

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Dear Reader,

Prashanthi Nilayam in the last month was witness to something it has never seen since it was christened and formally inaugurated by Bhagawan more than five decades ago in 1950. What a glorious Birthday it was! Bhagawan, in the sparkling white robe in the morning and the stunning yellow robe in the afternoon was irresistibly resplendent!

In the Divine Discourse on His 80th Year, Bhagawan reaffirmed His divinity in no uncertain terms and once again reiterated the great importance of Truth and Love in modern times. It was literally a sea of humanity in the Hill View Stadium on that momentous morning. Notwithstanding the discomforts and inconveniences, a few lakhs were in this 'Vatican of the East' and 'Mecca for Sai Devotees' to pay their homage and gratitude to the One who has touched them, transformed them and given a whole new meaning to their lives. Directly or indirectly, each one is a recipient of His boundless compassion and grace. And why not? For eight decades the only activity Swami has engaged Himself in is – Selfless Love.

After the wonderful University and the magnificent Hospitals, Swami proffered life-giving water to more than 1000 villages in Andhra Pradesh and subsequently to the whole city of Chennai – all for no charges whatsoever. And now there is yet another story of Sai's inscrutable compassion – The Sri Sathya Sai Godavari Drinking Water Project. Swami is providing drinking water to half a million people in the interior uplands areas of East Godavari and West Godavari districts in Andhra Pradesh and hardly anyone knows about it! Not many even inside the Ashram in Prashanthi Nilayam are aware of the tremendous work that is going on silently in these two Godavari districts so that the tribals and rural folk, some living in the forests and some spread over 500 villages, get safe water to drink every single day! This is precisely the reason why we have chosen the Godavari story for our cover story this time. You will get a good glimpse of what has been done and what is being done for these tribal populace in interior Andhra Pradesh.

As a fitting compliment to this cover story, there is a very revealing and elucidative article called "God, Man and Water". In this you may learn how proper understanding of water resources and their usage is so important in present times for the world's wellbeing, and what are the Swami's views on this great life-giving and life-sustaining element on earth.

After the Birthday, the next big event in the Divine Presence is joyful Christmas. Thousands flock to Prashanthi Nilayam to be with their "Father", their Divine shepherd, the Embodiment of Christ Consciousness. For millions, Baba is the "Father who has come again" as promised by Jesus to redeem mankind and the similar between Sai and Jesus is obvious – be it the message, the manifold miracles or the explicable magnificence and munificence. Every Christian Sai devotee knows it and has experienced it. Just to remind and reiterate ourselves of this magnificent phenomenon on this

holy month of Christmas, we have for you three beautiful articles in the feature articles section. Do not miss them.

A few weeks ago, the Minister for Works, Government of Fiji visited the Sathya Sai School in Fiji and paid glowing tributes to the quality of the education imparted there. He hailed the school for its work on human values and many national dailies in Fiji carried stories about it. You will find this interesting item in our Sai World News section.

Did you know that Sai Centres in Taiwan conduct blood donation camps, visit mentally challenged children and take care of elderly citizens? In New Zealand, Sai devotees visit two prisons and provide physical and mental comfort to the inmates. Their visit left some inmates in tears with demands of assurances from them that they would be back. Our Sai Seva section will surely move your heart with the stories of selfless service going on in different corners of the world.

Towards the end of His beautiful 80th Birthday discourse, Swami said, *“Let your life be filled with love. Do not confine your love to your family and friends. Share it with one and all. Whomsoever you come across, consider everyone as the embodiment of divinity. Share your love with your fellow human being and become the recipient of his love.”*

Love and Service – this has been the principal message be it Jesus, Sai, Krishna or Allah. Let's Trust His words and more importantly, Live His words. Just like the Sun which burns itself away everyday to give life and happiness to others, if not a star, let us be at least small candles bringing light, love and warmth to the fellow brothers and sisters around us. When that happens all around the world, the Golden Age would have dawned.

Let everybody in all the worlds be happy.

Loving Regards,
H2H Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

This is the sacred month of Christmas. Let us recollect what Baba told us just three years ago on the holy day of Christmas.

Emulate the Noble Qualities of Jesus

Jesus Christ developed such noble qualities. He gave protection to several poor and destitute people with a loving heart. In fact, several such people sought refuge in him. In the process, he had to face the wrath of several enemies. You should help people even if you have to undergo some difficulties. Never indulge in reviling others, for the same Atma (spirit) is permeating every living being.

If you abuse others, it amounts to abusing your own self. If you do not like them, keep yourself away from them, but never abuse them. Any amount of good work done by you will be of no use, if you do not give up bad qualities. If you cannot do good to others, at least speak good words. You cannot always oblige, but you can speak always obligingly. If you find someone suffering, try to help him. Today it is his turn, but tomorrow it could be yours. Always keep this in mind. Nobody can escape from pain and suffering. Always pray for the welfare of all. It is only in this context, the universal prayer of *Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu* (May all the people of the world be happy!) is addressed...

Everyone must cultivate such divine love towards others. Always tread the path of truth and morality. A nation without morality is bound to degenerate and disintegrate. It is not enough if you have patriotism; along with it you should have morality too. Merely giving lectures on morality will not suffice; it must permeate every activity undertaken by you.

Acquire Goodness along with Greatness

Embodiments of Love!

God is not moved simply by sweet words. You must translate those sweet words into action. You may be a great hero in giving lectures on a platform, but if you are a zero in putting them into action, it will be of no use. You must become heroes in practical life. That is what gives Me happiness.

Jesus Christ and Mohammad were highly noble. How could they acquire such greatness and goodness? It was only by their good deeds. Therefore, you must acquire goodness along with greatness. In fact, goodness is greater than greatness...

Pray for the Welfare of Others

Today, you do not find peace anywhere in the world. You see only pieces! In fact, people are breaking their heart into pieces. How then can peace be acquired? There is only one solution to this problem. Love God. Have faith in God. Surrender unto Him. Dedicate your whole life to God and carry on every activity of yours as an offering to Him. Let all your activities be helpful to others. Help ever, hurt never.

You cannot say that you are leading a problem-free life. Who knows what is in store for you the next moment! If you wish to be always happy, pray for the welfare of others. This is the real *Sadhana* (spiritual practice). Spirituality does not mean simply doing *bhajans* and performing some acts of worship. Cultivate noble qualities. Always be helpful to others and earn a good name. Jesus earned such a good name by sacrificing his body on the cross. You also must be prepared for such a great sacrifice. If you give up *thyaga* (sacrifice) and indulge in *bhoga* (sensual pleasures), you will end up with *roga* (disease). In fact, *thyaga* (sacrifice) is true *yoga* and *bhoga* is *roga* (Sensual pleasures lead to disease). Do not become a victim of *roga* (disease). Develop *thyaga* (sacrifice) and achieve *yoga*.

-BABA

25th Dec 2002

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI PART 15

(Continued from the previous issue)

H: (HISLOP) The mind is said to be dangerous. What does that mean?

SAI: It is the same mind that can liberate or enslave. The mind is like a snake with long poisonous fangs. When the poison is removed from these fangs, then the danger is removed. In like fashion, when desire disappears, the danger of the mind disappears.

H: But it is always said that all troubles arise from the mind ?

SAI: From desires.

H: Then, one should control his thoughts?

SAI: Thoughts and desires are not the same. There are many thoughts that are not desires. If thoughts go too deep into objects, desires arise. If there is a desire, there was a thought. But not all thoughts are desires. Dark clouds bring rain, but there can be clouds without rain. God's grace is in drops like rain. They accumulate and then there is a torrent. If there is a very strong desire for God, even bad thoughts just pass through the mind and are not held on to. Desire directed to God brings the discrimination. Intelligence, which is discrimination, is not the mind, nor is it thought. Intelligence is direct *Atma Shakthi*, a direct force of the *Atma* (the spirit).

A Visitor: How is one to handle bad thoughts arising from envy, hatred and laziness?

