was a Youth Conference entitled "Speak Out" with the aim of giving young people the opportunity to convey their concerns, beliefs and values and how these affect their lives as citizens of Luton and the UK. And to participate in this conference, the LCOF invited the Sathya Sai Human Values Network (SSHVN).

The SSHVN (www.sshvn.org) is a non-profit making web-based international initiative, which has a programme of ongoing development of reaching out to the global community through the universal message of Human Values. The ethos of the Network is to share knowledge and enhance our understanding of human values, based on the Sathya Sai Human Values Program.

Apart from the SSHVN, there were other Organisations too who participated in "Speak Out" like the Anne Frank Trust, the Islamic Cultural Society, St Mary's Church, Connexions, Luton Police, Luton Safer Partnership and Grassroots. The objective was to enable greater understanding between the youths, their families, social workers, law enforcement officers, teachers and any systems or persons that the youths are involved in.

Presentations at Luton Town Hall

The presentations were based on four topics. The first three were **'Global and Local'** (addressing global issues and their local effects), **'Different but United'** (exploring similarities and differences among young people and empowering them), **'Inspiration and Identity'** (understanding citizenship and the sense of belonging to community). The fourth theme was **'Views and Values'**, and the presentation on this pertinent topic was done by the SSHVN Team. They sought to raise awareness of human values and highlight the importance of integrity in the daily lives of young people so that there is a consensus on shared human values. All the youth participants of the conference were required to attend all four sessions to understand and appreciate common issues arising from various related themes.

Baba says, **"The age span of 16-30 is crucial, for that is the period when life adds sweetness to itself, when talent, skills, and attitudes are accumulated, sublimated, and sanctified. If the tonic of unselfish service is administered to the mind during this period, life's mission is fulfilled – the process of sublimation and sanctification will be hastened by this tonic…"**

The SSHVN utilised this unique opportunity to convince and instil in the young minds the powerful positive effects of Human values. And they went about it in a careful and systematic way.

Putting the Pieces Together

The SSHVN Youth team

The SSHVN Team, consisting of four youth members led by Dr. Daksha Trivedi, drew up a plan for the presentation. Together, they developed a working model, coordinated by Ms Hetal Moraraji (Youth project coordinator) and the supporting team of youths (Hiten Morarji, Revashnee Naidoo, Prasanth Mistry). Their approach was approved by LCOF and then began the preparation. The message to be conveyed, they decided, should not only reflect current Government initiatives for better communities but should also have an impact on the personal lives of the youth which would provide them an impetus for integrating human values in future initiatives. After several weeks, they finally evolved an appropriate presentation model. Ms. Yasmin Akhtar, the project lead from LCOF said, "I am very encouraged and enthusiastic to know more about how Human Values will be addressed in this very important debate and how to engage the youth."

What the Youths and Trainers Say

Hetal Morarji, Youth project coordinator of the SSHVN team, says, "It's easy to talk about Love, Peace, Right Conduct, Non-violence and Truth, but the hard part is practising them in our lives. We wanted the youths to become more aware of the Human Values particularly when making important decisions about their lives. Keeping things simple would be the key. To be able to show the impact values can have on our lives we had to get back to basics..." Hiten Morarji, youth member of the team recalls, "This was quite a daunting task, trying to deliver a message of Human Values to fellow youths in a way that they can easily relate to."

Mr. Pradip Trivedi, SSHVN Trainer, says, "It is our responsibility to encourage, enable and empower the youth to take the lead in such important initiatives. They have tremendous energy…greater awareness of current thinking and attitudes towards local and national concerns. To see them blossom through challenging tasks is rewarding." And Prashant Mistry, one of the youth of the SSHVN team, reminiscing about the preparation days, says, "We had to be absolutely confident of what we were presenting so as to capture and hold the youth's attention."

The Conference and SSHVN's "Exploring Views and Values"

Young bright faces from diverse communities filled the council chambers of the Luton Town Hall on the morning of December 1, 2007. The welcome address by the LCOF Committee set the scene for 'Speak Out' which reinforced the need to listen attentively to the concerns of those that one day would become great leaders in

During the welcome address from LCOF

In the Council Chamber with some youth attendees

their own right. The conference was attended by around 80 youths who participated by rotating between the four topic sessions, so as to ensure full involvement by small focussed groups.

The SSHVN Youth team conveyed a cogent exposition of a Human Values message. The Group discussion was initiated with opening questions like "What are Values? What do we understand about Values? Whose Values? Do they have a place in our lives? What use are Human Values? etc."

And then the Pandora's Box was revealed which had all the social ills (challenges) that have beset modern youth, but at the same time leaving hope within (opportunities). The youth team brought to the fore the high prevalence of anti-social behaviour in the community and to explain it better, took the example of bullying. And they did this innovatively through a short role play. They also had a DVD which illustrated the turmoil faced by the victim in fighting back against a bully, the distress faced by his parents, and the resultant depression which led to the bully dying. This raised a debate regarding the desperation the family faced in trying to help their son and questioning the use of weapons.

To understand deeply why bullies and victims behave the way they do, a reflective process of self-audit was presented by the two youths, A and B, identifying how they felt when they were in character, the reasons for their behaviour, and ways they can change to become more content with themselves and to respect each other.

Youth Team's skit on bullying

Human Values: A Mosaic

Moral crisis is not destiny, they emphasised. The reality reflected by the worrying statistics available in the media only reinforced the need for a change amongst the attitudes of the youths. They explored the feelings of the bully and the victim who desired to change from reactive or thoughtless tendencies, to proactive or thoughtful qualities.

Key emerging issues highlighted a number of 'risk' factors which present many challenges: family crisis and dysfunction, low self worth and self esteem, violent tendencies, unhealthy environment and poor

Group discussions

Session in progress

performance. Against these, 'protective' factors such as strong family bonds, healthy standards and examples set by parents, teachers, professionals, heads of institutions and community leaders, community service, social and life skills training, and a strong sense of spiritual beliefs, provided opportunities to develop interventions through a human values approach targeted to the needs of individuals. They were awakened to the fact that values are not commodities for sale or disposal, neither are they academic subjects. These virtues were, in fact, inside everyone. Through the analogy of a 'dirty' flower, they explained, how when once the layers of anger, pain, suffering and hatred (the dirt that we have accumulated) are removed one by one, the fragrance of character can be revealed (a beautiful flower) in every individual.

Youth Participants' Views

The whole day's programme, which had impressive presentations from the other groups along with SSHVN, had a deep impact in the youth participants. One of them said, "Values make us who we are; they are something you hold close to yourself. They make us more closely connected with life, and give us our personal goals." Another expressed, "Family values are important, and these can include religious values. Bringing up children with values and knowing right from wrong is important. Values are taught by parents; they shape our culture and give us morals and standards to follow…"

By the end of the presentation, the whole group had reached the consensus that all problems affecting our society can be addressed by values-based choices and using discrimination to reach decisions that help reduce tension in a volatile situation. The Project Coordinator, Hiten Morarji said, "For me, this was an exciting

A group of the youth

opportunity… Not only did we succeed in delivering a message but we also learnt how we can practice Human Values more. It is a simple and effective concept, and this project was a thoroughly enjoyable experience."

The session concluded with the community youth reflecting on the beautiful message:

If there is righteousness in the heart,
There will be beauty in the character.
If there is beauty in the character,
There will be harmony in the home.
When there is harmony in the home,
There will be order in the nation.
When there is order in the nation,
There will be peace in the world.

One of the reasons for the success of the programme was that the message to the youth was conveyed by the youth. And the Human Values approach opened up the possibility that problems are a solution in disguise and therefore not always beyond resolution. The Youth realised that personal transformation was the key and an individual change in attitude and interests automatically feeds into all external initiatives.

Resounding Impact

The people of Luton were glad learning about the proceedings of the conference. The event was reported in the Luton News on 19 December, 2007. And Councillor Lawrence Patterson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, said, "The event was a great success and the young people came up with really good examples of discrimination, equality and justice issues. Hopefully, there will be more events like this so that young people can play a real part in their community and have an impact on decisions that affect them."

Ms. Yasmin Akhtar from the Luton Council of Faiths, stated: "I was pleasantly surprised with the excellent Human Values presentation. It was well received by the participants. The Human Values programme has an important role in the betterment of the multicultural society of Luton."

Ms. Yasmin Akhtar, from LCOF

As for the Team Members of SSHVN, for each one it was a memorable and insightful experience. If Mr. Prashant Mistry said, "It is a great feeling to be able to give back to the community and be able to help other youths", Ms. Revashnee Naidoo, another team member, opined, "From the planning stages to the final day and even now, I have been greatly encouraged. This was also a really good opportunity for me, as I learnt things that I can take back to my own school."

Bhagavan Baba says, **"Virtue is the salt of life and Love is the highest virtue. Develop love by sharing it."** All the values have love as its basis and the loving endeavour of the youth to share these precious virtues with the members of their community is a pointer to what the youth can do in their own surroundings to make this world a better place.

- The SSHVN Team

SAI - THE CEO OF MY LIFE

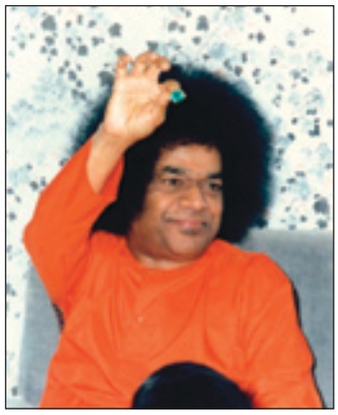
By Mr. N. T. Arun Kumar

Mr. N.T. Arun Kumar is the Chief Executive Officer of Dun & Bradstreet Predictive Science & Analytics, part of a US based global organization. He has extensive leadership experience with multi-national companies like Citibank and PepsiCo. Arun came into the Sai family as a young Balavikas student in Trichy while in secondary school. In 2001 Bhagavan permitted Arun to visit Sri Sathya Sai University (SSSU), Puttaparthi to offer guest lectures in technology management to the MBA students. Since then Arun has had numerous opportunities to visit SSSU as a guest faculty for MBA and M. Tech classes and has had a few 'life-altering' encounters with the Divine.

While the whole world is agog over the "information revolution", Swami says the information age is over, it is now transformation age! Working in a company (Dun & Bradstreet) that has been in the information business for over 165 years, I cannot but be astounded by Swami's Absolute Truth synthesized so beautifully – information by itself is useless: its purpose is to transform through action.

In Air or Fire – Always in Sai's Care

I joined this company in 2005 as Chief Technology Officer and had to travel a lot all over the world. Swami's Omnipresence - and His eternal promise to be always with us - was once again revealed to me that year when the airplane I was traveling on in Russia developed problems mid-air and could neither proceed to its destination in India nor return to Moscow. In the gloomy silence that followed within the aircraft, I clutched involuntarily with all my strength to the green diamond ring Swami had created for me a few years back and prayed. I do not remember how, but we landed safely back in Moscow. And then I had a grueling 24 hour journey back home, and by the time the plane landed in India, I was completely worn out. After reaching home, no sooner than I had done my prostrations to Swami's Robe, the ring split into two! Maybe Swami had absorbed all the energy while averting the disaster through his 'visiting card', the ring, which is now in my altar.



The Ringmaster of this Divine Drama

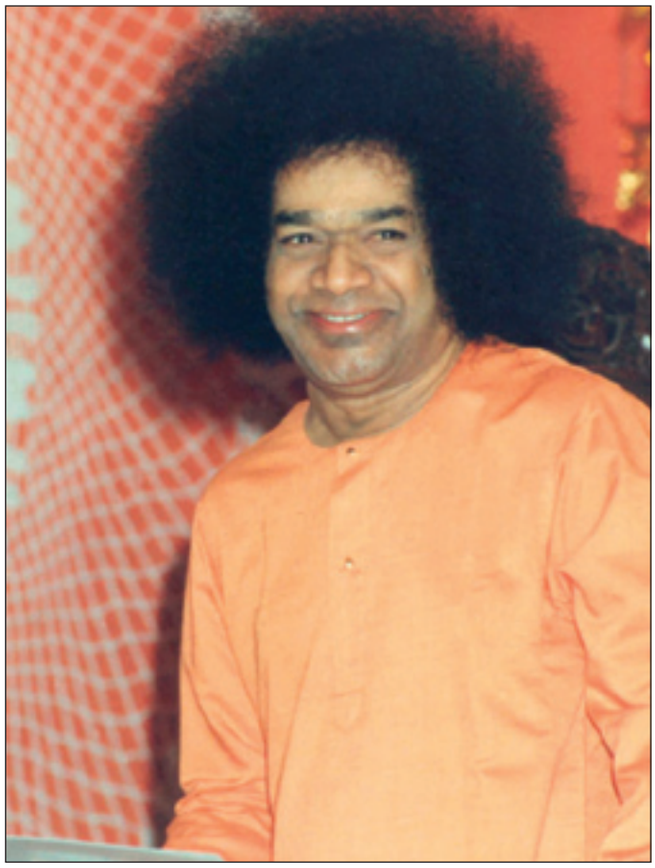
Swami's Grace has extended to the whole office too. In 2006, when we first expanded into new premises, disaster struck a week before our inauguration – while testing the fire extinguisher, the pressure valve gave way and the whole office got flooded. It meant losses of several lakhs of Rupees and I was on the way to Sri Lanka on an urgent meeting. We had no insurance yet to recover, and worse still, there was dispute as to whose mistake it was! Swami appeared in the dream of our manager who was handling the project (he was not a 'devotee' then), gave him an 'interview' and asked him why I did not come to see Him. Upon being told I was traveling to Sri Lanka, Swami said I could visit Him in Colombo as well!

That same day in Colombo, I got an email informing me the address of the Sai Center there! I had been to Colombo several times but could never find time or means to visit Swami and this was completely out of the blue (orange, should I say!). I had a blissful time in "Sai Mandir" in Barnes Place, Colombo, and back in Chennai, all our vendors by themselves agreed to fix the damages and the builder paid for their losses! There was no debate and no loss of time to inaugurate our global operations. In fact, Swami's students employed with us chanted vedic hymns and did homam as an expression of the entire company's gratitude to Him, instead of the typical MNC practice of calling VIP's to inaugurate.

U-Turns Devised by the Divine

In January 2007, one of our colleagues had a serious head injury while returning home late night after work. Doctors gave up completely as he was paralyzed from top to toe. The next day, Swami was to visit Chennai for the Athi Rudra Maha Yagna. We all prayed to Him earnestly and sent an "emergency" fax. After a tense period, our colleague started recovering miraculously, and today, that is, a year after his accident, he is on his feet and at work – something that was completely ruled out then!

Another amazing experience I had in office was when a very tough and demanding client visited us for a project review. He was intractable on all issues and wanted us to do more work within the same contract. Our deadlines and costs kept extending, and despite all our hard and sincere work, the project didn't seem nearing completion. After grueling meetings where we were forced to agree to all his terms, I persisted on our constraints and he and I had a private review again. He came over to my office and upon seeing Swami's picture, suddenly exclaimed



that his wife is an ardent devotee and they are doing a social service project based on Swami's principles near Bangalore. From then on, the conversation suddenly turned warm with discussions of Swami more than work issues in hand, and at the end of the meeting, he not only agreed to proceed our way but also said he will sanction extra budget to be paid to us!

"I will bless your career" - Swami

Swami, in every way, has been with us throughout the journey of our company. Last year, when the Chennai division was made an independent company, I was made the CEO. I was actually quite surprised since there was absolutely no debate or nominations going around at the level of the Board of Directors – it all happened as if I was destined to become the CEO. I then realized Swami's Omniscience and Omnipotence when in 2004 He had predicted this to me.

It was March 26, 2004, when our Beloved Swami hosted 11 of us from Polaris (a software company) and graciously allowed me to read to Him the contents of the folder we had prepared.

On the portico that day, when He called me, His first question was, "Arun from Polaris?"

I said, "Yes, Swami"

"CEO?"

Mr. N. T. Arunkumar with the CEO of his heart

"No, Swami"

"Oh, that is another Arun…", He said with the characteristic twinkle in His eyes!