SAI: No use resisting or fighting thoughts. If suppressed, they are always ready to spring forth at weak moments - like snakes in a basket; if the cover gets loose or is removed the snakes spring forth. **The way to overcome bad thoughts and impulses is by having thoughts of serving the Lord, good conversation with wise people, good actions and words. The weight of good acts and thoughts will bury the seeds of bad actions and thoughts.** Both good and bad thoughts and impulses are like seeds in the mind. If buried deep enough in the earth, seeds rot and waste away. Good thoughts and deeds bury bad seeds so deeply that they rot and pass away and are no longer ready to spring forth.

H: Swami, when thoughts are troublesome. I say, 'Thy mind, Swami; it is not mine', and that particular thought-stream stops.

SAI: That is right. At that moment there is no ego. That is the easy path.

H: Swami, what does the mind know? There is much knowledge in the mind, but what does it really know?

SAI: The mind does not know anything. So-called education is just book knowledge. Hand in hand with knowledge must go philosophy. **Philosophy is not religion, it is love for God, it is cultured by reciting the Name, singing Bhajans, thinking spiritual thoughts, desiring union with God.** Union with God - as the bubble upon breaking finds itself the whole ocean. From the cultivation of philosophy comes will power. Without will power, knowledge is useless.

On Heart and Mind

H: Swami, in the West, will power is thought of as a quality one is born with.

SAI: Will power is brought about by philosophy. Will power is the direct manifestation of the *Atma Shakti* (Power of the Self).

H: In the West, great value is given to mind. It is felt that unless one develops a skilful mind he cannot gain success in life. For instance, I needed to develop skill of mind to get an education and earn money to travel and see Baba.

SAI: You came to see Baba because of the heart, not the mind, isn't it? The viewpoint that there is a mind is useful up to a certain stage, university, science, and so forth. But after a certain stage, science falls away and philosophy comes to the front. Heart is then used instead of mind. The other day, someone mentioned the illustration of the mirror. As one moves away the image grows smaller and smaller, although actually, the image has not changed at all. The same happens with the world. As one turns to God with stronger love, the world recedes, appearing smaller until it can hardly be noticed at all. Really, there is only the heart.

H: The belief that we are self-willed, separate beings moving about in the world - what is the cause of this illusion?

SAI: The whole mirage, the whole thing, arises from the 'I' thought. From identification with the body, all complications arise. Since it is the mind that has woven this web of identification with the body, it is the mind that must now turn and seek one's true nature through inquiry, discrimination, and renunciation.

On 'Mind Senses' and 'Body Senses'

H: Swami has said that the mind need not be dangerous. But with all the trouble it has brought about, it seems to be very dangerous.

SAI: The mind creates no harm and gives no trouble as long as it is not merged with the body senses. For instance, the mind has a thought of the theatre. No harm. But if mind picks up body and carries it to theatre, then it becomes involved with the picture, the people, the emotions, the concepts, and peace is lost. The mind should not engage itself in the body senses. The body senses should serve the needs of the body only.

Mind should be engaged in the five '**mind senses**', which are: truth, concentration, peace, love and bliss. As long as the mind is so engaged, all is well and the person is happy and peaceful. Physical objects have a temperature potential. If the breathing is fast, body temperature rises. If objects subject to temperature are added to a fire, the fire burns more fiercely. That which is subject to temperature may join with that which is subject to temperature. Mind, however, has no temperature. God is without temperature. So mind and God may merge.

H: In this, Swami, what is the definition of 'mind'?

SAI: The whole complex, ego through intelligence may just be called 'mind'.

H: Whenever the mind falls away from necessary work, I call it to attention and keep it engaged in repeating, 'Sai Ram, Sai Ram.' Is this all right?

SAI: Quite all right.

H: When the mind is not engaged in any particular work, where should the attention be kept?

SAI: Between the eyebrows. That is the Eye of wisdom of (Lord) Siva.

On Nature of Mind

H: The flow of thought interferes with concentration. How to diminish thinking?

SAI: The habit of thinking is long standing. Even if the habit is broken, there is a slow cessation. For example, a fan continues to revolve for a time after the switch is turned off. But the train of thought can be changed. One train of thought can stop another. The best way is to divert the train of thought to a spiritual topic. This attraction to God is spontaneous. It is the turning back to the source; all other attractions are self-imposed. The fish is placed in a gold and jewel vase of greatest value, but it has no interest in the gold and jewels; it wants only to get back to the sea. Man comes into his limitation from his home; he is really of the nature of God, of this Ocean of Delight, of Rama, of He who attracts. The Soul attracts us. Rama was God, that Ocean of Delight in human form. Everybody wanted to be close to him, to look at him.

H: Well, Swami, perhaps if one were to follow thought inward to its source and observe the source of thought, one might then have a quiet mind? In affairs of the world thought is both necessary and practical. But when there is no need to be thinking, the mind still keeps on going with all sorts of idle thoughts; whereas one would be much better off if the mind would just be quiet.

SAI: That is really the wrong way to approach the matter. The nature of the mind is restless, just like a rat whose nature is always to nibble to something, and just like a snake whose nature is to be biting at something. The nature of the mind is to be occupied. And, even when still, like the feathers on a peacock, there is a shimmering, an apparent movement in the mind. Like the

aspen tree, even on a still morning its leaves seem to tremble and move, it is the nature of the mind to dwell upon things. **So, the proper method to deal with the mind is to direct the mind's activity towards good deeds, good thoughts, repetition of the Name of the Lord, and not allow it to aim at harmful objects, harmful thoughts and deeds.** In that way, the mind's natural tendency to be occupied will be fulfilled and yet it will keep out of mischief.

Another essential means for keeping the mind away from harmful activities is work. Man is made to work hard, and if one is working hard in service to the Lord in one way or the other, the mind will not have time to be occupied with useless, random thoughts. And if there is no outside work, then the work of spiritual endeavour should go on, in the way of meditation, recitation of the Name, reading good books, talking with good people, and so on.

One might find it difficult to surrender to God, but every man surrenders to time, and time is God. Day by day one's life is shortened and one surrenders his life to that time; time conquers one's life and that time is God. Therefore, first there is work, then wisdom, then love, and the time will come in a person's life when work itself is love, or work itself is God.

H: But Swami said the other day that if the mind was quiet and receptive, then perhaps Swami would come into the mind and speak.

SAI: If the desire to communicate with Swami is sufficiently intense and strong, then the mind will be sufficiently quiet for Swami to speak; but the problem is that we do not have that intensity in our lives.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

ASK AND YE SHALL BE GIVEN

In an obscure village lived a mother and her son. The boy had lost his father when he was just two years old. The mother exerted herself in many ways to earn enough money to bring up her only son and educate him. The boy was very smart, obedient and had great love and regard for his mother. The boy grew up and reached the seventh class. He was studying hard for the examination.

One day he told his mother, *“Ma, within four days I have to pay fees of Rs.20/- for the examination. Please somehow get me the amount.”*

The mother was panicky, she had no money with her, and it was the last week of the month. She went to the headmaster and explained her inability to pay the fees in time and requested that he help her in some way. The headmaster replied that nothing was in his hands.

The mother returned home, sat under a tree near her hut and began to weep. The boy returned from the school, and found his mother crying. He sat near her and asked, *“Why are you weeping mother?”*

“My son, I cannot find money. You cannot go to school from tomorrow. You had better come and work with me. There is no other way.”

The boy said, *“Why don’t you ask somebody for a loan of Rs.20/-. After the examination, I shall work and will be able to pay back the amount.”*

“My dear son,” replied the mother, *“who will give me the money? Only God, if He wills.”* The boy eagerly enquired, *“Who is God, Ma? Where is He? What is His address? I shall go and get money from Him.”*

The mother helplessly said, *“Yes, there is the Lord of Vaikunta*, Narayana, who is the source of all wealth.”*

Without a moment’s hesitation, the boy ran to the post office. He had a few small coins with him. He purchased a card and wrote on it his mother’s unfortunate condition, his own need and requested God to send Rs.20/- immediately by return post.

He ran to the post box tied to a tree, but he was too short to reach the slit to put the letter in the box. The postmaster, who had been observing the boy all the while, came out, took the card from him and asked,

“To whom are you writing the letter?” The boy said, *“Oh Sir! This is a very urgent letter to Lord Narayana in Vaikunta. I have to pay my examination fees within three days. I am writing to him requesting him to send Rs.20 - immediately.”* The postmaster stared at the address on the postcard. He could not find words, tears gathered in his eyes at the innocence of that boy.

“My dear boy, who gave you this address?” asked the postmaster. The boy narrated the dialogue between himself and his mother. “Sir, my mother says that God is very kind and He will certainly help the poor like us if only we pray to Him earnestly.” The postmaster was very much moved. He patted the boy and said, “My dear boy, I shall see to the express delivery of this postcard, you had better come day after tomorrow.”

The boy ran home in a joyful mood. He told his mother that he would get the money in a day. The boy went to the postmaster the day after. The postmaster said, *“My dear boy, here is the cover, inside it you will find Rs.20/- . Now go and pay the fees.”*

The boy ran home with the cover and placed it in his mother’s hands. The mother asked him sternly how he had got the money. The boy narrated the entire discussion with the postmaster. She would not believe him. She hurried to the postmaster and asked him whether what her son had told her was true and how it could have happened.

The postmaster told her, *“Mother, believe me. I have always been a hardhearted man. When I saw your son with that letter, I could not believe my own eyes. A letter written to God with such faith, it moved me. It must be God who has induced me to come to the rescue of your son. Please take the money. It must be God’s will that I should give this money. Otherwise I would not have chanced to see your boy posting the letter and the letter would have remained unanswered and your son’s faith in God would have been shattered. I consider this an opportunity to help a good boy.”*

If we pray to God sincerely, God does help us. He would induce someone to act as His agent. Implicit faith in God alone would rescue everyone from all troubles and travails.

- Baba

Source: Chinna Katha, Illustrations: Ms. Vidya, Kuwait

**In Indian mythology Vaikunta is referred to as the Abode of Lord Vishnu (also called Narayana) who is the Preserver of Creation.*

COVER STORY

THE SRI SATHYA SAI GODAVARI DRINKING WATER PROJECT

Yet another saga of divine love to the distressed and isolated....

Godavari is one of the great rivers of India, mentioned in the scriptures and considered sacred. Rising in the Satmala Hills in the Western Ghats close to the city of Nasik in the State of Maharashtra, the 1450km long Godavari, flows in a southeasterly direction, picking up many tributaries on the way. Entering Andhra Pradesh, it cuts right through two Districts, East Godavari and West Godavari, appropriately named, and then empties into the Bay of Bengal. Being a sacred river there are shrines all along, starting with Panchavati near Nasik, where Lord Rama is supposed to have lived in exile for a while. Legend has it that it was here that Ravana abducted Mother Sita.

Unlike many other rivers in India, the water flowing in river Godavari has not been harnessed to the same extent, and Swami has often referred to the enormous amount of water flowing into the sea [the Bay of Bengal]. Some time after the massive Drinking Water Project for Chennai was completed Swami decided that something ought to be done for the poor people in the East and West Godavari Districts. Swami noted that though the Godavari River carried plenty of water, people living in these districts often faced drinking water problems.

Baba on the Godavari Project in Dec 2004

While speaking to the staff of the Super Specialty Hospital in Prashanthi Nilayam on Dec 26th, 2004, Swami said,

"Currently we are executing a water project for East and West Godavari Districts. It is possible to live without food but not without water. Water is highly essential. These people live by the side of Godavari but they have no potable water. Though water is available nearby, they are not in a position to have access. For everything, human effort is very essential. To attempt and act is human nature; success or failure is in God's control."

In the East Godavari District especially, which is full of forests and populated largely by tribals, people living just about ten or fifteen kilometres from the river faced an acute drinking water problem. They depended mostly on borewells, most of which are drying up due to excessive use of ground water. Moreover, in some pockets, the borewell water contains harmful chemicals. In some places in East Godavari District, the tribals used to draw water from nearby streams. However, the natural water from the streams is bacteriologically unsafe. In short, for a variety of reasons, the poor people in these districts were facing difficulties.

The Two Godavari Districts Blessed By SAI's Drinking Water Project

The two Godavari Districts are quite far from Puttaparthi and no one had come from there to pray explicitly to Bhagavan to help them with good drinking water. However, Swami came to their rescue even before they asked. That is God in human form.

Thus far, Swami has blessed through His many drinking water projects, the people of Anantapur District in Andhra Pradesh [where, by the way, Puttaparthi is located], then the people of Mahabubnagar and Medak Districts in north-western Andhra Pradesh, and after that the huge city of Chennai in Tamil Nadu. It is now the turn of the two Godavari Districts in the east coast of Andhra Pradesh to receive the Divine Grace of safe drinking water.

Every Sai drinking water project has its unique features. Of these, the Anantapur project, the first one to be executed, is by far the most complex. [Details of this may be found in the volume **WATER: THE ELIXIR OF LIFE**, which forms one of the five 80th Birthday souvenir set, blessed by Bhagavan at the time of Gurupoornima this year.] The Chennai water project presented its own challenges and it belongs to an entirely different category. Larsen and Toubro, a leading engineering construction company in India executed both the projects, and according to Mr. A. Ramakrishna, then L & T chief, the Anantapur project continues to remain the most complex water project they have executed thus far. The Godavari project follows the scheme adopted earlier in Mahabubnagar District, Andhra Pradesh.

In principle, the scheme is simple - one first constructs an intake well near the water source, in this case the Godavari River. Water is drawn from the source by pumps, and then sent to a reservoir. There it is treated and purified, after which the water, now fit to drink, is distributed through pipes to the designated villages.

In the villages, there are local storage tanks, from which water flows to cisterns, to which water taps are connected. That is the general idea. Although this is no different from what was done earlier in Mahabubnagar, there are, as is to be expected, some unique challenges, especially in East Godavari. The most important of this is that the target villages are located in a forest region.

Before doing any project in this area, however beneficial, clearance must first be obtained from the agency charged with environmental protection. Further, while laying pipes, no trees must be cut. Interestingly, the tribals living in the region also demand this, which of course, is good news.

Swami Speaks about the Godavari Project During Guru Poornima 2005

Recently, in His Guru Poornima Discourse on 21st July 2005, Swami said,

"Recently, a strange incident took place. Subramaniam of Larsen & Toubro and Chief Engineer Kondal Rao had gone to East Godavari and West

Godavari region in connection with the Water Supply Project works. As they were conducting a survey in a forest area, they were confronted by a group of naxalites (terrorists). The naxalites questioned them, "Who are you? Why have you come here? Who has sent you here? How dare you enter our area without our permission?"

They replied, "We have come here in your own interest. Because there is scarcity of water in this region, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has sent us to make arrangements for the drinking water supply." On hearing this, the naxalites were stupefied and overjoyed. They said, "We are living in the forests and hence are not aware of the magnificent service activities that Swami has undertaken."

They guided the engineers as to where to lay the pipes and fix the taps. They are all coming here for Swami's darshan. The Water Supply Project works in East and West Godavari districts will be completed soon...I am taking up these projects and completing them of My own accord, without anybody's asking. Water is very essential for the survival of everyone. It is the sustainer of life. What else can be of greater service than providing drinking water to the needy? It is the source and sustenance of life. I do not expect any rituals or worship from you. I am doing it out of My love for you."

Yes, Swami's love knows no barriers. He knows who needs what and provides like a loving mother. Before we proceed with the details of the project, just a word about the tribals of this region - the main beneficiaries of the East Godavari project.