Then much more of the drama and conversation followed, at the end of which Swami materialized Vibhuti, and said, "I will bless your career". Well, I did not know what to make of it thinking, firstly, that Swami mistook me for another Arun who was the CEO; and secondly, the fact was that I was leaving the company at that time and was actually already in the notice period!

When I mentioned it to a few people that day, I heard a story involving Mr. Deve Gowda who once was referred to by Swami as "our Prime Minister" in a speech, when he was only the Chief Minister of Karnataka, and quite unexpectedly, beating all odds, a few months later Mr. Deve Gowda indeed became the PM of India! Given the difficult situation I was in, I could not imagine anything great from this story – I was only in bliss with Swami's blessings and gift.

Now, I definitely know that what has happened to me today in D&B is hundred percent because of what Swami said that day and nothing else; it is completely His Grace and Mercy. In the last six months, I have seen situations in the company turn 180 degrees by His Omnipotence, and in the previous year, I felt Swami was literally carrying me in His arms through the chaotic times.

His Students, His 'Proper Ties'

I have been extraordinarily fortunate to work with many of Swami's students (MBA as well as M. Tech boys). The experience I have gained interacting with them has shaped my thoughts and attitude greatly towards being more balanced and in being better able to relate to Swami's teachings in the corporate context. The students I have worked with – and am working with – are shining examples of practice, perseverance and perfection!

In August 2000, I was traveling to the USA with a team member who happened to be an MBA graduate from Swami's Institute. Not only did he become a close colleague but also a constant reminder of the fact that Swami was always with me at all times.

Mr. Arun (centre) with students of Swami's University in the quadrangle of Prasanthi Nilayam college

One night, after I lost my gold chain that was gifted to me by Swami, both he and I had separate dreams wherein Swami gave us interviews and lovingly talked for a long while on our work and life. The next day, when the two of us exchanged notes, it was simply amazing to realize that Swami had actually given us important messages pertaining to both our work and personal life. Exactly a year later, while I was in Puttaparthi for a guest lecture at His Institute, Swami called me for an interview (real, not dream!) in Puttaparthi and recounted the entire incident, and more importantly, to assure me that He was really there, materialized again for me the same chain that I had lost! Swami's Omniscience and Omnipresence, though understood by me through vicarious experience, was for the first time revealed to me in all its glory and in the form of His Pure Love. For someone like me, caught in the glamour of a high-profile globe-trotting job and the heady power of technology, this simple yet absolute act of Pure Love started an irrevocable transformation of the heart. It taught me that the most important contribution we make in life is not merely by our intellect but through our heart – a lesson that is apt to the world of technology!

Swami's Count is Always Right!

Swami's students also set a very high standard of performance and behavior in the workplace, albeit in a quiet manner. The Institute, its philosophy and the faculty members obviously shape this outcome. In an age where higher education has largely become a fashionable and unaffordable commercial venture, the Sri Sathya Sai University stands out as a beacon of hope through its unique input, process and output!

In my previous assignment, I had about 15 students of Swami's Institute in my business unit, almost each one of whom had won some recognition or award from the company management and clients! To thank Swami for this, we all prayed to Him to visit Him together and we got the Divine opportunity in March 2004. Along with me were 12 students (3 could not make it owing to work related travel). On our very first day at Darshan, Swami enquired from me the details of every student's performance and patiently went through the citations of their awards! His face was beaming like that of a proud Mother and while materializing vibhuti, He spoke omnisciently about the company and its management, with words of comfort and blessings! The same day, Swami distributed His Robes to all students and staff, and we were fortunate to receive one each too. But wonder of wonders happened when we returned to our room and counted the Robes in our bags; there were three extra Robes for the students who could not make it with us!

On a visit to the Institute's artificial intelligence lab

This extraordinary Love and care can only come from the One in this world – our Creator, who is our very own breath! No wonder, Swami often says that even if we forget Him, He will never forget us! While we need our technological gadgets and calendars to remind ourselves of small things, the Master Divine Technologist just needs a spark of our love to reciprocate a million times over!

ALL ENCOMPASSING GRACE

By Mrs. Kavitha Sriram

Mrs. Kavitha Sriram attended the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University from 1993-1996 and gained a Bachelors in Sciences (Hons) in Physics. She later completed her Masters in Computer Application (MCA) from Avinashilingam Deemed University, Coimbatore, India. Currently she is a homemaker and an active member of the Shrewsbury Sai Center, Massachusetts, USA, where she participates in all the Center related service activities.

Bringing Cheer to Seventy-Seven Babies

Swami's 77th birthday was fast approaching when I had humbly proposed to the members of our Sai Center in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, that we take up a special service project such as the sewing or knitting of baby blankets, to live His message that the "Hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray." My idea had its roots in the Anantapur College tradition, when final year students take up a hands-on project to express their gratitude to our Chancellor, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, prior to our graduation.

Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur campus

With the Ultimate Source, during Summer Course, 1993

As I was planning on traveling to India during the time of Swami's birthday, I volunteered to carry whatever we made. Everyone agreed and I was given responsibility to coordinate the entire effort. We decided to do 77 baby quilts. Even though I was in charge of the project, I had no clue about stitching or sewing. I surrendered my lack of needle-and-thread abilities to Swami and reposed my trust in Him to guide me.

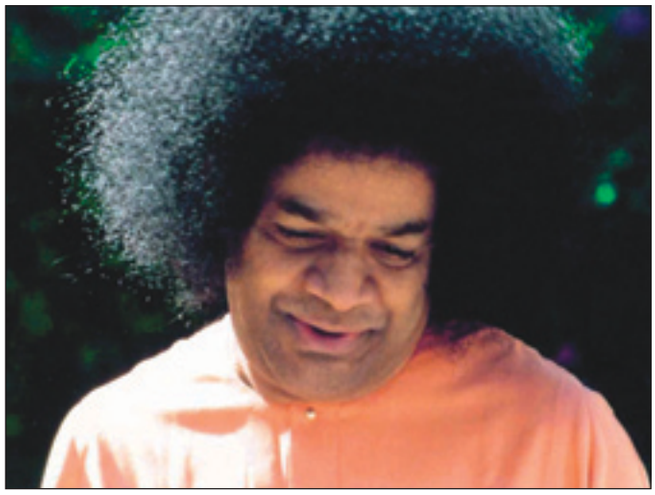
Baby quilts to offer at Baba's Feet on His Birthday

Immediately thereafter, we began procuring materials for the project as we had just 3 months in hand. We were still doubtful about completing the whole endeavour successfully because there were no sewing specialists in our center. We held on to the faith that we are but instruments in His Divine Hands, and that His Grace would empower us to execute His Will.

Guided by His unseen Hand, slowly, but surely, things started to shape up. Every Sunday after the Center sessions, I reported the progress to the President of our Sai Centre. One such Sunday night, I had a dream in which our Beloved Swami called me by name, enquired about the work going on and then even asked me about the number of quilts completed? In my dream, I was able to recall the exact details as I had just relayed the same information to our centre President in that evening. Swami listened carefully to my brief update and said that He was very happy about it.

Next morning, I couldn't wait to share my dream encounter with the Lord with everyone involved in the project. We were all overjoyed and knew Swami was

with us and guiding us through. Despite the lack of talent, the task was completed well ahead of time and our parcel of love was shipped to Puttaparthi. When I went to Prasanthi Nilayam that year, I requested that I be allowed to tell Bhagavan about the quilts.



But when Swami came near, I was so overwhelmed by His love that I could not utter a single word. I simply spoke to Him in my heart. And Swami was talking to another devotee but looking at me all the while. I felt that this was enough of a confirmation!

Later, after I was back in the US, we got to know that Swami did accept a sample piece shown to Him and carried it to His interview room. Everyone was ecstatic at this gesture of Divine Affirmation.

Blanket Blessing

Ever since then, during Swami's Birthday every year, it has become a tradition for us to undertake a special service activity to express our love by reaching out to Him among the needy, as He so lovingly always reminds us that "Service to God is service to man".

The following year too, He graciously accepted the sample package and instructed that the first piece be given to the first child born on November 23 in His Hospital in Puttaparthi.

Swami inspires us in many ways and instantly acknowledges every single sincere gesture of ours, however small and insignificant it may seem. We think, in our small human minds, that we are doing something for society, but He does not need our help. It is a chance given to us to improve ourselves. For me, each little blanket is a baby step towards my self-transformation. He affirms our efforts and reminds us in a million different ways to live in the awareness of His Universal Self which is always present everywhere and in everyone. This is a big lesson and I learnt it the hard way, and this is how He taught me.

Ms. Kavitha receiving a prize from His hands during Sportsmeet 1995

Darshan Denied

This happened the second time I was visiting India in March, 2004. This visit was extra special, as this time I was a new mom and was very eager to go to Puttaparthi so that my little one could catch a glimpse of the Lord - even though she had barely started looking people in the eye. Well, that was my plan. But the Lord works in mysterious ways and His game plan sometimes can be quite unexpected. As His children, we have to be ready to deal with it and accept it, as I soon found out.

I ended up in Chennai, for the entire 3 month period and found that I could not attend even one bhajan session or Darshan of the Lord. Robbers broke into my in-laws home in Chennai and in this incident I lost almost all my wedding jewelery including the ones made for my little daughter. It was a tragic setback. Needless to say, I was devastated. Most of our time and energy was spent on visiting the police station and following up on the paper trail in wake of this huge loss. The net result was, even though I was in India, I still could not make it to Puttaparthi. Remembering Swami's advice that "Money comes and goes, morality comes and grows", we prepared ourselves to return to the United States.

Forlorn Return

Just before boarding the flight to the United States, after passing through the gate, I noticed a small window. I cast one longing look through it, feeling terribly sad that I was leaving my motherland without even a single Darshan of Bhagavan. I was waiting in the line to board the plane. With a heavy heart, I prayed to Swami to step into the aircraft ahead of me, as I always do. Just as I reached the door of the plane, to my utter surprise I saw two photos garlanded on either side of the door. On the left was that of Lakshmi-Ganesh-Saraswathi, and on the right side was Shirdi Baba!

Never before or after this incident, have I seen any pictures of God in the vicinity of an airplane? I was amazed at how Swami works! He gave me His Darshan just before I left my motherland. Along with the plane, my spirit was ready for take-off now.

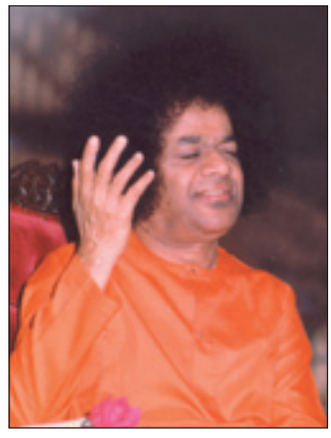
On the day of the journey, my eight month old developed severe diarrhea and was running a high fever. I had even considered canceling my trip! Once inside the flight, she was very cranky and cried her way out before falling asleep. Her loud crying drew the attention of fellow passengers. I felt nervous and embarrassed, and prayed for Divine intervention.

Just then, an elderly lady who spoke Tamil, my mother tongue, came up to us and started enquiring why the baby was crying. She went on to say that she was visiting her son in the United States and that she was going for the delivery of her daughter-in-law. She extolled how her son and daughter-in-law were part of a spiritual group that did *parayanam* (a regular recitation of a holy book) of the *Divya Prabandham*, a sacred scripture of the Vaishnavite Hindus. She also mentioned that it was her second trip to the United States but it was pretty scary for her this time because she was the first to enter the flight.

My husband and I were tired after a long day - the tension over making it to the flight and our sick child had worn us out. So I was almost falling asleep as this kind lady started narrating her story. But something made me sit up and listen to her attentively. At the end of the conversation, I clearly remember her saying that she was a Sai devotee and that she believed only in Swami and also that she had Swami's *padukas* (Divine sandals) with her in the cabin. So saying, she returned to her seat and came back with some Vibhuti, applied it to my child's forehead and gave us some too. I was speechless! She then went back to her seat and promised to see us in Frankfurt where we would be stopping for the next flight.

Who Else Could It Be!

As soon as we reached Frankfurt, I urged my husband to go and help the lady with her cabin baggage. He went to the seat she had mentioned but found no one! The entire episode seemed so surreal. I started recalling every detail of our encounter with the lady. I realized I had prayed that Swami should enter the flight first and she had clearly mentioned that she was the first to enter the flight! And now she was nowhere to be seen!



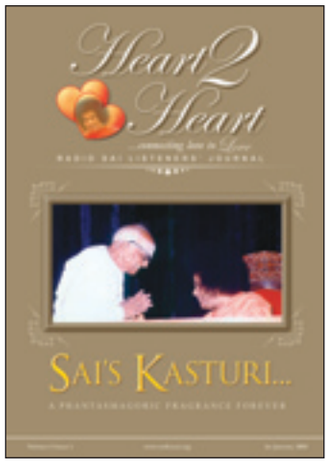
In retrospect, I realized that every word this elderly lady had spoken was an appropriate response to my prayers to Swami. Can I ever describe the Infinite Love of Mother Sai! Swami knows all of our earnest desires and fulfills them in His own way assuring that He is always with us. The Divine can assume any form, at any time and place, as space and time are no barriers to the Universal Consciousness. But for His Love we would be adrift in this world's material pursuits. My only prayer is:

"O Lord, please give us the opportunity to be part of Your Divine Mission in whatever little way possible so that we make our stay here fruitful. Also, be with us to show us the right path so that we may live our lives as Your message."

SO FAR, YET EVER NEAR

By Dr. (Mrs.) Radha Nandkumar

Mrs. Radha Nandkumar hails from Bangalore and has been living in USA since 1978. She is an active member of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. She has a Ph.D. in Physics and has been working in high-end computing for nearly two decades with her more recent projects being of international scope. She also visits regularly and supports the Sri Sathya Sai University at Puttaparthi in some of their Information Technology based endeavours.



January 2008 Coverstory

I am normally glued to my computer when new articles appear in H2H, Radio Sai's e-Journal. The Cover Story of January, 2008, on Professor Kasturi was so captivating that it touched the core of my heart; I could not help but make note of this statement in the editorial:

"If only we look around and have the eyes to see, there are many personalities whose lives are filled with devotion and dedication, but for the most part they are silent, letting their deeds do the talking."

I have had the privilege to be around devotees who live Swami's teaching, do an incredible amount of selfless service, and have been close to Swami for several decades, but never speak about it. And these people have influenced me greatly. I have wondered what makes me qualified to share the story of my life with Swami. He has touched my heart so deeply, and this is something that can only be experienced, not explained. But with humility, I submit the following with the hope that the words, anecdotes and stories will strum the strings in the hearts of others on the same path. Prof. Kasturi, in *Loving God*, summarizes this beautifully:

"I have discovered that all who have come into the presence of Sai, either during visits to places where His Darshan is possible or through His visiting them in dreams and visions, in films or on portraits or in the pages of books, or through actual physical appearance and concrete signs and signals, are somehow drawn to fellow devotees and are urged to share their elation with those who will become as elated as themselves."

Noble Upbringing

I was born and brought up in Bangalore. My parents Jayalakshmi and M.S. Srinivasan (who are both no more), were very pious and loving. I was raised in a traditional South Indian environment which was peace-loving, harmonious and religious. My parents had inculcated staunch faith in God and brought us up with the values of 'love of God' and 'fear of sin'. Their love expanded not only to their children, but also to everyone around them. My father's spiritual pursuits were very strong from his early years and he was always around and among Godmen, saints, and sages. On one such occasion, he brought Saipadananda Radhakrishna Swamiji to our home, who was a disciple of Sri Narasimha Swamiji - a disciple of Shirdi Sai Baba - who spread the teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba in South India. We were very blessed to have Radhakrishna Swamiji stay with our family for a couple of years until accommodation was established for him in Bangalore and this was around the time I was born.

Shirdi Sai Baba

I was given the name Radha by him. My father always believed in the 'Oneness of God' and was very much attached to Swamiji and Shirdi Sai Baba. He was among

the few founding members of a Shirdi Sai Center in Bangalore Cantonment, located in our housing compound and we used to attend Sai bhajans regularly on Thursdays when we were all young. All our family festivals and observances centered on devotion, Hindu traditions and love for Lord Krishna.