The lives of the tribals in Interior East Godavari District are fully intertwined with forest and seasons. They live on forest produce. They cut the trees on the mountain slopes and cultivate pulses and some cereals which is generally called "Kondapudu Cultivation." In the recent times, the Government has imposed certain restrictions on felling of tress and ordered that fruit yielding trees must be grown on the mountain areas cleared by tribals. They also make thin threads out of the trunk of a tree called "Thati Picchu". These threads have many salient properties and are an export-oriented item used for making baskets and other handicrafts. Their living conditions are still primitive.

Coming back to the project details, there are two intake wells in the East Godavari District while West Godavari has only one. The intake wells at Purushottapatnam and Pamaleru in the East Godavari District, together will cater to the drinking water needs of about 300 villages.

While the Purushottapatnam Intake Well is located on the bank of the Godavari River, the intake well at Pamaleru actually collects water from a stream which later joins the Godavari River. The stream, in the rainy season, carries a lot of water. Even in the dry season, there is always a fair amount of subsoil water to meet the needs of many neighbouring villages. In the West Godavari District the only intake well is at Polavaram. And near this intake well is the large Water Treatment Plant at Hukumpet.

Water is sent from the intake wells at the various collection stations to filtration plants where the water is filtered and purified. From there, the water is pumped out and sent through pipes to many storage tanks, from where the water is distributed to the villages.

Work started some months ago and is in full swing. It is expected to be completed by around March 2006. When completed, **about five hundred villages in the two districts are expected to be benefited and about half a million people would receive Sai water to drink every single day!**

By the way, if one counts all the people benefited by Sai Drinking Water Projects [including the seven million or so in Chennai], then in the last one decade, **Swami has provided drinking water to about ten million people!**

To give you an idea of what this means, please note that the population of New Zealand is about 3.8 million, the population of Belgium is about 10.3 million, the population of Hungary is about 9.8 million, and the population of Sweden is about 8.9 million.

Just think about it: Has any private charitable trust anywhere in the world done anything like this? And please note, EVERY SINGLE PROJECT DONE BY SWAMI IS GIVEN AWAY FREE TO THE STATE CONCERNED. The State may get it free but Swami's Central Trust has spent **hundreds of millions of dollars**. Does He take one cent back as repayment? No, never! We all know mothers sacrifice for their children. How many know what this Universal Mother of us is doing for humanity? While we may describe this as sacrifice, Swami never uses that word. For Him, it is always an expression of His Boundless Love!

Very few people know about the Godavari Project, including people in the Ashram here in Prashanthi Nilayam. That is why Heart2Heart is making a special effort to tell you all about it so that you may speak about this great miracle of the Lord to everyone you know.

Water from the intake well in East Godavari district is now flowing to the water filtration and purification plant. Safe drinking water is now being supplied on a trial basis to a few villages. This happened on the eve of Swami's 80th Birthday.

Before we bring this feature to a close, there is one thing that we must draw attention to. From the late sixties, Swami has, step by step, been sending some important signals through His Missions in the area of education, health and now water.

The education projects came first, starting with the establishment of the College for Women, way back in 1968. As is well known, other colleges followed, all of which were blended into a University, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. What was the underlying message? There were actually two. First, **education must set character development as the primary objective**. As Swami often says, the end of education **MUST** be

character. With every passing day, especially the way things are in the world this message acquires greater and greater significance. The second message is that **education must be given free**, and must be a responsibility of Society as a whole. When Society takes care of all, everyone would in turn take care of Society – that incidentally is also the lesson the human body teaches us where all organs serve to keep the body alive and the body as a whole in turn takes care of the organs.

What about health? It is the same message there. If Society does not come forward to provide healthcare for all in some manner or the other, and healthcare is available only to those who can afford it, then Society would be sharply divided into the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, with all the social tensions and the evils that go along with such a division. **What is the use of a Society where most people are sick because they do not have the means to stay healthy?** That in fact is the situation faced in many countries, especially in Africa.

And it is the same with water. **Water cannot be monopolised or made into a commodity that is traded.** There are deep and profound issues involved and these are touched upon in the companion article, God, Man and Water which we invite your attention to.

Finally, it is humbling to go way back to 1947 and remind ourselves about what Swami wrote then to His elder brother Seshama Raju:

I have a Task: *To foster all mankind, and ensure for all people lives full of Ananda.*

I have a Vow: *To lead all who stray away from the straight path, again into goodness and save them.*

I am attached to a 'Work' that I love: *To remove the suffering of the poor and grant them what they lack.*

Yes, that is Swami. He is far, far more than what He might appear to be. When we talk of Swami's Love, let us not forget how much He loves humanity and how He who is to be served by us, is instead serving us! Should we not do something at least now about reversing the roles?

- Heart2Heart Team

We are grateful to B Krishna Raju, a Sai worker from Andhra Pradesh, for painstakingly documenting the Godavari Water Project in pictures and on video for Prashanthi Digital Studio.

FEATURE ARTICLES

GOD MAN AND WATER

Introduction

Elsewhere in this issue, we carry an article on Swami's Drinking Water Project for people living in the East and West Godavari Districts of Andhra Pradesh. In this companion article, we focus on the broader topic of man, water, survival and sustainable development. On the face of it, this article might seem out of place in a journal like ours, since a good part of the article deals with issues of a socio-economic nature. However, in as much as issues relating to water profoundly affect Society and since Society is God as Swami often reminds us, we believe the subject matter dealt with here is not only relevant to each and everyone of us but also has a deep connection with Spirituality, and thus with Swami's teachings as well.

In the Universe as God made it, there are about a billion, billion stars. This is a staggering and awesome number. Our Sun is also a star, although we are not accustomed to think of it that way. Seen in this fashion, our Sun is just one member of a huge family with a billion, billion "brothers". It turns out, however, that of this astronomical number of stars or Suns if you want to think about it that way, only an extremely small number of stars have planets orbiting around them. And, of this very tiny fraction of stars with planets going round them it appears, according to present knowledge, only an incredibly small number may have planets [if at all] with conditions suitable for sustaining life as we know it on earth. Even in the case of our Sun, it is only the planet earth, the third from the Sun, which supports life. This is one of the many factors that make us humans special.

Now the Supreme Lord in His Wisdom and Compassion has created conditions on earth such that we may all live comfortably. As a part of this package, He has provided us with air, water and land. Ancients in all lands understood this and were grateful to God in their own different ways. We see this, for example in the *Vedas*. The Red Indians of North America too revered Nature and were often in communion with it [see BOX 1]. However, in the rat race we are caught up in at present, we seldom take even a minute off to appreciate how vital air, water and land are for sustaining life. While we shall be focussing here on water, we should always remember that we could never speak of water in an isolated and fragmented manner. As we shall see later, any serious discussion of water would inevitably bring in many other related issues.

Sustainable Development

Water is needed for all aspects of life. Since most of our body is made up of water, we necessarily have to drink water several times a day. Further, water is needed for producing food. Without water, we simply would not have any food to eat. Few realise, as we shall discuss later, that meat eaters too depend on vegetation; as someone put it crisply, even a tiger

“eats” grass! Obviously, we cannot have grass without water. In other words, the entire issue of food security concerning which one hears much these days, is closely connected with water and its availability. Indeed, when considering food it is necessary to remember that there are many important components of the ecosystem that determine the food supply, such as croplands, rangelands, wetlands [see BOX 2] and forests, all of which have a great bearing on agro economics. Thus, when we start talking about water in a serious way, the discussion would actually cut right across the whole gamut of human affairs and existence. Many of these points would be highlighted later, either in the main text or in supplementary boxes.

Since life depends on water, it is no surprise that almost all the early human settlements were on the banks of or adjacent to good sources of waters, especially big rivers. Thus, we have examples of the Indus valley civilization located adjacent to the famous River Indus, the Sumerian civilization that flourished adjacent to the River Euphrates, and the Egyptian civilization that flourished on the banks of the River Nile. Even today, the great Mississippi River in America plays a vital role in the economy of the many States through which it passes.

God has blessed man with a wonderful brain, thanks to which humankind has advanced tremendously. Indeed, the progress in the twentieth century is truly mind-boggling. It is because of this progress that there has been massive economic development. Development needs capital, and it is customary to recognise two kinds of capital inputs – the capital “contributed” by Nature and the capital contributed by man. While man contributes via intelligence and money, Nature makes material resources available via its in-built systems, including the ecosystems.