In my large family, all of us were very close knit. When my mother passed away (before I completed my high school), it was a great shock for us; but the loss only brought the family closer together than ever. We had intense faith in God, but could never understand why God had taken our mother back in such a hurry. Prayers were our anchor and answer for everything. My father was our example in following Baba's teachings of being in the world, but not of the world.

I used to choose different deities to pray to for different situations – help with exams needed Jesus, to get out of a situation of fear it was Baba, and so forth. Moving from Bangalore Cantonment, growing up, getting busy with studies and so on, somehow kept me busy for a few years and away from Shirdi Sai Baba, Bhajans and *Satsangs*, etc. even though I continued using sincere prayers as the crutch for every step, slip and fall.

I finished college, and became excited about space science and joined ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) working there for a few years. Soon I was married; my in-laws were loving, affectionate and always treated me with much love and warmth. All this was God's Grace in abundance. I had to soon leave this loving family and come to the United States to join my husband, who was settled in the US and had come to India to visit his family when we got married.

Dr. Radha Nandakumar's Family

I had never been away from family for too long, and so when I first came I felt so isolated from anything familiar. My husband and I were the only ones from both sides of our families to come to the US and in the new environment I kept feeling a sense of emptiness around me. I then joined school, finished my graduate program, had two children, and found myself busy with my career and family.

Drawn Through Dreams

During one of our vacations in Toronto, Canada, we went to visit our close family friend couple - Krishnaswamy and Anusuya. They talked about Swami and had also bought us a set of books on Swami from the Toronto Sai Center. This was in 1984. Somehow I had kept them unread for several years. Eventually, when I started reading the *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* series (Baba's biography) by Prof. Kasturi, Swami started appearing in my dreams frequently.

My dreams were always very vivid and I experienced an inexplicable happiness and excitement whenever Swami was in my dream. I knew from my readings that Swami does not appear in our dreams unless He wills it. So I recognized that it was a unique and great blessing. In 1990, when my son, Ajit, was about eight and my daughter, Anita, was about three, I was reading a story from the book *Chinna Katha* (stories narrated by Bhagavan) to them everyday. Swami once again appeared in my dream: He stood at the entrance

to the children's room, signaled me to leave the room and indicated that He will take care of reading the story to them. I felt reassured and blessed beyond measure with this Grace since I always felt parenting was a much greater challenge in a foreign land with the expectations and conflicts of ill-understood dual cultures.

My children also had a few dreams of Swami, now and then. Meanwhile, my family members in India were experiencing signs of His Grace as well. I was somehow hearing more about Swami from people and I found an intense yearning to join a Sai Center. I knew there were Sai Centers all around the US, but I did not know of any easy way to locate one close to where I lived. I started to read a lot of books about Swami, discourses by Him and also about spirituality.

The story about Swami Vivekananda in *Chinna Katha* impressed my son so much that he chose to write about Vivekananda for a school project when he had to select a famous person or a hero. I was quite thrilled inwardly, but at the same time, a little apprehensive about how he would be able to convey his enthusiasm about an Indian monk to a class full of American children, who may not know about Indians, leave alone monks. But he did quite well and this also influenced me greatly to read Swami Vivekananda's biography and discourses. Then serendipitously, I joined my son's class on one of their field trips as a parent chaperone. His regular class teacher who had an emergency in the family had sent another teacher in her place on this field trip. This teacher, Lisa, took me by surprise when she pronounced all of our Indian names with great ease. Later that day I found out that she had traveled to India, and when I probed more, I found out that she had spent a month at Prashanti Nilayam! I immediately knew here was a proof of 'Sai-incidence', not 'coincidence' that I had read about, and found out from her about the local Sai Centers.

Meeting 'Like-Hearted' People

The Champaign-Urbana Sathya Sai Baba Center was (and still remains) a very small group, and meets in devotees' homes. The meeting was in one such devotee's home in the coming week. Lisa gave me the details and invited me to the Sai Bhajan session which I attended. (Since then, Lisa has become a very close friend and a spiritual sister forever). That very first Bhajan session I attended in the United States was a unique experience in itself. There was a small traditional Indian altar in the devotee's home with images and idols of Lord Ganesha and Shiva, and in this was included a small 2"x4" picture of Swami. This tiny picture was so incredibly powerful and radiating so much energy that it kept me focused on it all throughout the session and tears started streaming down my cheeks. It was a great turning point in my life in the United States. I knew that was what my heart was longing and yearning for all the while; it filled my inner void. From then on, the Sai Center of Champaign-Urbana has been my extended family in the US. It is nearly two decades now since I first went there.

Altar at the Champaign-Urbana Sathya Sai Baba Center

Immediately after my first week of joining the Center, everyone was planning on attending the Memorial Day Weekend Retreat of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centers in St. Louis and I joined them along with my children. Attending this retreat was absolutely soothing to the soul, and I could see how love for Swami had brought so many good people together. I could experience His Love through them and was soaked in bliss listening to the Bhajans sung by everyone with so much devotion. The mutual love and respect that was being shared and the kindness and compassion of those who volunteered in various ways at the Retreat was touching.

The adults, who were Bal Vikas gurus, impressed me a lot, as they took care of others' children, so that those parents could attend the sessions and enjoy the Sai Bhajans. I have been associated ever since then with the

Sai Centers. In fact, the retreat had such a great influence on my little daughter, Anita, that apart from learning a lot of Bhajans, for the first time, she even started 'reading' by reading/singing her favourite bhajans from the 'Bhajan Book' of our center.

Amidst all this, I should mention that my husband has with him a picture of Swami in his wallet that he says I gave him during our wedding; but I don't ever recall possessing this picture or seeing it, let alone giving it to him. I think this must be a Divine Play of Swami that I was to learn about years later.

His Presence Never Leaves

I have never felt that I have had heard enough stories of Swami's miracles and experiences, because I am always thirsting for more. I always attempt every possible way to incorporate more of His teachings in my life. Whatever was learnt, suggested or offered as a spiritual *sadhana* that worked for other devotees, were always shared and tried by us. I remember on one occasion, we received an email note from one of Swami's students which said that her mother would always make her start the day with vibhuthi from a jar and a quotation from another. They had a box with a lot of messages from Swami in small strips and she would pick one each day and follow it.

I too wanted to do that as a daily thought for the day and a message to follow for the day (before the internet use was as prevalent as it is these days, when we have the privilege of reading it online from the Radio Sai website). Swami would always make me aware that He is watching over us and would even exhibit His Omniscience, and at times He would do it with a great sense of humour too! Every time I would do something against my usual routine and feel guilty, I would get the prick right away! For example, if I had a day when I would decide to be a bit lazy and postponed my bath or slept off in a hurry without doing the required cleaning up in the house, my message the next day would say 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'. If I overindulged in tasty delicacies (which I often do), he would reprimand me the next day with 'Overeating is harmful.' If I had yelled for some reason, it would say 'Speak softly.' If I were in a quandary on some issues or decisions, He would indicate to me 'Don't give up the opportunity' and so forth. In things small and large, I would experience His kindness and guidance.

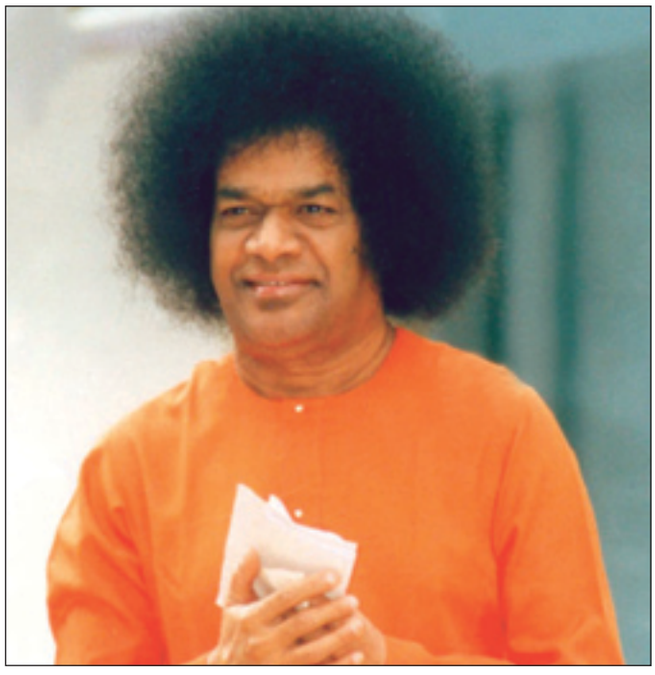
All my siblings and their family members are also very spiritual; each one's experience and acceptance of Swami as a *Poorna Avathar* (Divine Incarnation) has occurred at different times. I used to keep praying to Swami to bring everyone in my family closer to Him. When this prayer was intense and sincere, He blessed us all in such a manner that during one of my early visits to Prasanthi Nilayam, from each one of our siblings' families, someone could travel to Puttaparthi for His Darshan. It is amazing how beautifully these trips came together for all of us at very short notice.

Out of the blue, someone came in a larger car, took them all, promised to send help for the broken car, stopped on the way at a house, provided them with a grand meal and finally dropped them all in Bangalore. When my family members returned to the same spot later to offer thanks to the family that was so kind to them, to their amazement, there was neither a house nor a trace of any building where they were stranded the week before!

On one occasion, in the early eighties, when I was in the US and not yet in Swami's fold, a couple of my sisters had taken their nieces and gone for His Darshan to Bangalore. The car had a broken axle on their journey and there were no male family members with them at that time; so they sincerely prayed to Swami for help. **Out of the**

blue, someone came in a larger car, took them all, promised to send help for the broken car, stopped on the way at a house, provided them with a grand meal and finally dropped them all in Bangalore. When my family members returned to the same spot later to offer thanks to the family that was so kind to them, to their amazement, there was neither a house nor a trace of any building where they were stranded the week before!

There have been ample proofs of His Omniscience and showers of Grace on all of us, and He has also given us the wisdom and strength to 'Hold onto Him' during great difficulties. He once came to me in a dream in the US, while at the same time He was blessing my sisters during Darshan in Puttaparthi by materializing Vibhuti for them.



I always try to remember Swami who has been my inner strength. His words of solace and succor always appear at just the right time and in the right context to guide me through tough and disappointing times. Similarly, during good times, I have felt His blessings heaped on me. I never therefore forget to thank Him wholeheartedly for all His Grace in my life.

I work in a field that stays at the leading-edge of technology which is more often termed as the bleeding-edge of technology. Working in such a competitive environment is not always healthy; there are biases, sometimes subtle and at other times, not-so-subtle. My reasonably traditional upbringing with associated high moral values, coupled with a deep sense of intuition and strong spiritual bent, has always guarded me against a lot of challenges in the professional world. Amidst all this, what has come to my rescue tremendously is the professional network that Swami has helped me build over the years through my work and travels. Treating the work place as a spiritual training ground, smoothens for me the ripples caused by oppressive forces in my environment.

Devotional Dilemma

As a major part of my work, I establish and follow-up on synergies and collaborations between institutions around the world. Wherever I travel, my scheduled activities always involve full days with professional colleagues from the institutions I visit. A couple of years ago, I was on one such follow-up trip to the UK with some of my office colleagues to attend an annual conference and also meet with our UK colleagues for collaborative engagements, on the side.

"Let the different faiths exist, let them flourish, and let the glory of God be sung in all the languages and a variety of tunes. That should be the ideal. Respect the differences between the faiths and recognize them as valid, as long as they do not extinguish the flame of unity."

- Baba

On this particular trip, I was debating whether I should detour and visit the London Sai Center prior to my meeting (since I often recall the reverberations from the riveting Bhajans there from my previous visit and the joy of participating in their seva activities), or go with my colleagues directly to our destination.

Since we were to arrive a bit earlier, I was thinking long and hard about spending that time in spiritual pursuits, but something compelled me to be a good team player and proceed with my colleagues to the final destination

rather than route myself separately for being at the Sai Center. When we arrived for the conference, we had a few sessions to attend in the evening and also had meetings scheduled for the next morning. One of my fellow attendees, a senior colleague - let's call him Mr. Xavier - did not attend the arrival day evening sessions and we did not think much of it, as we thought he may be jet lagged and resting that evening.

At about 10 PM, he called to let me know that he was feeling quite ill and was not sure if he would be able to attend the next day's morning session. Before hanging up, he mentioned that he had brought some publications for distribution at the meeting the next morning. When I picked up the publications, he indicated that he was feeling faint from a bleeding ulcer and may need to go to hospital later. I offered to assist him and told him not to hesitate to call.

A Gift of the Sacred

I returned and prayed to Swami sincerely. I had a favourite picture of Swami and a little Vibhuti with me, which I knew would help Mr. Xavier. However, I had no idea about his beliefs and attitude towards objects that were religious or spiritual. Nevertheless, I prayed to Swami to guide me through, and took that picture as well as the Vibhuti to him. I mentioned to him that it was my spiritual teacher's image which he could keep, and the white powder was like the 'Holy Water' of Jesus, some of which he should take. I returned and continued to pray.

A little after midnight I received another call from him saying that as soon as he took the Vibhuti, his bleeding stopped; but he was still too weak and did not want emergency treatment in a foreign land. He wanted to check if he can undertake his return travel right away with no risk of an emergency on the way; and so, he had already called for an ambulance.

Since I offered to help, I accompanied him to the hospital, got him admitted and returned after I was assured that he was being taken care of by a good team of physicians. I had done my part and trusted that Swami in the people around will keep him safe. The next day I juggled between meetings, conference attendance and hospital visits, as he underwent some emergency procedures.

The following morning, Mr. Xavier was ready to be discharged and we rearranged our schedules to return to the States earlier than planned. The return trip was fortunately uneventful and by His Grace, we reached home without any emergencies. Mr. Xavier's family was very thankful to me for my timely help, but I knew I was only an instrument in His Hands.

But this is not the complete story; there was a revealing tale within this story. Mr. Xavier informed me later that on that particular night, along with him there were more than twenty patients in the large room which had a nurses' station outside. The patient in the bed next to his was a big, burly and tall gentleman, much larger than himself. And this neighbour was either trying to get out of bed or was sleep walking, and consequently fell flat on the floor before any help could be summoned. **Xavier had Swami's picture in his hospital jacket pocket close to his chest and he apparently patted it and asked for strength to lift and help the patient get on his feet.** And surprisingly, he was able to do that even though he himself was extremely weak! He could not believe himself. When Mr. Xavier narrated this

to me, he again patted his shirt pocket that had Swami's picture and said, "He must have put me in that particular ward in the hospital so that I could be there to help this other guy out."

The whole incident was like a revelation to me. I knew I did the right thing in giving my favourite picture, even though initially I was very hesitant, and also understood why my trip, that could have started with a visit to the London Sai Center, was to be otherwise. He says, "Hands that help are holier than lips that pray," and I thanked Him for the opportunity.

Experiencing the Language of the Heart

We have had the privilege of having Bhajans of the Sri Sathya Sai Center of Champaign-Urbana in our home regularly for almost a decade now. It always leaves such a positive atmosphere and anchors everything else we do over the week. True to my initial dream, Swami has always been with my children. My daughter, Anita, currently is the Young Adult coordinator in our small Center, and Ajit, who is now in Irvine, California, is not too far away from Dr. Sam Sandweiss's Center in San Diego. Whenever I travel for work, which I do quite often, I would miss being at the Center and so would look forward to participating in Sai Bhajans wherever possible.

I am generally at a loss of words in social gatherings, but with Sai families around the world, I am at home, as words and feelings emanate from the heart and without saying much, you are folded into the group. In the last seven years, my work has taken me to several countries

The Brisbane Altar...

...and the Brisbane sisters themselves

and I have often utilized opportunities at the beginning or at the end of my trips to attend Sai Bhajans in those places. Swami says:

"Let the different faiths exist, let them flourish, and let the glory of God be sung in all the languages and a variety of tunes. That should be the ideal. Respect the differences between the faiths and recognize them as valid, as long as they do not extinguish the flame of unity." - Baba

Away from Champaign-Urbana, which has been my home for nearly three decades now, I have had the privilege of attending *Satsangs* in Brisbane in Australia, Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, Cape Town in South Africa, Bangalore, Chennai and Prasanthi Nilayam in India, London in the UK, and in cities like Arkansas, Bloomington, Chicago, Dallas, Decatur Detroit, Peoria, Springfield, and San Diego in the USA. No matter whether the Bhajans are sung in Sanskrit or Hindi, English or Portuguese, Kannada, Telugu or Tamil, you feel one with the gathering, experience the Bliss, sweetness of the Divine, and the Language of the Heart.

When I was in Brisbane, Australia, I had the unique opportunity of spending some time with the Brisbane Center where 'Twin Devotee Sisters of Swami' not only exemplify Swami's teachings, but have become Swami's images in the intense Selfless Love and Peace they radiate. They showered so much love and affection on me that I felt as though I was in Baba's presence in Prasanthi Nilayam. They were kind enough to give as a loving gift, one of the books written by them. Similarly, when I was

in Cape Town in South Africa and was able to attend a Sunday Satsang, I was so touched and inspired by their *havan* (sacrifice), and the sincerity with which the center members prayed to Swami to heal Himself when He had a hip fracture.

Unique Blessings

It has truly been a blessing and a privilege to experience the Love for Swami in various parts of the world. I also consider it a great blessing to be able to see the vast and varied beauty of the world, the many facets of God's creation and especially wonderful people in all the places I visit. The most enjoyable and profound benefit of my travels is, of course, when they bring me to Prasanthi Nilayam and to the campuses of the Sri Sathya Sai University.

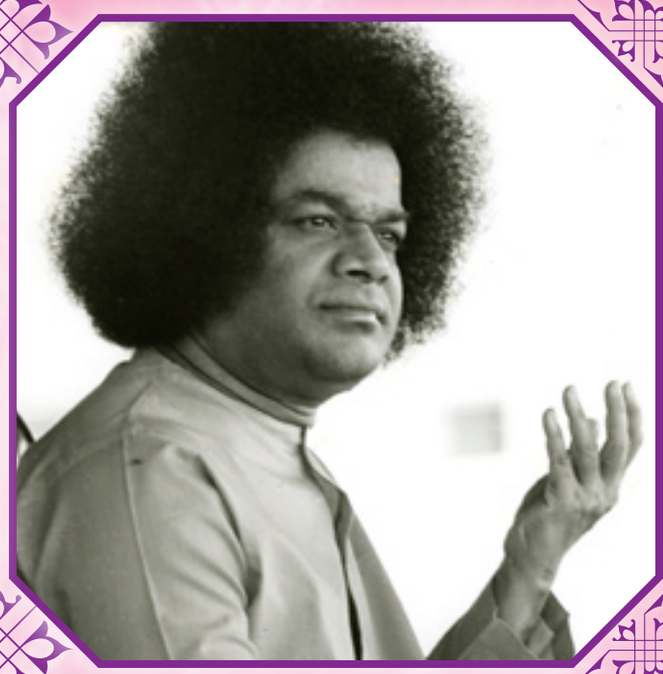
Dr. Radha (second from right) with the teachers of the Anantapur Campus of Sri Sathya Sai University

I feel really blessed that the Head of Department and faculty of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Sciences (DMACS), Sri Sathya Sai University, involved me in discussions on high performance computing, visualization, and a few cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary discussions between DMACS and the Baba's Super Specialty Hospitals in 2005. It was again a great blessing to have been associated with the organization of the "Next-Gen Information Technology for Societal Advancement and Integration (IT-SAI) Conference" at the Prasanthi Nilayam Campus in July 2006, and also with the Women and Information Technology for Societal Advancement and Integration (WIT-SAI) Workshop in the Anantapur Campus in July 2007. All these occasions have

With the faculty of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Sciences, Sri Sathya Sai University

brought me to meet with some of Swami's highly eminent and esteemed instruments working in His Institutions. I always feel that it is in preparation for associating with the esteemed SSSU that Swami has given me all the other opportunities in life. I am convinced that 'The Light of God surrounds us, the Power of God protects us and wherever I am, God Is.'

the Immutable Eternal



the Immutable Eternal

Shivoham IN Vaikuntham

WHEN THE DOOR OPENS…

This is the story of a bubbly four-year old, Harsh, who was fun and frolic personified, but at the same time, to his parents' horror, harbouring within himself a heart which had many 'holes'. How and when did the trials of his parents end? Read this touching account to find out.

The paper plane glided silently over the beds and made a belly-flop landing on the nurse's head. Apparently, the parting between her tresses was the perfect air strip for that voyage of imagination. Engrossed in recording some notes in the patient's file, she was caught unawares and with a mix of surprise, irritation and curiosity, turned to glare at the bunch of children occupying the Pediatrics cubicle.

The wordless giggle, joyful clapping of the hands and the excitement in his eyes at having obtained a perfect landing were a total giveaway…unmistakably it was Harsh again! One look at him and the nurse's irritation drained away from her face and was replaced with a warm affectionate smile. Harsh was not being naughty. He was being…well! He was just being himself. In his four-and-a-half years, Harsh seemed to have learnt the knack of getting away with mischief, thanks to his endearing smile and those sparkling eyes. It would take a stretch of imagination to guess that those eyes were windows opaque to the ravages within; the fact that his little body suffered from multiple congenital malformations.

Rather philosophically, the Syrian poet Khalil Gibran said:

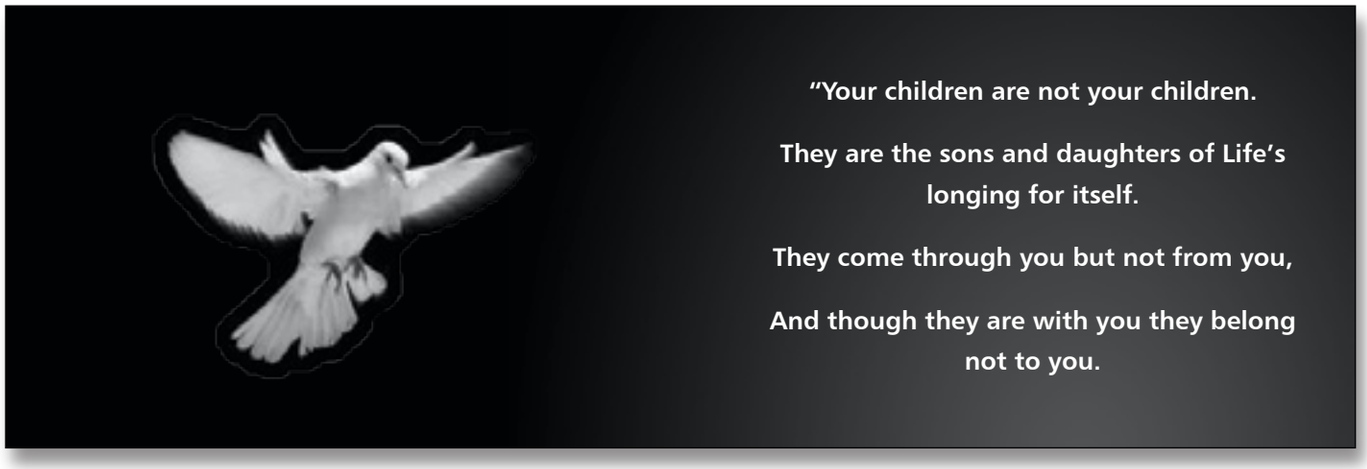
Beautiful words, poetry to the ears but hard to imbibe in a real life crisis! A seer, detached from the world and its apparent vagaries, is at peace with himself, in a stage of evolution far beyond that of a father knowing the plight of his first born. Yet, destiny is not harsh on all. With the power of prayers, when one door closes, a hundred new ones can open – one only has to search for the right door. The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences was the anvil that sealed the fate of little Harsh and his father Mr. Chhagan Lal.

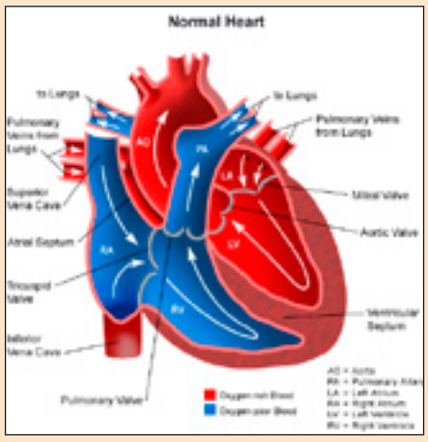
The Father Shares His Story

When the heart is full, words are few, but then when happiness is shared it multiplies, while sorrow when shared is halved. Chhagan Lal was only too happy to share his pursuit of happiness with Heart2Heart readers. He said:

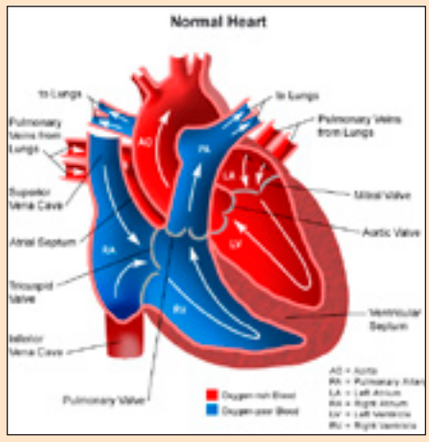
Little Harsh and his father, Mr. Chhagan Lal

"We hail from the Udaipur District of Rajasthan, but have been living in the Pandapura town of Mandya district, about 120 kilometers south-west of Bangalore, along with 25 other families from Rajasthan, all of whom are engaged in business. We have a daily-provision store

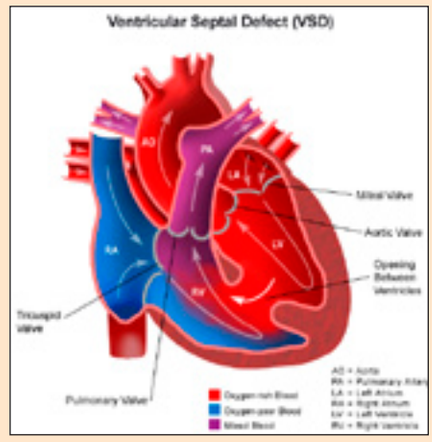




A Normal Heart



Patent Ductus Arteriosus



Ventricular Septal Defect

in Udaipur, which I was helping my father manage. About four or five years ago, I decided to come down to Bangalore and help my brother, who was running a jewelery business in Pandapura.

"Harsh was our very first child, born in July, 2003 in Rajasthan. At the time of his birth itself, we noticed that he had a deformity in the roof of his mouth. The doctors suggested us to wait for a few months before taking him to a plastic surgeon to fix this deformity, which in medical parlance is referred to as a cleft palate. We brought Harsh back to Pandapura when he was 6 months old, and took him to a plastic surgeon when he was one year and three months of age. After taking a look at him, he referred us to a Pediatric surgeon for some more tests and evaluation. Suddenly, it seemed that this was not a simple problem as we had imagined. My wife Manju and I had a trying time during those days.

"Though the surgery was complex, the doctors and the attending team have vast experience in dealing with such complex problems. The surgery was completed in a relatively short time and Harsh was shifted to the ICU. The ICU is equipped with state-of-the-art technology where he was monitored round the clock for 24 hours by an expert team of doctors and nurses. He had an uneventful recovery and was discharged soon."

"From our side it only seemed that Harsh's speech wasn't that clear, and that he was not picking up language very fast, but we had not expected anything more serious than that. It turned out to be a really stressful time for us when the Pediatric surgeon listed out the multiple problems Harsh was diagnosed with and then mentioned that Harsh first needs cardiac surgery, and only after that will they correct the cleft palate. He referred us to a Cardiologist. As parents, we were not prepared for such a bleak prognosis. It was all too much to take in at once.

"The cardiologist put Harsh through a battery of tests and diagnosed Harsh's problem as PDA, Patent Ductus Arteriosus along with a VSD, Ventricular Septal Defect (An anomaly between two vessels of the heart and also a defect between two heart chambers)."

Their Hope Finds an Answer

The immediate reaction of the parents predictably was of shock and despair. Like the dark cloud that comes with its own silver lining, the parents soon found a ray of hope. "We were very distraught at first, but somewhere in our hearts we knew our little son would be saved. Soon after visiting the Cardiologist, a relative living in Pandapura, told us about Baba's Hospital in Bangalore, which offers free surgery. Given the gravity of our situation, we rushed to the Hospital right away and within a month, Harsh was admitted in the pre-operative ward.

"In our desperation, there was no scope to consider various options. We just had to take the leap of faith to approach the Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospital for help. We had absolutely no idea how the Hospital would be, and what kind of treatment we could expect from a free Hospital. Never could we have imagined that this totally free of cost medical facility would turn out to be such a wonderful set-up. The doctors and the staff put us at total ease and all this gave us the trust that

The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Bangalore

this is the place where Harsh could be safely treated and cured of his heart ailment. As parents, this is the ultimate relief we could ever have wished for."

Harsh underwent two consecutive surgeries, one to tie off the PDA, an abnormal connection between the aorta and the pulmonary artery, and the next to close the hole between the ventricles of his heart, a VSD Ventricular Septal Defect closure.

The Dedicated Doctor Explains

Dr. Hari Kumar, who was part of the surgical team, says, "Harsh had two defects — one in the heart between the right and left chambers and the other between the two great vessels, which supply blood to the lungs and the body. As a result, there was increased pressure in the lungs (pulmonary hypertension). Patients with these complex defects usually die of heart failure or infections. When not treated early, the disease becomes incurable due to permanent changes in the lungs.

"The sternum was opened and Harsh's heart was connected to a Cardio Pulmonary Bypass machine (CPB). The CPB machine allows an advanced machine pump and an artificial lung to take over the function of the heart and lungs during the surgery. The heart was then opened and the defect was closed with a patch. Next, the defect between the two great vessels was also closed. Though the surgery was complex, the doctors and the attending team have vast experience in dealing with such complex problems. The surgery was completed in a relatively short time and Harsh was shifted to the ICU. The ICU is equipped with state-of-the-art technology where he was monitored round the clock for 24 hours by an expert team of doctors and nurses. He had an uneventful recovery and was discharged soon."

After cardiac surgery, Harsh underwent successful plastic surgery, thanks to a helpful doctor who was also a Sai devotee. He returned to Bhagavan's Hospital early November for a minor procedure. This was to avoid any future surgery related complications.

A Family Transformed

Prior to this life altering experience at the Sri Sathya Sai Hospital in Whitefield, Harsh's father Mr. Lal had only heard about Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba and His Mission of spreading Love through His unique healthcare and educational institutions. After the first surgery, Baba's picture given to Lal and Harsh by the Counseling staff, started to adorn Lal's shrine at Pandapura. "Very soon, we are all planning to visit Puttaparthi, to have Baba's Darshan, and express our gratitude to Him, who has given our son a new lease of life," he says gratefully.

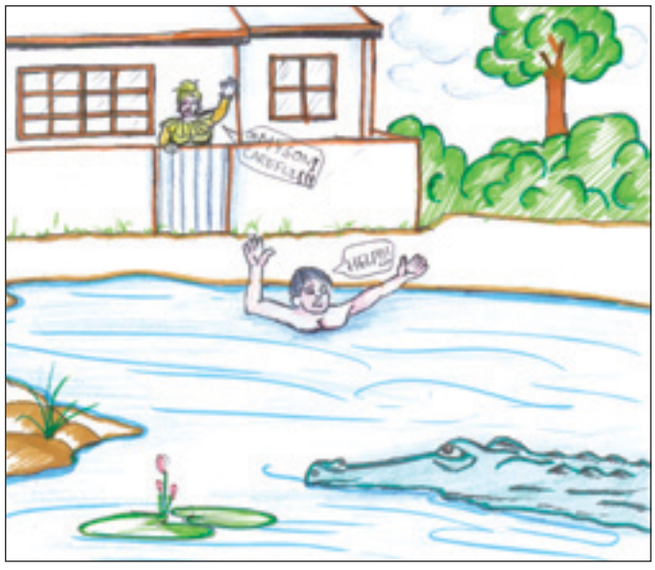
The ever happy and upbeat Harsh

The ward is well lit and warm and even as Chhagan Lal is narrating his story, little Harsh is busily revising the English alphabet and proudly shows it to his father. He has even mastered the Kannada alphabet and quickly scribbles it on a piece of paper. His father's face glows with a smile tempered with pride, satisfaction and relief. The moment is just perfect, for it lacks nothing, thanks purely to the Advent on earth of the Purest form of Love, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Had it not been for Him, Chhagan Lal and Manju would never have had their little son's precarious health restored through such complicated and advanced surgeries done with love, patience and caring ….. without even a mention of the word 'money'. Only in the realm of the Divine can such concerns be ever assuaged.