For thousands of years when the population was small and man had not advanced much in technology, his contribution to capital was miniscule compared to what Nature contributed. It almost seemed then that Nature was an infinite reservoir from which one could draw endlessly and as much as one wanted. However, in a few short decades, all that has changed. Today, as technology is running away at breakneck speed, natural capital is fast becoming a limiting factor. However, most people are simply ignoring the warning signals, and that is vastly compounding the problem. Two key contributions made by Nature are water and the ecosystems. If these were to be strained beyond limit, then the future of humankind would be in great danger.

It is this grave danger that has made a concerned few to worry about what is called **sustainable development**. Although this phrase is often heard these days, not many understand what it really means. It is appropriate therefore to take a minute off to explain the implications.

Let us start with the term development, which basically means improving the economy and generating more wealth through more industries, business etc. However, all this calls for capital investment and, as already

pointed out, there are two types of capital that come into play, that invested by humankind and that drawn from Nature. Humanity has now reached a stage where Nature is simply not able to cope up with increasing demand. If we overdraw, and that is what is often happening, then future generations would not get their share.

Humankind is thus at a sort of crossroads. Many who do not care about future generations more or less say, “To hell with the future; the present is what matters and let us have a ball.” Others who are more responsible say, “No, we cannot be irresponsible like that. We are here because our ancestors cared about future generations. We have no right to deny future generations their rightful share of Nature’s bounties and we have a compelling duty and obligation to protect what is their due.”

The latter point of view has given rise to what is called the philosophy of sustainable development. The core idea is, “Yes, the wheel of development must move on but it should advance without harming beyond repair the supportive capacity of the ecosystem. We may certainly draw from Nature’s bank but only to the extent that future generations would not be affected; that is to say, they too should be able to draw their rightful quota.” In practice, this means we put an end forthwith to all practices currently followed that pose great threats to the ecosystem.

Distribution of Water on Earth

With the above background, let us now examine in some detail the issue of water. We start with the question: “How much water is available on earth? Is this amount fixed or can we generate more and more water as our demand increases?” The answer to this question is the following [see also BOX 3]:

Three-fourths of the earth’s surface is covered with water. About 97 % of this water is in the oceans – it is salt water and therefore not directly useful for drinking and agriculture. However, that does not mean seawater has no role to play – that comes later. For most of our use, we need fresh water. Only 3 % of the water available on earth is fresh water. Seventy-three percent of this 3 % has been locked by God as “fixed deposit” in icebergs! [see BOX 4] Of the remaining 27 %, some is present as water vapour, some is present in lakes and rivers, and all the rest is underground. It turns out that most of the freshwater on land is actually below ground.

We must note at this point that the amount of freshwater available for use by humankind is fixed. What is available today is the same as what was available a hundred years ago and is also what would be available a hundred years from now, unless man does something drastic to change Nature’s rhythm, which he well can. This implies that as the years roll by and the population keeps on growing, the *per capita* availability of water would constantly shrink. If mankind seeks to march on ignoring this RED

LIGHT, then it sure is headed for trouble. How that is likely to happen would be considered later.

The Hydrological Cycle

Water is not tucked away into “tight compartments”; on the contrary, water on earth moves in a constant and never-ending cycle, with Nature recycling fresh water over and over again. Thus, the water one drinks today might have been drunk before by a dinosaur! The water cycle in Nature is called the hydrological cycle, more details about which can be found in BOX 5. As should be evident from the graphics in BOX 5, man can interfere with this cycle of Nature in many ways – he can disturb the atmosphere, he can disturb the natural flow of water back to the sea, he can affect the temperature of land, air and water, and so on. Until the twentieth century, man did not have this capacity to influence the hydrological cycle in a big way. Today, the situation is very different. Even as his demand for water is skyrocketing, he is also disturbing the hydrological cycle in many ways. In this sense, we are facing a double disaster.

Demand for Water

Let us now take a brief look at the demand for water. A long time ago, water usage by mankind was restricted to drinking, agriculture and domestic needs [such as bathing, washing clothes etc.] Today, that has changed enormously. BOX 6 offers a graphical summary of the current usage spectrum. As is evident, in most of Africa and many parts of Asia that are still backward, water is used mostly for agriculture. In Europe, on the other hand, industry competes strongly with agriculture for water while in North America it is industry that is the biggest consumer of water. Few realise how much water is used by the steel industry, the chemical industry, the semi-conductor industry etc. This factor must be kept in mind while discussing the *per capita* availability. Not surprisingly, as the standard of living increases, the *per capita* consumption of water also increases – see, for example, BOX 7, which gives an idea of the daily usage of water by a person in America.

We thus have the following situation: water is presently needed for more than just drinking and domestic usage. Every person consumes, although may be indirectly, water for agriculture and for the material products that he wants industry to provide him. Added to that, there are three important complicating factors. 1) The population of the world is constantly increasing, at an alarming rate in fact. This means that even if the *per capita* demand is frozen at today's level, more and more water would be required in the future simply because of the increase in the number of humans living on earth. 2) In addition to the above, industry is demanding more and more water because of the enormous growth in consumerism. People are simply buying more and more products, all of which use up a lot of water in the manufacturing stage. 3) Further, existing water sources

are being polluted, making them useless; which makes the fresh water resource available actually less than what it was before. In short, we have a situation where we have less and are actually trying to consume more! How can this be a sustainable situation? Even if we are able to manage somehow at present, how long can this go on? And what will happen to the future?

Crisis due to Population Growth

From what has been said above, it is clear that there are many urgent issues concerning water that need serious attention. Let us start with the population growth problem, discussed further in BOX 8. Some people go to the extent of saying that population growth is the NUMBER 1 threat of the future, especially in relation to water. Since the amount of fresh water available on earth is fixed, if the population grows exponentially, it automatically spells disaster.

The gravity of the situation is further compounded by uneven distribution. It turns out that most of the population growth is occurring in regions of the world where there is not much water available. In these regions, there is thus both physical water scarcity and economic water scarcity, which implies that even if water is made available, it would be at a price that most people just cannot afford. On the other hand, most of the advanced countries happen to be in regions of the earth where water availability is much greater. It would thus seem that they do not face any danger of shortage. However, even in this region, the galloping demand by the commerce and industry sector is posing a serious threat.

Water Wastage

We next consider water wastage [see also BOX 9]. When we talk of wastage, we are not merely referring to the obvious wastage resulting from leaking taps and taps left carelessly open, or even using too much water for flushing toilets. These issues **are** important and do need to be taken care of; however, there is much more to wastage.

Let us start with some aspects of water usage connected with luxury living. A golf course consumes a lot of water. What sense does it make then in a country like India to talk of golf tourism? And yet, there are people who think the country should earn foreign exchange by promoting golf tourism! Incidentally, the water situation in India is presented in BOX 10. The point we are trying to make is that as living standards and life style ascend to the level of luxury, they invariably call for, either directly or indirectly, more and more usage of water – just imagine how much water a family with 3 cars would need just for a car wash!

Water wastage thus means much more than taps left open, etc. Few realise that meat eating contributes enormously to water wastage, land wastage and, believe it or not, also energy wastage. Let us focus on water wastage. It is reported that in the United States, the meat industry

consumes slightly less than half of all the water used for all purposes in the country. To get an idea of how wasteful this is, consider the following fact. Twenty thousand litres of water is consumed to produce 1 kg of animal protein, whereas to produce 1 kg of wheat, only 200 litres is required. What a waste, quite apart from the cruelty inflicted on the poor cows! By the way, worldwide the cattle feed works out to 735 billion kg of grains every year. Conveyed in a goods train, this would require 12.3 MILLION wagons! That train would span the equator six times!! [See also BOX 11].