– By B. Satish Chandra and the Heart2Heart Team

SCARS IN OUR HEARTS

Some years ago, on a hot summer day in South Florida, a little boy decided to go for a swim in an old swimming pool behind his house. In a hurry to dive into the cool water, he ran out the back door, leaving behind shoes, socks and shirt as he went.



He flew into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore. His mother, who was in the house and looking out the window, saw the boy swimming towards the alligator. Petrified, she ran towards the water, yelling to her son as loudly as she could to get out of it.

Hearing her voice, the little boy became alarmed and made a U-turn to swim to his mother. It was too late. Just as he reached the bank where his mother was, the alligator reached him. The mother grabbed her little boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. And then began an incredible tug-of-war between the two. The alligator was much stronger than the mother, but the mother was totally consumed by her passion for her son and was gripped by a holy strength.

While this terrible struggle was going on, a farmer happened to drive by, heard the screams, and saw what was going on – he took his gun, raced from the truck, and shot the alligator.

Remarkably, after weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived. His legs were badly scarred by the vicious attack of the alligator. He also had deep scratches on his arms where his mother's fingernails had dug into his flesh in her efforts to hang on to the son she loved.

The newspaper reporter, who interviewed the boy after the trauma, asked if he would show him his scars. The boy showed him his legs. And then, with great pride, he said to the reporter, "But look at my arms. I have great scars on my arms, too. I have them because my Mom wouldn't let go."

You and I can identify with that little boy. We have scars, too. No, not from an alligator, but the scars of a painful past! Some of those scars are unsightly and have caused us deep regret. But, some wounds, my friend, are because God has refused to let go. In the midst of your struggle, He's been there holding on to you.

God wants to protect us and provide for us in every way. But sometimes we foolishly wade into dangerous situations, not knowing what lies ahead. The swimming pool of life is filled with peril and we forget that our inner enemies are waiting to attack. That's when the tug-of-war begins - and if you have the scars of His love on your arms, be extremely grateful. He did not, and will not, ever let you go.

In a beautiful discourse, Bhagavan Baba, once said:

"However you are, you are Mine. I shall never give you up. Wherever you are, you are near Me. You cannot go beyond my reach.

"No matter where you go, always know that I will be there, inside you, guiding you every step of the way. In the years to come you will experience Me in different Manifestations of My form. You are My very own, dearer than dear to Me. I will protect you as the eyelids protect the eye."

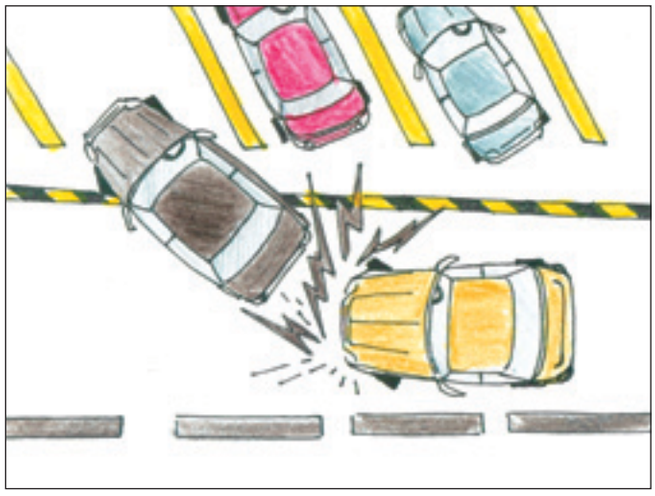
Let us trust Him, never be worried and smile at every opportunity, for He is always watching over us.

Illustrations: S. B. Sai Krishna, SSSU

– Heart2Heart Team

LAW OF THE GARBAGE TRUCK

How often do we let other people's temper affect our mood? Do we let a terrible driver, or a rude comment ruin our day? The mark of a spiritual aspirant is how quickly we can regain our focus on what is important. One man learnt this experience while in the back of a New York City cab. Here's what happened.



He was traveling in a taxi, on his way to Grand Central Station. All of a sudden, without warning, a black car jumped out of a parking space right in front of them. The taxi driver slammed on his brakes, skidded and missed the other car's back end by inches.

Then, the driver in the other car, who nearly caused a huge accident, whipped his head around and started abusing the taxi driver.

But the taxi driver just smiled and waved at the guy. The startled passenger said, "Why did you take it so easy? The guy almost caused your car to crash and could have sent us to the hospital!" The taxi driver

laughed and then related what he called, "The Law of The Garbage Truck."

"Many people are like garbage trucks. They run around full of rubbish, filled with frustration, bursting with anger, and packed with disappointment. As their garbage piles up, they need a place to dump it. And if you let them, they'll dump it on you. When someone wants to dump it all on you, don't take it personally. You just smile, wave, wish them well, and move on. You'll be glad you did. I assure you."

The passenger started thinking how regularly he let garbage trucks run right over him? And how frequently he took his own garbage and spread it onto other people, at work, at home, or on the streets? It was that day he promised to himself, "I'm not going to do it anymore."

Over time he learnt how to distinguish when a "Garbage Truck" was coming to dump all over him. He noticed the junk they were carrying and prepared himself to avoid it all being unloaded onto him. Like the taxi driver, he did not make it a personal thing; he just smiled, waved, wished them well, and moved on.

In His own inimitable way, Bhagavan also tells us:

"Be always saturated with Love. Do not use harsh words against anyone, for words wound more fatally than even arrows. Speak softly and sweetly. Sympathise with suffering with an unshaken faith."

- Adapted from "Let the Garbage Go By..."
By David J. Pollay

Illustrations: S. Aditya, SSSU

– Heart2Heart Team

SIGNALS OF GRACE

In the days of sailing boats, ocean voyages were at great risk from the high seas. There were many shipwrecks due to the strong ocean currents and storms. One such shipwreck in the Pacific Ocean left a lone survivor, who by God's Grace, found himself washed up on a small, uninhabited island.

At first the man thanked his good fortune for being alive. The island was warm and there were no wild animals to bother him. He began to search the island for food and managed to get by on fruits and coconuts. Over time he built himself a small hut out of bamboo and coconut branches, gradually adding to its size and fashioning chairs, a table and various features to make it comfortable.

The man had strong faith and every day he prayed to God for his rescue. He spent hours scanning the horizon in hope for a passing vessel to rescue him - but none came by and he grew rather depressed and lonely. He wondered, "When is God going to answer my desperate prayers?"

Then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost and he was overcome with grief and anger.

"God, how could you do this to me!" he cried. What little he possessed had been cruelly taken away from him – literally everything he owned and cherished. Where was the justice in this – where was God's compassion for his plight!

Early the next day, as he miserably got up from his place at the bottom of a coconut tree near the beach, he was stunned to see a sailing ship approaching the island. He jumped up and frantically started to wave his arms, shouting "Help, help, I am here!" at the top of his voice.

He saw the boat weigh anchor and soon a rowing dinghy came ashore. It had come to rescue him. The joy he felt was indescribable. He embraced his rescuers in sobs of

relief and happiness – his ordeal was over. The crew took him on board to meet the captain and he offered his gratitude for rescuing him.

"How did you know I was here?" he asked. The captain replied, "We saw your smoke signal."

The man suddenly realized how God had caused his hut to burn down just at the moment when a passing ship would see it and be alerted to his presence. He was stunned into silence at the wonderful ways of the all knowing Lord. All his doubts at God's mercy vanished.

Similarly there are instances in our lives when we get too depressed with an unexpected calamity or misfortune. Only later, we realize that they were, in fact, blessings in disguise. Bhagavan Baba tells us:

"Your troubles are often self-created. If you develop firm faith in God and surrender to His Will, He will not fail you. This is the concept of *Sharanagathi* or surrender. The bliss that can be derived from this surrender to God cannot be derived from any other means. Regard whatever happens to you as something intended for your own good."

So remember, next time your "little hut" is burning to the ground, it just may be a "smoke signal" that is summoning the Grace of God.

Illustrations: Mr. Rahul Raja, SSSU

– Heart2Heart Team

Dear Reader, did this article inspire you in any way? Would you like to share you feelings with us? If so please contact us at h2h@radiosai.org mentioning your name and country. Thank you for your time.

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

This quiz concerns festivals celebrated by people of different faiths all around the world in the month of March. It shows how for generations man has exalted God and His Presence on earth in this blessed month in so many beautiful ways and found light, peace, bliss.

1. **Maha Shivaraathri falls on March 6 this year. This day is spent in meditation on Shiva and fasting. Temples dedicated to Shiva are filled with devotees offering prayers, singing hymns and chanting mantras, especially Om Namah Shivaya. After fasting and meditating throughout the day, a vigil is held all night with continued prayers and meditation.**

   The Shiva Linga at the temple or in one's home is bathed with milk, honey and water, and offerings are made to Shiva in the form of Bilva [also known as Bael] leaves, fruits, and other specially prepared foods. Offering Bilva leaves to Shiva on Maha Shivaraathri is considered especially auspicious.

   According to Swami, what is the significance of worshipping Lord Shiva with this three-leaf plant?

   A. Because He is part of the Trinity; Bramha, Vishnu and Shiva

   B. Because He likes the three forms of worship, namely, Bhakthi, Jnaana and Vairaagya (Devotion, Spiritual Wisdom and Detachment).

   C. Because the leaves have a heavenly fragrance.

   D. Because He is considered to have three eyes.

2. **In the Christian calendar, on March 20 this year, the feast of Holy Thursday is celebrated before Easter. Services held on this day typically include a reading from the Gospel account of the Last Supper, which includes Christ's taking bread and wine, declaring them to be his body and blood, and giving them to the Apostles. This day also stresses Jesus' washing of the feet of the Apostles at the start of the Last Supper, as recounted in the Gospel of John. At services on this day, a minister, priest, or lay leader(s) may wash the feet of some members of the congregation to commemorate Christ's actions and command.**

   What is this holy day also known as?

   A. Good Thursday

   B. Maundy Thursday

   C. Blessed Thursday

   D. Last Thursday

3. **After sundown on March 20 this year, Bahá'í's throughout the world celebrate Naw-Ruz, the start of the Bahá'í New Year. For Bahá'í's, this is a religious holiday that marks the end of the Nineteen Day Fast. Naw-Ruz meaning "new day/daylight", is one of the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is to be suspended. It is generally observed with a meeting for prayer and celebration, often combined with a dinner since the sunset on which Naw-Ruz begins ends the last day of the Bahá'í fast. It is also a day of gift-giving.**

   The Bahá'í calendar is divided into 19 months. How many days does each of their months consist of?

   A. 19

   B. 21

   C. 29

   D. 31

4. **The most important events in Christianity are the death and later resurrection of Jesus Christ. Good Friday is the Friday before**

Easter. On March 21, this will commemorate the execution of Jesus by crucifixion. Why do Christians call this day 'good'?

A. Jesus personified goodness.

B. To teach us to love one another.

C. Because the barriers of sin are broken.

D. To remind us of our inherent goodness.

5. **In India, on March 22, Holi, which is the Indian festival of colors and happiness, is celebrated among all ages of people. This colorful festival bridges the social gap and renews relationships. On this day, people rub coloured powder or paints on each others' faces and say, 'Happy Holi!'**

Tradition is that even enemies turn friends on Holi and forget any feeling of hate that may be present, as on this day, people do not differentiate between the rich and poor, and everybody celebrates the festival together, with a spirit of bonhomie and brotherhood.

How does the celebration begin?

A. By breaking coconuts.

B. By lighting up a bonfire.

C. By playing drums to wake people up.

D. By going around in masks to avoid being colored.

6. **On March 26, a very important festival, known as 'Khordad Sal' is celebrated. It is celebrated as the birthday of Zoroaster. What is this commemorative day also knows as?**

A. Holy Fire Day

B. Greater Noruz Day

C. Day of Feast

D. New Year Day

7. **Each year, on World Day of Prayer [WDP], a worldwide movement of women of many traditions, people come together to observe a common day of prayer. It is a movement initiated and carried out by women in more than 170 countries and regions, symbolized by an annual day of celebration – the first Friday of March – to which all people are welcome. This year it is held on March 7.**

Which faith initiated this movement?

A. Muslims

B. Hindus

C. Jews

D. Christians

8. **On March 21 this year, 'Eid Mawlid An-Nabi', is celebrated by many Muslims throughout the world. It commemorates the birth date of the Prophet Muhammad. This date is important to Muslims because the birth of the Prophet Muhammad is regarded as a great blessing for the whole of humanity. Prophet Muhammad is deemed to be the chief of all the Prophets sent on earth and it is to him that the Holy Qur'an was revealed.**

On what aspect do Muslims focus on this special day?

A. Making a Pilgrimage.

B. Prophet Muhammad's Character.

C. Observing Silence.

D. Fasting.

9. **Wherever the Buddha went, the people that he met were very often deeply impressed by his wisdom, energy and boundless creativity. They were attracted to these and other qualities and wished to cultivate them themselves by following the Buddha's example and practicing the Dharma. These people made up the Sangha, or _____.**

They came from all walks of life. Some where rich, some poor, some were Kings and had a very high status in society, and others had very low status. There were women and men, people with family responsibilities and those who were homeless wanderers like the Buddha.

What does 'Sangha' mean?

A. Buddhist Hospital.

B. Buddhist Monastery.

C. Spiritual Community.

D. Buddhist Pilgrimage Center.

10. **Easter is a Christian Festival that celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the third day after Good Friday, the day of his crucifixion, now called Easter Sunday, He rose from the dead. Mourners went to His tomb to collect His body. However, He was not there and they were greeted by an angel who said "He is Risen".**

The Christian festival of Easter is celebrated this year on March 23. It is the most important Christian festival, and the one celebrated with the greatest joy. Churches are filled with flowers, and there are special hymns and songs.

What flower is most commonly displayed on this day?

A. Lily

B. Sun-flower

C. Daisy

D. Rose

ANSWERS:

1. ***B*** ***Because He likes the three forms of worship, namely, Bhakthi, Jnaana and Vairaagya (Devotion, Spiritual Wisdom and Detachment).***

In His 1967 Divine Shivaraathri Discourse, Swami explains: "Shiva has the trident, three-pronged spear, as His weapon; He is worshipped with the bilva leaf, which is tri-foliate. The significance is that Shiva likes the three forms of worship, namely, Bhakthi, Jnaana and Vairaagya (Devotion, Spiritual Wisdom and Detachment)."

2. ***B*** ***Maundy Thursday***

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday before Easter. Christians remember it as the day of the Last Supper, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and established the ceremony known as the Eucharist. The word Maundy comes from the command given by Christ at the Last Supper, that we should love one another. In many other countries, this day is known as Holy Thursday.

3. ***A*** ***19***

The Bahá'í calendar is divided into 19 months of 19 days each. The Bahá'í year begins on March 21, the

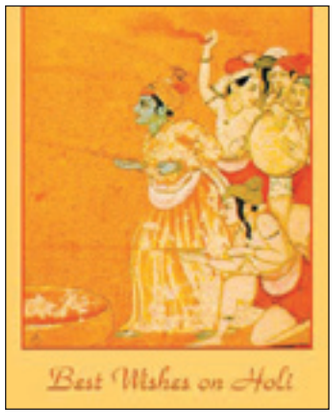
first day of spring. Days begin and end at sunset, and the week begins on Saturday. On the first day of every Bahá'í month, Bahá'í communities gather for the Feast, which includes prayer, fellowship, and discussion of the spiritual and social affairs of the Bahá'í community.

The 19 Bahá'í months and days of the week are named after attributes of God: Splendour, Glory, Beauty, Grandeur, Light, Mercy, Words, Perfection, Names, Might, Will, Knowledge, Power, Speech, Questions, Honour, Sovereignty, Dominion and Loftiness.

4. *C* *Because the barriers of sin are broken.*

Good Friday, also called Holy Friday or Great Friday, is the Friday before Easter (Easter always falls on a Sunday). Christians meditate on Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, and what this means for their faith. The name may be derived from 'God's Friday'. In the same way as 'good-bye' is derived from 'God be with ye'.

5. *B* *By lighting up a bonfire.*



Holi celebration begins with lighting a bonfire on the Holi eve. Numerous legends and stories associated with the Holi celebration make the festival more exuberant and vivid. Here's one of the stories:

Once upon a time, there was once a demon king by the name of Hiranyakashyap who won over the kingdom of earth. He was so egoistic that he commanded everybody in his kingdom to worship him. But to his great disappointment, his son, Prahalada became an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu and refused to worship his father. Hiranyakashyap tried several ways to kill his son Prahalada but Lord Vishnu saved him every time. Finally, he asked his sister, Holika to enter a blazing fire with Prahalada in her lap. For, Hiranyakashyap knew that Holika had a boon, whereby, she could enter the fire unscathed. Treacherously, Holika coaxed young Prahlad to sit in her lap and she herself took her seat in a blazing fire. The legend has it that Holika had to pay the price of her sinister desire by her life. Holika was not aware that the boon worked only when she entered the fire alone.

Prahlad, who kept chanting the name of Lord Vishnu all this while, came out unharmed, as the Lord blessed him for his extreme devotion. Thus, Holi derives its name from Holika and, is celebrated as a festival of victory of good over evil and as the triumph of a devotee. The legend depicts that anybody, howsoever strong, cannot harm a true devotee, and, those who dare torture a true devotee of god shall be reduced to ashes.

6. *B* *Greater Noruz Day*

This is known as the 'Greater Noruz' and happens six days after Now-ruz. This festival is considered one of the most important in the Zoroastrian calendar. Zoroastrians gather in Fire temples for prayers and then celebrate with joyful family and community gatherings.

7. *D* *Christians*

WDP is a movement which brings together Christian women of various races, cultures and traditions in closer fellowship, understanding and action throughout the

year. Through World Day of Prayer, women around the world affirm their faith in Jesus Christ, share their hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, opportunities and needs.

Throughout the entire day, collective prayers are held all over the world, beginning with the first sunrise and ending at the last sunset, thereby following the sun's path around the globe. WDP's motto is "Informed prayer leads to prayerful action." Through the World Day of Prayer, women affirm that prayer and action are inseparable and that both have immeasurable influence in the world.

8. *B* *Prophet Muhammad's Character.*

The most important part of 'Eid Milad-Un-Nabi' is focusing upon the character of the Prophet; on his teachings, sufferings, and how he forgave even his most bitter enemies. Salutations and songs in his praise are recited. In some countries, streets and mosques are decorated and illuminated at night. Some Muslims donate to charity. Families gather together, feasts are arranged and food is served to guests and the poor.

This occasion is not for frivolity or pleasure seeking, but an event of inner joy and happiness. The Celebration of the Holy Prophet's birth is motivated by this obligation to love the Prophet, to obey him, to remember him, to follow his example and be proud of him, as Allah is proud of him.

9. *C* *Spiritual Community.*

Sangha Day is the second most important Buddhist festival. It is a celebration in honour of the Sangha, or the Buddhist community. The story of the origin of this festival tells of a spontaneous gathering, from many separate parts of the countryside, of 1,250 fully enlightened monks. They had all quite independently decided to go and visit the Buddha. All of these monks were direct disciples of the Buddha - having been ordained by him. Because of this gathering the full moon of Magha has come to be known as 'Sangha day' and is a time when monks make an effort to gather together to share their knowledge and experiences.

This assembly had four distinct features. First, all those 1250 who gathered were Arahants [enlightened monks]. Secondly, they were all ordained by the Buddha himself. Thirdly, all of them gathered on their own without any prior invitation from the Buddha and lastly the gathering took place on the full moon day of Magha month (March).

Because of these features, the festival is also known as the Fourfold Assembly, Magha Puja Day, or the Sangha Day. The festival is one of the most important festivals celebrated by the Buddhist community. The festival honours the Sangha, or the Buddhist community and offers a chance to the people to reaffirm their faith and commitment to Buddhist practices and traditions. The Sangha or the spiritual community is extremely important in Buddhism, because it is one of the three jewels of Buddhism apart from the Buddha and the Dhamma.

10. *A* *Lily*

Of all the Easter flowers the Easter Lily is the most popular. In the Christian religion, the white Lily represents purity and the plant is a symbol of Easter and the Resurrection of Christ. The Lily has long been considered a symbol of life and has been associated with various fertility goddesses. Lilies are allegorical to motherhood. The Lily, because of its pure white color, became synonymous with the Virgin Mary. Thus the archangel Gabriel, who told Mary that she would be the Mother of Christ, is very often pictured with a Lily.

A QUIZ ON SWAMI'S DIVINE SHIVARAATHRI DISCOURSES

1. **There are many different stories to explain the origin of the *Shivaraathri* Festival. As we all know, Lord Shiva offered to drink the poison and save the world. His throat is blue ever since, for the poison has pervaded the area.**

   In His 1959 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, Swami explained further: "One of the stories is that when He [Lord Shiva] consumed the *Haalahaala* (death-dealing) poison that emanated from the Ocean of Milk, in response to the prayers of the Worlds, which it threatened to destroy, the heat of the fumes was well nigh unbearable, even for Him."

   According to the scriptures, what relief measure was taken to cool Lord Shiva down?

   A. He had to swim in the Ocean.

   B. All the Gods united and blew strong winds.

   C. River Ganga was poured on His matted locks.

   D. Lord Shiva went into meditation for several years.

2. **In His 1965 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, Swami reminds us: "Do not treat a holy day like *Shivaraathri* as a holiday, set apart for picnics, cinema, card-games, revelry, rivalry and fun. The *rishis* (sages) fixed these days in the calendar for the contemplation of God and the service of God in man, for the removal of the weeds of vices and weakening habits."**

   How does Swami want us to utilize the opportunity of this holy day?

   A. By reading stories of Lord Shiva.

   B. Going on pilgrimages.

   C. By being in isolation and on fast.

   D. For self-improvement.

3. **We all know about the importance of observing a fast and keeping a night-long vigil on the Auspicious *Shivaraathri* Day. But do we know the inner meaning and the significance of it? In His 1969 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, Swami uplifts our consciousness by enlightening us: "Relying on the merely literal meaning of the words, people wait a whole year for this particular holy day to come, in order to miss a meal and call it a fast, to miss a night's sleep and call it a vigil!"**

   What do you think is His say on the true significance of observing a 'fast'?

   A. Living with God.

   B. Control of our palate.

   C. Giving our body a rest.

   D. Speaking sweetly and softly.

4. **Through the years, Swami has demonstrated the Shiva aspect of His Advent as Avatar by blessing us several times with Divine Manifestations of *Lingams* from His Auspicious Body, called as *Lingodhbhavam*. On one such 1971 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, Bhagavan clarifies: "People ask, 'Why does Swami produce the *Lingam* (Formless Form of God) from within Himself on this day?'**

   What reason does Bhagavan reveal for such a formidable act of His?

   A. To worship Lord Shiva more devotedly.

   B. To remind us that Divinity is amidst us.

   C. To continue our fasting every year.

   D. To amaze us about His powers.

5. **In His 1973 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, Swami brings to our light the significance of the various names that Lord Shiva is adored with: "Consider the significance of the Form that Shiva has assumed for human adoration: In His throat, He has the holocaust-producing poison, *Haalahaala* that can destroy all life in a trice. On His head, He has the sacred Ganga River, whose waters can cure all ills, here and hereafter. On His forehead, He has the eye of Fire. On His head, He has the cool comforting Moon. On His wrists, ankles, shoulders and neck He wears deadly cobras, which live in life-giving breath of air."**

One among the many of Lord Shiva's Names is *Mrithyunjaya*. It means He who vanquishes_ _____?

A. Ego

B. Anger

C. Greed

D. Death

6. **In His 1978 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, Swami reveals to us that: "*Shivaraathri* is a very auspicious day for all. It is the fourteenth day of the lunar fortnight, when the Moon is waning and the Sun is in the sign of Aquarius. The festival is, however, related to the Moon rather than the Sun. That is the reason why it is called *Shivaraathri* (the night of Shiva). Unlike other nights, this particular night is the night of consecration, of dedication, of illumination."**

Which part of human body is intimately associated with the Moon?

A. Our Love filled Heart.

B. Our Powerful Mind.

C. Our Innately Pure Soul.

D. Our God-gifted physical Body.

7. **In His 1978 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, once again, Swami reveals a very interesting aspect to the meaning of the word '*Shivaraathri*' itself! He says: "According to numerology, the first three syllables of the word *Shivaraathri* - *shi*, *va* and *raa* - connote the numbers 5, 4 and 2, and the fourth syllable, *thri*, means 'three.' 5, 4 and 2 make one whole, one composite picture of the eleven rudras. *Rudra* means, 'The one who makes man weep.' The eleven *rudras* are: the five senses of perception, the five senses of action, and the mind. These, by leading him astray in pursuit of trivial and transitory pleasures, ruin him and make him weep. But the _____, if it is sought and relied upon, sheds its rays on the eleven and makes them meaningful partners in the progress of man towards self-realization."**

What is Bhagavan teaching us to rely on here?

A. Righteousness

B. Heart

C. Goodness

D. *Aatma*

8. **In His 1978 Divine Discourse, clarifying some of the doubts of devotees, Swami says: "You might ask, 'Swami has often declared that all days are holy days, that there is no special rite or ritual that has to be observed on any single day; but, Swami Himself is pouring *vibhuti* (holy ash) on the Idol and calling it *abhisheka* (anointing the idol); is this right?' Swami is doing so, to teach you a lesson.**

The Vibhuti *Abhisheka* has a potent inner meaning which Swami wants you to grasp. The Vibhuti is the most precious object, in the truly spiritual sense. You know that Shiva burnt the God of Desire or *Kaama*, called *Manmatha* (for he agitates the mind and confounds the confusion already existing there) into a heap of ashes. Shiva adorned Himself with that ash, and thus He shone in

His Glory, as the Conqueror of Desire. When *Kaama* was destroyed, _____ reigned supreme."

What was He referring to?

A. Peace

B. Unity

C. Love

D. Non-Violence

9. In order to develop purity and sacredness in us, Swami has been guiding us tirelessly! On one such 1985 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, Swami helps us achieve this goal: "This *Shivaraathri* is a day when one tries to establish friendship between mind and God. *Shivaraathri* makes one aware of the fact that the same Divinity is all-pervasive and is to be found everywhere. It is said that Shiva lives in Kailasa. But where is Kailasa?"

What answer did Swami give us?

A. In the Himalayas.

B. In our own state of bliss.

C. In service to mankind.

D. In observing spiritual discipline.

10. Swami has taught us that if during *Shivaraathri*, one meditates on God, one can achieve nearness to the Divine. The Supreme sacredness of *Shivaraathri* consists in realizing oneness with the Divine through meditation on God. The world may change, but the Shiva principle is unchanging. The same union of Shiva-Shakti as the Universal Divine Mother and Father is represented by the Name and Form of 'Sai Baba.'

On revealing the meaning of the worship of Shiva, according to Swami, what is the most sublime aspect of the night of '*Shiva Raatri*'?

A. Lord Shiva's Auspiciousness.

B. Lord Shiva's Uniqueness.

C. Lord Shiva's Immortality.

D. Lord Shiva's Transcendental Nature.

ANSWERS:

1. *C* *River Ganga was poured on His matted locks.*

Swami further explained: "So, it is said, Ganga was poured uninterruptedly on His matted locks - this is the explanation for the *Abhisheka* (ceremony of pouring consecrated water, oil, milk, etc., on the idol) which is offered in all Shiva temples for hours on end, and in some places, uninterruptedly - but Shiva was only partly relieved. So the cool Moon was placed on the head; that gave some relief. Then, Ganga was placed on the matted locks. That was of great help. After this, Shiva danced with all the Gods, the Taandava dance. That is the story but all this did not happen on a particular day and so *Shivaraathri* cannot be said to commemorate that day."

2. *D* *For self-improvement.*

Swami lovingly guides us: "Do not waste the few days that you are bent on spending at the Prashanti Nilayam, in days of hectic chatter, vain disputation, idle curiosity or restless wandering. Learn the discipline of the place and limit your talk, your association, your comfort, so that you may live in thoughts Divine, not merely in this atmosphere but later, in your own homes. Take delight in the *Shanti* (peace) of this place; do not disturb it by thought, word or deed. Utilize this rare chance, this unique opportunity, secured by the merit of many births, for self-improvement."

3. *A* *Living with God.*

Swami teaches us further: "The fast is called in Sanskrit as *Upavaasa* and it means something far more significant than missing a meal! It means (*Upa* - near; *Vaasa* - living) Living with, or Living near. With whom? Near whom? Near and with God. *Upavaasa* means living in the unbroken constant presence of the Lord, by *Naamasmarana* (remembrance of Divinity); that is the real fast, holding fast to Him.

And, *Jaagarana* (Vigil)! It means keeping awake, shaking off the sleep of the senses and being fully aware of the Light of Love that is the Divine essence, in all. It means, shaking off the drowsiness and laziness, and deep concentration in meditation and *sadhana*. Look at the word for heart in Sanskrit: *hrudayam*. It means *Hrudi-ayam* that is to say, "The Divine Heart"; the place where He resides, where He is installed. By vigilance and the practice of the constant presence of God, you must install Him in your heart and see Him as installed in all other beings as well. That is the main purpose of these holy days and the regulations laid down for their observance."

4. *B* *To remind us that Divinity is amidst us.*

Swami confirms: "Let Me tell you, it is impossible for you to understand the attributes of the Divine and to measure its potentialities, or, to gauge the significance of the Manifestation of Divinity. It is *agamya* (unreachable) and *agochara* (un-understandable, mysterious). Therefore, in order to bear witness to the fact that the Divinity is amidst you, it becomes necessary to express this attribute. Or else, the atmosphere of hatred, greed, cruelty, violence and irreverence will overwhelm the good, the humble and the pious.

The *Linga* is just a symbol, a sign, an illustration, of the beginningless, the endless, and the limitless - for it has no limbs, no face, no feet, no front or back, no beginning or end. Its shape is like the picture one imagines the *Niraakaara* (Formless) to be. As a matter of fact, *linga* means - *leeyate* (that in which all forms and names merge) and *gamyate* (that towards which all names and forms are proceeding, to attain fulfillment). It is the fittest symbol of the All-pervasive, the All-knowing, and the All-powerful. Everything is subsumed in it; everything starts from it; from the *Lingam* arises *Jangam* (Universe), from the *Jangam* arises *sangam* (association, attachment, activity) and as a result of the *sangam*, one realizes the *lingam* (attributeless *Aatma*). Thus, the circle is completed - from the Beginningless to the Beginningless. This is the lesson that *Lingodbhavam* (emergence of the *Linga*) teaches. The *lingashareera* (the physical body) that is inhabited by the *Aatma* is but a vesture worn for this particular sojourn! Many a vesture has this Soul worn, though its reality is Eternal!"

5. *D* *Death*

Swami adds: "Shiva, again, is said to go about with a begging bowl. He teaches that renunciation, detachment, indifference to good fortune or bad, are the paths to attain Him. Shiva is known as *Mrithyunjaya* (He who vanquishes death). And, He is also the *Kaamaari* (the destroyer of Desire). These two Names show that he who destroys desire can conquer Death, for desire breeds activity, activity breeds consequence, consequence breeds bondage, bondage results in birth and birth involves death. Shiva means, Graciousness, Auspiciousness, *Mangalam*. He is all Graciousness, ever Auspicious, *Sarva Mangalam*."