Water Quality Degradation

In addition to wastage, the quality of the water available is constantly being degraded in many places due to a variety of reasons. Take fertilizers, for example. Once upon a time, agriculture everywhere was based on natural, organic fertilizers. Nowadays, it is mostly based on artificial fertilizers. Such manure may appear to give high yields but the yield comes with a price that is hidden. Artificial fertilizers have nitrates and phosphates and some of the nitrogen and phosphorous seep into ground water, thereby polluting it – water containing nitrogen and phosphorous is not suitable for drinking. Similarly, spraying pesticides too affects ground water due to water run off from the crops and plants. Once ground water becomes polluted, it is very difficult to clean it up. The pollutants would remain in the water and would come up along with the ground water when it is pumped up for drinking purposes. It is quite expensive to treat water that is polluted by industrial and agricultural chemicals to make it fit for drinking.

There is one more source of water pollution that comes via the atmosphere. Many industries discharge highly corrosive substances into the atmosphere through chimneys. These chemicals, sulphuric acid for example, get into clouds and when it rains, come down with rainwater. [See BOX 12]. Such rain is called acid rain and causes damage to vegetation; entire forests are known to have been destroyed by acid rain. And when such rain water flows into a river or a lake, they too get affected causing much hardship to people who depend on those sources.

Proper Water Management

Water needs proper management, failing which there can be trouble. Mankind has been taught this lesson many, many times but has failed to digest it. Thousands of years ago, the ancient Sumerians who built up a great civilisation in Mesopotamia learnt this. Mesopotamia is a Greek word meaning the land between the rivers. The Greeks gave this name to the great alluvial plain between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, a region that now distributed partly in Syria and partly in Iraq. This region is famous for many civilizations; first there were the Sumerians, then came the Assyrians and after that the Babylonians.

The Sumerians were very advanced in many branches of human endeavour. Among other things, they had an elaborate irrigation system, the water being taken from the source by canals to irrigate farms. Some of the water was used by the crops, some evaporated, while the rest percolated downward into the ground. Over time, this percolation slowly raised the water table, until eventually it reached the surface of the land. When the water climbed to that level, it began to evaporate into the atmosphere. As this happened, the salt in the water was left behind. Over time, the accumulation of salt reduced crop productivity. This was an environmental flaw that ultimately undermined the economic foundation of this great civilization. A similar thing happened in Central America, in the region now known as Guatemala. Here the Mayan civilization flourished from AD 250 to about AD 900 when it collapsed, once again due to water mismanagement.

Water management is not as trivial as it might appear. There are many nuances, and all of them must be carefully considered. Take the case of the State of West Bengal in India and the neighbouring country Bangladesh. This region receives plenty of rain; in fact, in Bangladesh, floods are quite common. Rainwater is free from arsenic and yet, millions of people in this region are drinking water heavily contaminated with arsenic. Why? See BOX 13 for a further discussion, but here is one illustration of how important water management is.

In many places where a big river is flowing through people say: “We need a lot of water. There is a big river here and so let us harness the water of this river.” Superficially, this might seem all right but God did not intend all the river water to be used up by man. As Baba said in a discourse in December 1986, “All living beings emanated originally from water; humans have bodies built out of food based ultimately on plants sustained by water.” Water is as important to plants as to humans. The river, we know, plays a vital role in the hydrological cycle. If waters from all the rivers are used up and not allowed to flow into the sea, then the salinity in the sea near the delta of the river would rise sharply, in turn affecting the marine biology of that region. What this tells us is that water management goes hand in hand with a number of other factors, most of them ecological.

Floods in recent years in Europe and China have demonstrated that when excessive habitation is built up in the natural drainage path of water flow from the mountains, there are invariably massive floods when there is heavy rainfall. The recent floods in Mumbai [Bombay] brought home this lesson, as we described in an earlier issue of H2H. In other words, water management must look not only into the needs of man but must also accommodate the needs of Nature.

Water, Land and Agriculture

Agriculture is vital for food security but must be pursued with care, that is to say, must be practised so that there is no serious loss of top soil. When the earth was first created, its surface was covered mainly with rocks. Soil

formed over a period of time due to the weathering of rocks. It was this soil that supported early plant life. As plant life spread, the plants protected the soil from erosion due to wind and water. This enabled the soil to support even more plants. In other words, the symbiotic relationship between plants and the soil not only facilitated the accumulation of top soil but also promoted bio diversity. The top soil layer is not very thick; it is only a few centimetres but plays a vital role.

When man started to farm, he essentially transformed virgin land into farmland. Ploughing digs up the land, exposing the top soil to wind erosion. Watering of the crops causes additional loss of top soil when the water flows away from one region to another. In the beginning, man grew food in order to feed only his family. Soon, crops became a marketable commodity and a basis for commerce. At that point, man did everything possible to increase productivity by planting crops again, almost immediately after a harvest. This seemed to improve productivity, but did not give time enough for the land to recover from the earlier harvest. Net result, after some time the land became almost useless for growing crops.

A spectacular example of this type of disaster is provided by what happened in Kazakhstan. Way back, in an effort to boost agricultural output, the authorities in the erstwhile Soviet Union brought vast areas of grasslands of Central Asia under the plough. Grasslands that for centuries had kept the top soil bound were now converted into farms where wheat was grown. The area cultivated was equal to the entire wheat area of Canada and Australia combined – a huge area indeed. There were of course bountiful harvests to start with but thanks to over ploughing, there was also top soil erosion, whereupon productivity fell. In turn, this led to the abandoning of several millions of hectares of farmland. What this shows is that if soil erosion proceeds too far, good land is converted into desert, becoming wasteland. Incidentally, in regions of Kazakhstan where farming is still pursued, there has been a sharp decline in the yield; the yield is only 1 ton per hectare, compared to 7 tons per hectare in France.

Industrial Pollution of Water

Water becomes polluted in many ways, some of which were mentioned earlier. By far the greatest source of pollution is industry. Industry not only consumes huge quantities of water but also produces a large amount of industrial waste. For decades, these wastes were recklessly discharged into rivers and lakes. In the beginning, no one noticed the harmful effect of such discharge but after a while, the disastrous consequences were more than evident. [See BOX 14].

In His inaugural address of the National Symposium on Methods to Combat Fluorosis held in Prashanthi Nilayam in 1994, Swami said,

“The fluoride that is contained in underground water sources varies from 1 mg to 300 mg per litre. In many areas they have established Aluminum factories. Fluoride is made use of to a large extent in these factories. This mixes with air

and the polluted air affects the people. It enters the stronger portions of the body such as bones and teeth. A portion of this fluoride is excreted through urine. The ignorant are not aware of the serious damage caused by this fluoride to their health. Fluorosis causes pain in the joints and affects the bones at the back, etc. The affected persons suffer from severe pain in joints. Some germs such as bacteria also enter the system and cause a lot of damage to the human body. Viruses also cause diseases. Polluted food also accounts for the spread of these disease carrying germs. Meat, fish, black and red salt, black coffee and tea also cause spread of fluorosis and aggravate it further. To the extent possible you should change your food habits. Chewing betel leaves also causes tooth decay. Certain drugs sold in the market also aggravate this disease.”

In India, for thousands of years, River Ganges was considered holy and sacred; it still is. However, in the last fifty years or so, untreated sewage is being dumped by just about every city and town the river passes through. It is an irony that while venerating the Ganges people are not bothered about the alarming pollution caused to it. This is but one example of the ways in which modern man worships God but does not bat an eyelid in harming Nature.

Climate Change

The hydrological cycle that circulates water, is critically dependent on weather. Today, scientists are talking anxiously about climate change caused by man interfering with Nature. The biggest factor expected to influence climate is carbon dioxide emission from automobiles, from industries using coal and oil, and from plants producing electricity by burning oil or coal. Apart from carbon dioxide, there are other molecules that contribute to climate change, but CO₂ is the most worrisome one, being most abundant in the emissions that result when fossil fuel is burnt.

What happens when a huge quantity of such molecules is discharged into the atmosphere? BOX 15 offers some perspective. In essence, these emissions cause the heat radiated by the earth to get trapped by the atmosphere instead of escaping into space. When heat is so trapped, the average surface temperature of the earth increases. This is what is referred to usually as global warming, and is largely a man-made phenomenon.

Global warming can produce terrible consequences. It can change the weather pattern drastically, leading possibly to extensive drought in some areas and severe floods in others. More worrisome is the fact that when the earth warms, the ice in the polar caps would melt, discharging a large amount of water into the oceans, thus dissipating the “fixed deposit” of fresh water gifted by God to living beings. In turn, this melting of the polar ice caps would not only make its own contribution to climate change but also cause the sea water level to rise. According to one projection, in the 21st century, the rise in water level could be as much as 1 metre. If that happens, many small islands would go under, while many coastal

countries could lose large portions of their territory. For example, a World Bank analysis shows that Bangladesh would be hardest hit, losing half its rice producing areas.

Options Available

One can go on and on with this kind of discussion but there is no need to. What is important is the question: “Where do we go from here?” Although we are focussing on water, it turns out we cannot discuss the issue of water in isolation, since the water issue is heavily interlinked to a number of other problems. At the same time, if one tries to address all these problems together in a political or socio-economic fashion, the solution would be well nigh impossible since there would be so many competing factors.

From a macro point of view, there are only two basic choices. The first is to carry on as at present doing a bit of tinkering here and there in the name of problem solving. Indeed, that is what is presently happening most of the time. This pretence of problem solving can go on for some time but one day, disaster is bound to hit and hit hard. The other option is to read the writing on the wall, go the root of the problem and devise a solution based on sound fundamental principles. Impossible though it may appear, this solution **IS** feasible, and that is what we shall consider.

If one examines the current situation carefully, one would find that we really have a nasty problem on hand. What is worse is that we are compounding the problem by demanding more water than we really require. To appreciate this, we must first recognise that in life there are five tiers – survival, sustenance, essential necessities, comfort, and luxury. The rich have all, while the desperately poor barely manage to survive. Over the ages, humankind has evolved from sheer survival through various steps; however, the evolution has not been uniform. Thus, the state of development of a particular country or Society may be indexed by the level to which it has risen. In countries that enjoy a high standard of living, even luxuries have become “necessities”. But does that mean that these luxuries are really necessary, especially when mankind has to pay a high price in terms of energy consumption, water consumption and pollution?

This is the crucial question. In terms of water, an international conference held in New Delhi in 1990 resolved that the guiding principle ought to be “some for all rather than more for some”. If one looks at the consumption of earth’s resources in all forms including water, it would be found that rich countries whose population constitutes a moderate percentage of the world’s population, consume the bulk of the natural resources, producing also the bulk of the pollution. Lately, the economies of China, and to a lesser extent India, have started to grow. Many in these countries are now reasonably well off and there is talk of millions of Chinese reaching the standard of living and consumption of Americans. However, others are alarmed by this prospect and warn, “This cannot be; there are not enough

natural resources for that to happen.” Does that mean some can enjoy arbitrarily high standards of living while others must restrain themselves so that the supply of resources for the rich is assured? Obviously that is asking for the moon; yet, that is precisely the lecture that the haves give to the have-nots! “We arrived first and so we are entitled to what we have; you are late and you have therefore got to stay behind.” Will this work?

A Timely Warning

Decades ago, a group of concerned people met in Rome and thrashed this entire thing out for many days. In the end, they issued a report, which is known as the Club of Rome report. [See BOX 16]. In essence, what the wise men of Rome said was that mankind must seriously practice CEILING ON DESIRES. Imagine that! This is Swami’s constant advice to all of us, and the very same thing was advocated by a group of serious economists and intellectuals, many of whom probably did not believe in God. The difference is that whereas Swami is advocating a ceiling on desires from a spiritual point of view, the thinkers of Rome called for a ceiling in order to save the world from the consumption disaster.

The Club of Rome is not the only one to be worried about the future. In the context of water, for example, the UN has been expressing much concern lately [see BOX 17]. The UN’s concern is very legitimate since there is a great danger in the future, that wars may be fought over water rather than land or oil [see BOX 18].

Strategies for Avoiding Disaster

It is necessary to understand the profound difference between the two approaches, that based on pure socio-economic considerations and that based on moral ground [see BOXES 19-23]. The Club of Rome advocated a ceiling on consumption for the simple reason that if there was no such ceiling humanity would perish by trying to achieve limitless growth in a finite world. The advice is thus purely practical and for escaping disaster.

Swami’s approach is different. Thousands of years ago when He came as Krishna, Swami gave the same advice. In those days, there were no environmental or scarcity problems as faced now; yet the Lord wanted everyone to practice a ceiling on desires. Why? Because desire is man’s greatest enemy and the gateway to hell. Desire is what binds us to this world. It is what breeds attachment, and in stages takes us through greed, jealousy and anger, all of which cloud our judgement with fatal consequences.

The Only Meaningful Approach – that given by Swami

Excessive desire is thus **always** bad because it makes us crave for the transient instead of yearning for the Eternal. And in these times, desire is what consumerism preys on, and consumerism is what is responsible for the ravaging of the environment. Through the clever use of the media,

today's business world is multiplying our wants, making us crave for things we simply do not need. Long ago when consumerism was not so rampant, Gandhi said:

I do not believe that multiplication of wants and machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a step nearer its goal I whole-heartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the end of the earth in search of their satisfaction. If modern civilization stands for all this, and I have understood it do so, I call it satanic.

It should be obvious from all that has been said that the sanest course for humanity to follow at this critical juncture in human history is to curb our desires as much as possible. Curbing desires is not possible if mind and sense control are not made priorities. The moment desires are curbed, wants would be curbed. The moment wants are curbed, consumption would come down. The moment consumption comes down, demand on water, energy and raw materials would also come down. Sustainable development, which right now is not even a dream, can be achieved. And, when water is not recklessly consumed by industry as is happening now, there would be more water for meeting genuine requirements, starting with drinking.

People may not be willing to accept all this, even if they understand that what is being said is true. The reason for this is the trickery that the Mind is capable of. As someone said, the Mind can delude anyone into believing anything. It is for this reason that Swami has given spirituality the prime importance, rather than economics, and social policy.

Speaking at the National Symposium to Combat Fluorosis in 1994, Swami had said,

"To enjoy good health, one should have water, food and air free from pollution. Now all these three are polluted. Apart from these, man's mind is also polluted. To purify the mind, one should nurture noble and sacred thoughts of service to others."

Once one is committed to the spiritual path [which means mind and sense control], one would be focussed totally on what is good carefully avoiding all that is bad. Such a person would automatically revere the five elements, will see God in water, will not waste water [see BOX 23], will not do anything to encourage the wastage of water and indeed will do everything to preserve the ecosystems and preserve the ecobalance that God has established.

Five years ago, speaking to a gathering of students and devotees on the 15th May, Swami said,

"....However, modern man is totally lacking in character and virtues. No wonder both peace and happiness elude him. Because of man's

misconduct and immoral behaviour, there is pollution everywhere – in air, water, land, and food. All the five elements have been severely contaminated, consequent to man's unbecoming behaviour. If man behaves properly, is pollution of the elements conceivable? It is all due to the extensive prevalence of immoral feelings and improper behaviour. The sharp decline of virtues like love, compassion, and forbearance is directly responsible for the wide-spread pollution that one sees today. In fact, one might even say that the five elements are afraid of man!"

Man is a child of God whom God has created in His own image. It is to such a child that God lovingly bequeathed numerous treasures that include air, water and land. God said, "Child, all these are for you. I give them to you free and ask for nothing in return except that you take proper care of it always." But man has forgotten God's words, and it is to remind us of that Swami has come in our midst. Thus, the best cure for the present malady is to pay serious attention to Swami's teachings. We must live, as God want us to live. God says, "Use this gift of life to come to Me. That you can do by strict control of the Mind and the senses." If indeed we live as Swami advices us to, where is the time for desires to have their play? If desires wither, how can consumerism survive? If consumerism collapses, then misuse of air, water and land would automatically diminish and even vanish.