6. *B* *Our Powerful Mind.*

Swami reiterates: "The mind is intimately associated with the Moon. *Chandra* (the deity of the Moon), is the presiding deity of the mind. He loses one sixteenth of his brilliance every day after the Full Moon day and continues waning until on this night he is left with just one sixteenth of his power. The waned Moon may be

taken to stand for the mind with all its vagaries and waywardness reduced after it has been conquered by *sadhana* (spiritual discipline). On this night there is just a minute part of the mind left to be conquered and that can be done by keeping vigil and dwelling on the Glow of God."

7. *D* *Aatma*

Swami reconfirms: "The rays from the *Aatma* illumine the intelligence, the illumined intelligence alerts the mind and the alerted mind gets control of the senses, making the path clear for the person to proceed through knowledge to wisdom."

8. *C* *Love*

Swami guides us further with His Divine Knowledge: "When *Kaama* was destroyed, Prema (Love) reigned supreme. When there is no desire to warp the mind, Love could be true and full. What greater offering can you give God to glorify Him than the ash signifying your triumph over tantalizing Desire? Ash is the ultimate condition of things; it cannot undergo any further change. The *Abhisheka* with *Vibhuuthi* is done to inspire you to give up desire and offer Shiva the ashes of its destruction as the most valuable of all the articles you have earned. Ash cannot fade as flowers do in a day or two; it does not dry and disappear or get soiled and unpotable as water does; it will not lose colour as leaves do, in a few hours; it does not rot as fruits do in a few days. Ash is ash for ever and ever. So, burn your vices, and your bad habits; worship Shiva, rendering yourselves pure in thought, word and deed."

9. *B* *In our own state of bliss.*

Swami helps us learn the true meaning of Kailasa: "Kailasa is our own joy, our own bliss. It means that Easwara lives in the Kailasa of delight. If we can develop that sense of joy and delight in our mind, that itself is Kailasa. How can one get this joy? It comes when we develop purity and steadiness and sacredness. Then the heart becomes filled with peace and bliss. Then your heart itself will be Kailasa and Shiva will be there in the sanctum sanctorum of your heart, within the temple which is your body."

10. *A* *Lord Shiva's Auspiciousness.*

In His 1983 Divine *Shivaraathri* Discourse, Swami has explained: "Whether one does good or bad acts, there is no escape from their consequences. Knowing this, our ancients always sought what was good and auspicious. This is the meaning of the worship of Shiva. When we speak of *Shiva Raatri*, we refer to the night that is associated with Shiva, that is, an auspicious night. *Shivam* means that which is auspicious. The Shiva principle is totally free from anything that is inauspicious or unholy in any circumstance. When incarnations like Rama and Krishna appear in human bodies, they have some inauspicious associations related to their bodies. Although they incarnate for the purpose of saving the world, protecting the devotees and uplifting humanity, they have to shed their bodies sometime or other. Hence in the name of such *Avatars*, the honorific 'Sri' is prefixed to indicate the sacredness of their Advent. But for Shiva, no such appellation is needed because Shiva transcends corporeal limitations. Unlike Sri Rama or Sri Krishna there is no "Sri Shiva" or "Sri Shankara". Shiva or Shankara is always auspicious. The realization of oneness with Shiva means the attainment of immortality." ■

QUIZ ON HEART 2 HEART

This quiz tests your recall powers from reading Heart2Heart and all the questions are related to Lord Shiva and Shivaraathri. In the answers we have included the links to all the stories and articles from which they have been taken. So please click on these links and enjoy reading about His glory.

1. **In our 'Moments, Memories and Miracles: Punkahwala' from the Dec 1st 2003 issue, we presented a story from Sanathana Sarathi, October 1961, shared by Dr. R [about his train ride] on a Mahaa Shivaraathri day at Prashanti Nilayam.**

   "Dr. R turned in bed and opened his eyes, for there was a strange smell in the compartment, something burning, he thought! The fan was emitting sparks, like a Catherine Wheel! There was no one else in the coach, except his wife who was fast asleep. There was no time even to think out a plan. He put out his hand and fumbled with the switch, but, good God, it was out of order!

   'Baba! O Baba, save us, O Baba!' The prayer automatically rose from his heart, for Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba was his never failing succour."

   What happened next?

   A. Baba pulled the chain and the train stopped.

   B. Baba came and repaired the fan.

   C. Baba pulled him and his wife out of the train.

   D. The Electricity failed and the fan just died!

2. **In our cover story: 'Lingodbhava' from the Feb 15th 2004 issue, we presented an article by late Dr. Eruch B. Fanibunda, a reputed dentist, and a great devotee of Bhagavan, from his book "Vision of the Divine".**

   He wrote: "Shiva in the form of the Lingam, is adored and revered for the acquisition of Divine Wisdom. In temples dedicated to Shiva, it is said that none should pass between 'Nandi' the bull and the Lingam."

   While we know that the Lingam represents Shiva, what does Nandi, the bull represent?

   A. Our earthly desires.

   B. Our hidden animal qualities.

   C. The Individual Soul.

   D. To be strong like a bull.

3. **In 'What Should We Learn from Lingodbhavam?' from the April 2006 issue, Prof. G. Venkataraman shares with us his view point on how the Lingam is formed inside Swami.**

   "We all say that Swami brought out a Golden Lingam. Yes, that is true but for a moment just reflect on this fact. Can anyone have so much gold inside? The answer is no. Then wherefrom does the gold needed to form the Lingam inside Swami come? It comes from the five elements that form Swami's body as well as ours. In our bodies, those five elements cannot specially combine to form gold. However, they do inside Swami's body, as the result of Divine Leela."

   What does he compare this phenomenon to?

A. Like a baby growing in the womb

B. Like a goldsmith shaping an ornament

C. Like the formation of butter from milk

D. Like a geologist unearthing a mine

4. **In our cover story 'With Baba to Badrinath' from the March 1st 2004 issue, Prof. Kasturi describes the intimate details of his 1961 visit with Beloved Baba to the holy shrine of Badrinath, nestling in the majestic Himalayas, the abode of Lord Shiva.**

"17th June was a Day of Days, a Day that will be enshrined in the memory of everyone in the party, for years and years. In pursuance of His Mission of re-infusing spiritual efficacy in all Holy Places where men congregate for acquiring peace and joy…Baba that day re –invigorated Narayana worship at Badrinath, by means of a unique ceremony, whose significance is beyond our tiny understanding!

During the morning Abhishekam to the idol of Badrinarayana, while Baba was inside the temple facing the shrine, about 8.15AM… Baba created a charming thousand petalled 'gold' Lotus, and before the wonder of the people around Him could express itself in an awe stricken gasp, He waved His hand before the Shrine and, lo, there was a Jyothirlinga in His palm, which He placed on the shining Lotus."

What did Bhagavan do next?

A. Bhagavan performed Abhishekham to the Lingam.

B. Bhagavan asked everyone to sit and do meditation.

C. Bhagavan created 8 more lingams.

D. Bhagavan blew on it and made it vanish.

5. **In our cover story, 'Sai Leela' from the April 1st 2004 issue, Mrs. Vijayakumari describes how in the olden days [the period of between 1940 -1950] on many occasions, Swami would shower His Love in His own unique way by taking them all out to the Chitravathi sands for a memorable evening of Leelas that went far beyond just materialisation, to give a larger glimpse into the immensity of His Cosmic Powers.**

One such incident is recorded in her well-known book, Anyadha Saranam Naasthi: 'We now began to wonder what miracle He would perform next, when He announced: "I shall show you the Third Eye. Watch attentively." "Third Eye?! How does it look?" we wondered. Swami's body was not visible but His head appeared gigantic, as if stretched across the entire sky. Bewildered and stupefied, we stared at the sky. An orifice appeared on Swami's forehead between His two eyebrows; and fiery sparks issued from that opening. We were dazzled by the brilliance of those sparks. We were also scared. More than being afraid about ourselves, we were worried about what might happen to Swami. The sparks continued to gush out.'

What happened next?

A. Most people ran away.

B. Swami turned day into night.

C. Thunder and lightning occurred.

D. Many people fell down unconscious.

ANSWERS:

1. ***B*** ***Baba came and repaired the fan.***

'The train slowed down just a wee bit….He rose and peeped into the darkness, far out into the oncoming

stage. Suddenly he saw a man clinging to his door holding fast to the handle…The man said, "I am a punkahwala; come to repair the fan!" He looked a seasoned mechanic; he had a screw driver in his hand; he wore a khaki shirt and drawers; he smiled in an appealing way. So, the doctor opened the door and let him in. The train gained speed. The wife too woke. It was all so easy for his skilful hands; a few turns of the screw and tap or two at the proper place; the sparks ceased, the fan whirred, swift and safe. He was a silent, skilful hand. He then sat crouching in a corner and asked the doctor to lie down and sleep. His voice was so sweet, his kindness was so overpowering that the doctor lost all fear and suspicion. He laid himself down and turned away from him and dozed. But, the wife had her own fears. She had read and heard of robberies in running trains of even worst calamities and so, she had half an eye open to watch the stranger's slightest movement. And, even while her eye was watching him, he disappeared!

A week later, they get a letter from Baba at Puttaparthi, "How did you like my Punkah repair?" Dr. R. himself narrated this wonderful incident when he came for MahaShivaraathri to Puttaparthi. "This is My Duty; when a call comes out of distress and devotion, I hasten to the rescue", Baba said. And sure enough, Baba kept His word! (from Sanathana Sarathi, October 1961)

2. C *The Individual Soul.*

He writes: "Baba has explained that the bull or the Pasu (animal) represents the Jiva and the Lingam is the symbol of Shiva. As they both have to merge into one, no one should pass between the bull and the Lingam. Also, the installed Lingam has to be seen through the two horns of the bull; which means that one has to see Shiva in the various Jivas. Pasu or Jiva, and Pasupati or Shiva are one; Nandi or Jiva and Eeswara or Shiva, become Nandeeswara.

Baba says, 'When in bondage it is referred to as Nandi and when free it is Eeswara. When the Pasu is offered fully to the Pasupati and its separate identity is cast away, then it is a true Yagna (sacrifice). This significance has been forgotten by the worshippers today.'"

3. A *Like a baby growing in the womb*

Prof. Venkataraman explains: "Next, the gold that forms inside thus must aggregate, become liquid, acquire the shape of a Lingam, solidify, and then only emerge. It is all very much like a baby growing in the womb, starting from a single cell. I am sure you are aware that gold is a solid at room temperature. If it has to exist as a liquid, and that is what happens at start during the Lingodhbhavam, then it must be a very high temperature, something like 600 degrees. Now at that temperature, the stomach of ordinary mortals would simply burn away and turn into ashes. But such is the control exercised by the Divine that the inner organs of the Avatar, do not get destroyed, though they experience excruciating pain. By the way, it is to counter the enormous burning sensation within that Swami drank so much water. Frankly, I have never seen any one consume so much water. But then, there was a reason for it in this case."

4. A *Bhagavan performed Abhishekham to the Lingam.*

Prof. Kasturi further describes: "Materializing a 'silver' Abhisheka Vessel full of holy water from Gangothri itself (as He announced), Baba Himself performed Abhisheka to that translucent Nethra Lingam. He had graciously taken the Linga round to everyone and made all to wonder at its quite effulgence and at a clearly visible Eye that was somehow incorporated in it. Devotees recited Sri Rudram, Purushasuktham and Narayana Suktham, while Baba was pouring the sacred water on the Lingam. Then, Baba created 108 miniature Bilva leaves or rather replicas of that holy leaf, in 'gold'; they fell in a lightning shower from His Palm on to a silver plate. He again waved His Hand and this time, O Blessed moment, 108 actual 'thumme' flowers fresh with even the touch

of the morning dew, fell from that Divine Palm! With these, Baba directed Dr.B.Ramakrishna Rao, presumably on behalf of all assembled to do Puja to the Linga, the Ashtottara Puja, as mentioned in the Sastras. After Puja, Baba collected the Abhisheka Ganga and gave a share of it to each one, Himself pouring it into the mouth with His own merciful Hand.

With the Manifested, we proceeded to the Unmanifested! At every step among the Himalayas we experienced the Prema of the Lord whose was with us! At every turn, His Grace guarded and guided us…May He be our Guard, our Guide and our God forever!"

5. *D* *Many people fell down unconscious.*

'Meanwhile, many had fallen down unconscious, and we did not know why these people had fainted. That made us even more scared. Feeling lost and not knowing what to do, we began to cry. Suddenly, Swami was in our midst. "What happened?" He asked, patting us gently on the shoulder. "Why are you crying? Why have all these people fainted?" Not knowing what answers to give, we just hugged Him and continued to weep! As a few of those who had fainted recovered and got up, we mustered a little strength and asked Him, "Swami, are You alright? How come we did not see You there?" Even as we asked all these questions, we patted His face to assure ourselves that He was really with us.

Swami laughed heartily and assured us that He was indeed alright. With a wave of His hand He materialised vibhuti and applied it on our foreheads. One by one, those who had fainted began to revive. It was a strange experience. We felt as if we were floating on air. It was a peculiar state of mind. We all went back to the Mandir and sat down for Bhajans. But we could not sing properly because we all felt dizzy. We were in that state that whole evening. Next day when we found ourselves to be in the same state, we asked Swami about it. With a smile He said, "You have been praying for a glimpse of this Third Eye during many past lives. In response to your prayers, I gave you Darshan of it. However, I did not show you even a thousandth part of its brilliance. You could not have withstood that. You could not even bear what you saw! Your present state is the result of that spectacle!" …… He again created vibhuti and smeared it on each of our foreheads. We gained a semblance of normalcy thereafter.'

FEEDBACK FROM OUR READERS
On February 2008 Issue

Feedback on the Cover Story: His Boys – His Voice: "Hryudayavani and Heartening Glimpses from Bygone Convocation Dramas

Sairam!

I was deeply touched on reading this article. Swami's Love for each of us is unconditional. He is truly our all. We must all change ourselves to become the persons He wants us to be. The way He expresses His concern about each aspect of the Convocation drama was beautiful. As I read the article and watched the videos, tears just kept flowing from my eyes. It was quite touching! I simply can't describe the feelings.

Thank you for bringing out such a wonderful write-up, with photographs and also interviews with some of the main people involved in the drama. Jai Sai Ram!

Regards,
Aarthi

Sai Ram Dear Members of H2H,

I absolutely loved the article on the Convocation drama; it was fantastic, beautiful and utterly inspiring, and very uplifting! Please do keep on presenting more such wonderful articles.

Loving Regards,
Nimish Ubhayakar

Thank You! That was excellent! Like everybody else it brought tears to my eyes. I can tell a lot of time and energy went into producing this for sharing with Swami's devotees.

Sanmayi

Sai Ram H2H Team,

Thank you very much for the cover story of this month: "His Boys - His Voice". To me, it was very inspiring to read about Swami and His work with the students and staff. Thank you very much for your service!

Sai Ram,
Joop Sturkenboom,
Holland.

Dear Sir,

In this month's H2H issue, the article on Swami's boys "Hrudayavaani" is mind blowing. It's awesome. I had tears rolling down my cheeks as I kept reading it and felt this experience should never stop. Just by reading the whole episode if one can have such a great and divine experience, then how fortunate are those who could actually witness the whole event!

H2H is doing a wonderful service to mankind. I don't have words to express, in fact words will not suffice. I thank Swami from the bottom of my heart for everything. Though I am not in a position to have Swami's Darshan daily, Swami has come to me in the form of H2H to give Darshan - it is such a purifying experience.

Thank you very much H2H Team.
Nair Ramesh

Dear Sirs,

The stories about the Convocation dramas are very inspiring. For people like me who have grown up outside our culture (though in the same country) and studied in various schools and colleges, these incidents, events and experiences are verily nectar and greatly benefit our soul. It also inspires people like me to live a worthy, meaningful and Godly life.

Swami is the Guru of Gurus... it's really one's great fortune to interact with Bhagavan and get His Smile as a reward for our actions. Prostrations to all the fortunate students of Bhagavan and thanks for all the wonderful messages we are blessed to get from the website.

Krishnan

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for sharing with all of us this beautiful article. My mother and I enjoyed it a lot, and it had a special meaning for us. She was delighted with this article. It was a very moving story. We greatly enjoyed knowing the attention Swami gave to every detail of the process during the Convocations Dramas and we could not contain our smiles. We were very overjoyed to learn of Swami's creation of the gold needle for the Krishna actor.

With loving regards in Sai Love,
Ana Margarita Urzúa Camelo,
México

Dear Sir,

We were greatly thrilled and overwhelmed with emotions when we went through the details of the Drama enacted during the Convocation. Every inch of it was touching and highly informative. Our congratulations to all the participants.

Yours sincerely,
S.Jayaraman and Vathsala Jayaraman

Feedback on Conversations With Sai: Sathyopanishad

Sai Ram,

Last month I was disappointed that the series 'Conversations with Sai ' was over. Now I am glad that you have started with Prof. Anil Kumar's book 'Satyopanishad'. I had been on the look out for this book for quite sometime. I hope this is as enlightening and enriching as the previous one and brings us closer to Bhagavan. Thank you.

Sai Ram,
Latha

Feedback on In Quest of Infinity

Dear H2H Team,

I have had the good fortune to read your series of articles on the origin of the Universe and the history of atomic physics and recent advances in astronomy in general. They are outstanding, as I am sure many people have told you. The beauty is in the elegance of the presentation of complex theory in terms laymen can understand. It is a beautiful piece of writing. Hopefully you are considering having it published by a good publishing company. I am sure it will be on the New York Times bestseller list in no time and reach a much wider audience.

Best Regards,
Madan

Feedback on Harnessing The Heart - Part 3: Go With The Flow Or Stand Your Ground?

Dear Friends,

This is a superb article by Mr. Mani, as it illustrates so well the absolute value of being truthful, whatever the consequences might be. It reminds me of my own experience in a court of law where I was an expert witness. I stuck to the truth as I saw it and was torn to bits by the opposing party's barrister because I revealed the result of some of my research, which cast a bad light on the opposition, a powerful organisation. As a result, I lost some of my business, but only for a short time. I was totally unaffected and I was glad to have stuck to Swami's teachings. I may add that, while sitting in the

witness stand, I imagined Swami there instead of me and handed it over to Him. It helped a great deal because I am normally rather shy, especially in such a situation.

With Love,
Jacqueline Trost MA,
Australia

Wonderful experiences! A timely report and a must for all the freshers who enter their career. Please try to include such mails and personal experiences of our illustrious students, in the house magazines of the big corporates. This will be an eye opener for the current materialistic world. I thank Swami for sending such nice experiences.

Sai Ram,
Bhagirathi Radhakrishnan

Feedback on Indelible Memories of Love

Dear H2H Team,

Sai Ram. This piece was not just inspiring but most wonderful. One can experience Sai's Love flowing through even while reading it. I can imagine what it must have been like when it was performed!

Sai Ram,
Harendra Singh,
Dehradun

Feedback on My All Knowing Sai

Dear Sai Brothers, Sai Ram,

I have just gone through the above article by Dr. Gayatri Raghavan. It is so wonderful to see how our Lord Sai fulfils our wishes and rescues us in helpless situations. The powerful Grace of Bhagavan comes to us when we are in touch with Him in our prayers and by way of His Physical Presence. Please continue to send us such inspiring stories which we love to share with Sai devotees in Japan and overseas.

At His Lotus Feet,
Ram Chugani,
Kobe, Japan

Sairam,

I found the article by Dr. Gayatri Raghavan concerning Swami's interactions with her to be most heart warming and reassuring of the Divine Mother's ever constant Love for us. Thank you for sharing it with us, it was wonderful reading!

Sairam,
Roger Parkhurst,
Indiana, USA

Feedback on Amazing Grace

Sai Ram,

The article 'Amazing Grace' is really very wonderful. It conveys the essence of taking in the true Christmas spirit as well as the right attitude to experience His Love and Grace in any act you do. Just this morning I happened to read an article in the Feb issue of Reader's Digest, which highlighted in just a sentence as how Sathya Sai Baba entered the life of an 83 yr old lady named Annam Narayan through a window to guide her in the path of service to blind and maimed people. It was thrilling to read this article to reiterate the feeling. Great! Keep up the good work.

Sai Ram,
M.G.Nanda Gopal, Librarian, Sri Sathya Sai University, Brindavan Campus, Bangalore.

I loved this story. It was very inspiring to read of the lovely Iranian Muslim lady's love for Christianity and for our Beloved Lord who is the essence of all religions. It would be wonderful if such stories could reach outside the Sai community too.

It is very touching. Thank you.
With loving Sai Pranams,
Ursula

Feedback on the Healing Touch article, When Love Beckons…

Sai Ram,

I just completed reading this article and experienced only one reaction - profuse flow of tears. It is more than abundantly clear that every word was flowing from the

very depths of the young lady's heart and with such love. May Swami bless this child with all His Love and happiness for Eternity.

I am eternally grateful to Swami for all that He has blessed us with - most importantly good health. I am more than certain that the only way that I can express my heart felt gratitude to Swami is to serve others. Currently I am lagging behind in this endeavour and I promise myself that this will be rectified promptly. Thank you very much for publishing this beautiful article.

Sai Ram
Prem

Dear H2H,

The feelings of Shweta are so touching and they are beautifully expressed. It is true we all take for granted the life given to us by Baba. As she said, every moment is a present and we should live thanking God for this present and Love everyone. Thanks for bringing this article.

Sai Ram
Rajesh

Dear Friends at 'Heart to Heart',

Thank you from my heart for the article 'When Love Beckons'. It came to me on a day (Thursday) when I was deeply disturbed about the 'fits' being suffered by a young man who comes to help me in our garden. I remembered an article which appeared some time ago in Heart to Heart, which I had printed and handed over to him suggesting him to trust our Lord and go to the Whitefield Hospital. When I opened the computer I was thrilled to read your article. Thanks to you all and to 'Shweta' for sharing her experience.

Love and Sai Ram,
S. Mohan

Dear Sai brothers,

Most of the articles in H2H are excellent as Education in Human Values. The Sai message on selfless service is fast spreading all over the world through Radio Sai. I would like to mention your section on "Healing Touch". What makes it remarkable and inspiring for us, the readers, is the selfless, dedicated and loving services provided by staff members to the patients who otherwise would have no future. Bhagavan Baba has, by establishing these Hospitals, given to all of us the message of serving our fellowmen, wherever we are. Swami's Hospitals are Temples of Healing both for body and mind. They provide new hope and a better future for humanity.

The accounts also infuse thought-provoking teachings to the medical community in the rest of India and the world to serve poor and needy people free of cost. At least for part of their time. "Service to man is service to God" as Swami says. It's about time that we all try to practise Swami's message and become truly His messengers by selfless actions for society's benefits.

Gopal,
Canada

Feedback on Adding Purpose to Life

Dear Sai Brothers,

This story was one of the best I have ever read. It is awe inspiring and such articles I am sure would open the eyes of many, who, like the class teacher have been living in a cloud of their own. I thank you for providing such stories which would instil in us the feeling that God has indeed created all human beings equal and some may require to be tapped to bring out their excellence. Best wishes to the Heart 2 Heart team and I pray to our Dear Sai that you may continue to give us such lovely stories to correct ourselves.

Pranams at the Lotus Feet of Swami,
V. K. Narasu

Feedback on Bhajan Classroom

Sairam,

This virtual bhajan classroom is great. I want to thank you all for this wonderful service you are doing. Is it possible also to include the notation for the bhajans? I would also prefer the Indian notation or saregama notation, not the western notation system.

Thanking you in advance,
R. Maharaj,
Trinidad & Tobago
[Dear Mr. Maharaj, we plan to start notations soon – H2H Team]

Feedback on the Quiz section

Sai Ram Dear Sir,

I attempted the quiz and find it very interactive, interesting, and not too difficult and more importantly it is an excellent refresher course for people like me who, more often than not, get lost in the mundane rat race. Thank you very much and my warmest regards.

Sai Ram,
Premchander Raj,
USA

Dear H2H Team,

I liked the quiz very much. When my first question was right I felt very happy. As my second question was wrong, I understood that only from mistakes will we learn many things. I enjoyed the quiz till the last question.

Sai Ram,
Sangeethaadiyodi Adiyodi

Feedback on the Sunday Special of Feb 17th, Daring To Think

Sairam,

Thank you for this lovely article. It was truly inspiring. I could greatly relate to the part about believing that Swami is God not because our parents or grandparents say so but because of our own personal experience. I sincerely believe Swami is God as a result of my own conviction.

I also found myself shaking my head vigorously while reading the following lines: "It is better to live your own life, even if no one accepts, rather than living somebody else's, just because others accept it." I am a firm believer in the above lines. I believe in Swami and have a set of principles in life that I live by. I feel that I would lose my identity if I live by what others say. I can feel Swami's presence with me all the time and I know I'm on the right path. Thank you once again for bringing out such an article.

Jai Sai Ram.
Regards,
Aarthi

Dear Sir,

That was really too good. It really refreshed me and made me feel rejuvenated. I have even forwarded it to my friends. Kindly continue sending us transcripts of such cogent speakers.

Thank you,
Niyati Tiwari

Dear H2H Team,

This morning I read the article about thinking and yes, I am very inspired and encouraged by it. In such a simple, yet profound way, it is made clear how much we allow ourselves to conform to what we are taught without questioning.

I would like to have permission to print this article so that I can share it with others and we can really begin to support each other in thinking for ourselves and find new creative ways of beings that serve to bring greater peace, harmony and healing in our world.

Thank you for this article at this time. It is so appropriate and needed in our world. I also realize how much trust it takes to think for ourselves and it is also the only way that we can be true to the Divine that is within each one of us and in all around us.

Peace to you,
Anke

Sai Ram!

Student Hari Krishna's analysis on 'Daring to Think, Talk and Act' is profoundly logical and I shall keep it as a reference for quoting in discussions.

Sai Pranams!
S.R.Rama Subbaiah,
Bangalore.

Sairam Radio Sai Team and all my brothers and sisters,

A wonderful speech, very scientific and Divine too. A speech with rock hard conviction and science and reasoning.....I can say only one thing...."Swami, You

have handpicked Your Students and Devotees....." I was wondering, once Swami is physically away from this world....what then....He has started preparing for that situation....He will definitely speak through His wonderful Students and Devotees.

And thanks for Radio Sai, as usual you have provided with us an inspiring article.

Anitha Sreekumar,
Abu Dhabi

Sairam,

The last part of the article brought to me the reassurance that although I might not be directly deriving any gains from being honest to myself, the fact that Swami is noticing all this is enough to keep me going. The only thing that I want to say is 'Thanks...'

Sai Priya Mahajan

Sairam H2H,

'Daring to Think' is a wonderful article. It has wonderful challenges for all. Equally we also realize Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Theresa were also social thinkers outside the box. As long as thinking enables Human Values, it enables the greater good of Humanity. That is the ability of humanity to manifest divinity as Swami guides us. A follow up article to this theme would be wonderful.

Love and regards,
Srilatha

Om Sri Sai Ram,

I have been rotating my japamala mechanically and doing my puja with little concentration from past few days. Swami's Words came as bolt from the blue. Thank You Swami for the stern and timely teaching. The article 'Daring to Think' is simply amazing and revolutionary. No words to express.

Thank You H2H Team

Sai Ram,
Rajeshwari L. M.

I am really impressed by the talk. We all fail to think. Is it because the way we are brought up? We do not encourage the children to ask questions. We always believe that if a child asks question it is arrogant behaviour. We should get rid of this habit and encourage children to think and not follow blindly. The story about the person in the Indian Oil Corporation is really sorrowful. We should be daring enough to oppose corruption, but before doing that, we should also try to gather mass support so that we are not defeated before our goal.

Om Sri Sairam!
Sujatha

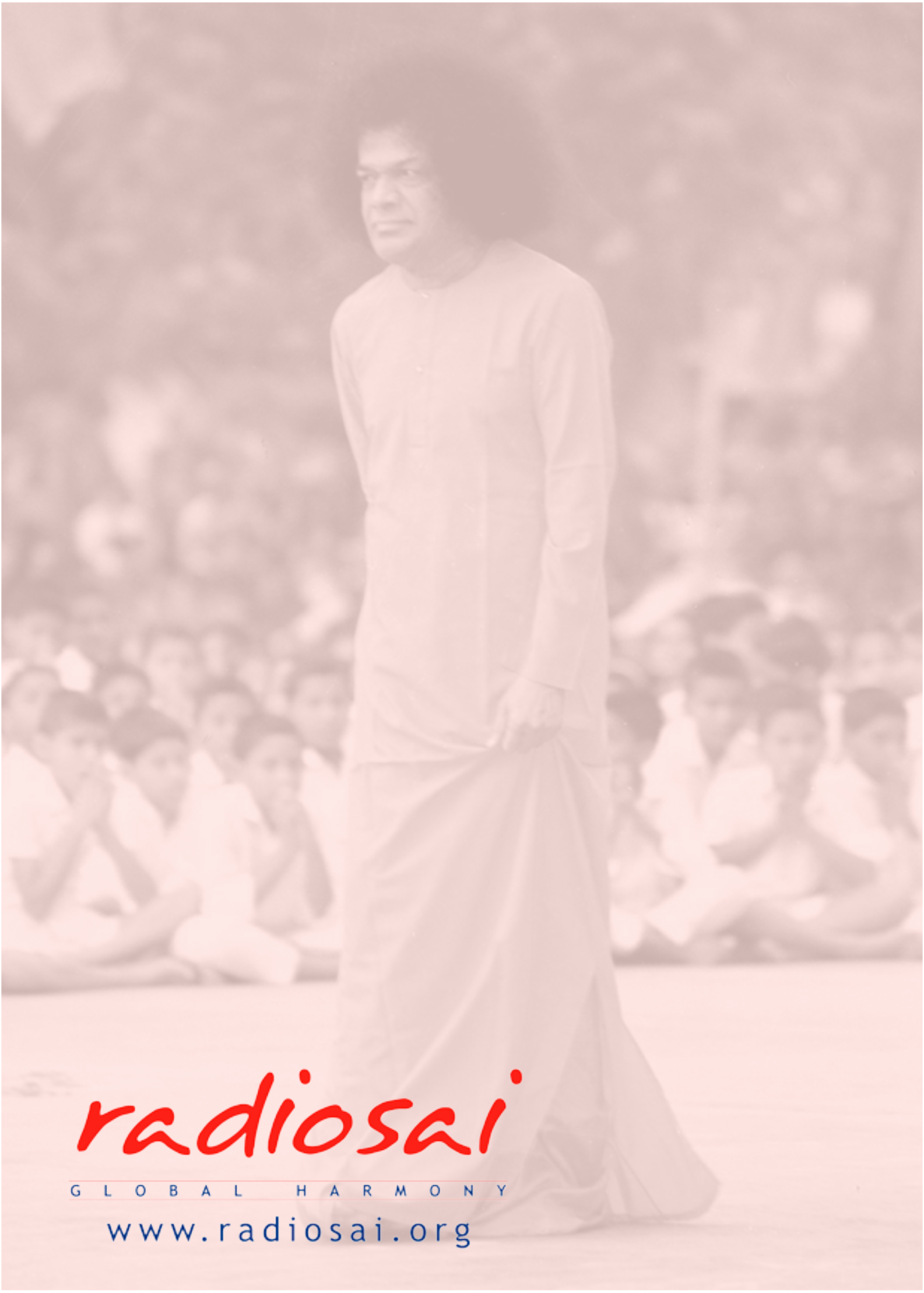
Sai Ram,

The article "Daring to Think" has essentially made me daring to think about my life. It was awe inspiring. I wish for many such articles to be published and inspire many more like me.

Thanks,
Kanakambika Jehan Mohan

Divine love is different from human attachments. It is timeless. It is Omnipresent. Make it your sole ideal. It is inherent in you. Manifest it in the proper way. If there is sugar at the bottom of a tumbler filled with water, you can make the whole water sweet by stirring the sugar and dissolving it. Likewise, your heart is a tumbler. At the bottom, there is Divinity. Take the spoon of Buddhi (intellect), stir the heart by the process of sadhana. Then, the Divinity in the heart will circulate through the entire body. Then, every action of yours will be sweet, your speech will be sweet, your walking will be sweet, your looks will be sweet, your thoughts will be sweet. You will be sweet all over.

- Divine Discourse, March 7, 1997.



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