It has been said that the earth has all that is required to meet the needs of all the people living on it but not enough to satisfy the greed of one single man. That is indeed true, and it stresses the importance of keeping desires severely under check, especially in this day and age. And we must do this not merely for preventing disaster but more so for being in harmony with Nature and God. It is such harmony that is expected of humans and not degrading into a consuming machine.

Swami's drinking water projects about which we have featured many articles, may look like just acts of compassion. Acts of Divine Compassion they undoubtedly are, but they must also make us sit up and introspect deeply on how man must deal with the innumerable bounties that God has provided him with. Must he squander them thoughtlessly or use them wisely so that all are benefited and not just some at the cost of others? That is the question!

BOX ITEMS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT FOR 'GOD MAN AND WATER'

BOX 1 SEATTLE

As is well known, the Red Indians are the true Native Americans. The white settlers, who came later, took away most of the land by force and the rest through one-sided "sale" agreements. In the mid-fifties of the nineteenth century, the Government in Washington D.C. planned one such acquisition, and an "offer" of purchase was made to Chief Seattle. In reality, it was an order to Native Indians to give up their land rather than an offer of purchase. Chief Seattle had no option but to surrender the land in the name of a sale but on that occasion made a powerful speech, which has since become historic. Extracts are presented below, to highlight the Native Indians' sense of veneration for Nature and their ancestors.

Our religion is the traditions of our ancestors -- the dreams of our old men, given them in solemn hours of the night by the Great Spirit; and the visions of our sachems [chiefs], and is written in the hearts of our people.

Our dead never forget this beautiful world that gave them being. They still love its verdant valleys, its murmuring rivers, its magnificent mountains, sequestered vales and verdant lined lakes and bays, and ever yearn in tender fond affection over the lonely hearted living, and often return from the happy hunting ground to visit, guide, console, and comfort them.

Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead as the swelter in the sun along the silent shore, thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people, and the very dust upon which you now stand responds more lovingly to their footsteps than yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch. Our departed braves, fond mothers, glad, happy hearted maidens, and even the little children who lived here and rejoiced here for a brief season, will love these sombre solitudes and at eventide they greet shadowy returning spirits. And when the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude. At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The White Man will never be alone.

BOX 2 WETLANDS

Wetlands are areas where water covers the soil, or is present either at or near the surface of the soil all year or for varying periods of time during the year. The prolonged presence of water creates conditions that favour the growth of specially adapted plants, and promote the development of characteristic wetland soils.

Wetlands vary widely, and are found from the tundra to the tropics and on every continent except Antarctica. Inland wetlands are most common on floodplains along rivers and streams (riparian wetlands), in isolated depressions surrounded by dry land, along the margins of lakes and ponds, and in other low-lying areas. Inland wetlands include marshes and wet meadows, and swamps dominated by trees.

Many of these wetlands are seasonal (they are dry one or more seasons every year) and, particularly in the arid and semiarid regions, may be wet only occasionally. The quantity of water present and the timing of its presence determine partly the functions of a wetland and its role in the environment. Even wetlands that appear dry at times for significant parts of the year, often provide critical habitat for wildlife adapted to breeding exclusively in these areas.

Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to rain forests and coral reefs. An immense variety of species of microbes, plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish, and mammals can be part of a wetland ecosystem. Physical and chemical features such as climate, landscape shape (topology), geology, and the movement and abundance of water help to determine the plants and animals that inhabit each wetland.

Wetlands can be thought of as biological "supermarkets." They provide great volumes of food that attract many animal species. These animals use wetlands for part of or all of their lifecycle. Dead plant leaves and stems break down in the water to form small particles of organic material called "detritus." This enriched material feeds many small aquatic insects, shellfish, and small fish that are food for larger predatory fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals.

The functions of a wetland and the values of these functions to human society depend on a complex set of relationships between the wetland and the other ecosystems in the watershed. A watershed is a geographic area in which water, sediments, and dissolved materials drain from higher elevations to a common low-lying outlet or basin a point on a larger stream, lake, underlying aquifer, or estuary.

Wetlands play an integral role in the ecology of the watershed. The combination of shallow water, high levels of nutrients, and primary productivity is ideal for the development of organisms that form the base of the food web and feed many species of fish, amphibians, shellfish, and

insects. Many species of birds and mammals rely on wetlands for food, water, and shelter, especially during migration and breeding.

Wetlands' microbes, plants, and wildlife are part of global cycles for water, nitrogen, and sulphur. Furthermore, scientists are beginning to realize that atmospheric maintenance may be an additional wetlands function. Wetlands store carbon within their plant communities and soil instead of releasing it to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. Thus wetlands help to moderate global climate conditions.

BOX 3 EARTH'S WATER DISTRIBUTION

Where is Earth's water located and in what forms does it exist? [That question is answered in the bar charts below.] What we see is that most of the water on earth is salt water that is in the oceans. Only about 3 percent is fresh water. Most of this fresh water is locked up in glaciers_and icecaps, mainly in Greenland and Antarctica. Thirty percent of this 3 % of fresh water is ground water. Notice that surface water is only about 3/10th of one percent of the fresh water on earth; and yet, this is where many derive their water for everyday use.

BOX 4 ICEBERGS

An iceberg is a floating mass of **freshwater** ice that has broken from the seaward end of a glacier or polar ice sheet. Icebergs are usually found in open seas, especially around Greenland and Antarctica.

They form mostly during spring and summer when warmer weather helps in the break up of the ice sheet. In the Northern Hemisphere, about 10,000 icebergs are produced every year from the West Greenland glaciers. About 400 of them move into the North Atlantic shipping lanes, where they are a hazard to ships. Icebergs of the Arctic vary in size from about the size of a piano to large ones that are roughly 50 metres tall and 200 metres long. The famous sinking of the Titanic was caused by a collision which the ship had with a huge iceberg.

The icebergs of the Antarctic are not only far more numerous compared to those in the Arctic, but are also of enormous dimensions. About 93 % of the world's mass of icebergs is found surrounding the Antarctic. Usually, 1/8th of an iceberg is above the surface of seawater. It is mostly made up of snow, and is not very compact. The ice in the core, on the other hand, is compact, heavy and has a temperature of about minus 20⁰ C.

BOX 5 HYDROLOGICAL CYCLE

Water is not tucked away into "tight compartments"; on the contrary, water on earth moves in a constant and never-ending cycle, with Nature recycling fresh water over and over again. Thus, the water one drinks today might have been drunk before by a dinosaur! The water cycle in Nature is called the hydrological cycle.

Man can interfere with this cycle of Nature in many ways – he can disturb the atmosphere, he can disturb the natural flow of water back to the sea, he can affect the temperature of land, air and water, and so on. Until the twentieth century, man did not have this capacity to influence the hydrological cycle in a big way. **Today, the situation is very different. Even as his demand for water is skyrocketing, he is also disturbing the hydrological cycle in many ways. In this sense, we are facing a double disaster.**

BOX 6 USAGE SPECTRUM

The question is often asked, “How much of fresh water is there on earth, and is there enough water for all?” In answering this question, the prime fact we must remember is that of the fresh water available on earth, there is only so much we can actually draw every year. Next comes the question, “How much is available in the various regions of the world?” An answer to this is available in the map below. While studying this map, we must remember the following: 1) If the *per capita* availability of water per year is less than 1000 cubic metres [CM], then there is said to be water shortage in that region. 2) If the availability is between 1000 and 1,700 CM, then there is said to be water stress in that region.

If we keep this fact in mind, we can see there was water shortage in many parts of the world where people were also poor. A study by the World Resources Institute estimates that by the year 2005, roughly half the world would be experiencing water shortage or distress. This study has also projected how water gets used in the various sectors in the various regions of the world. It is useful to study the data in this box together with the information provided in BOX 8 which discusses population issues.

BOX 7 CONSUMPTION IN US

The amount of water physically consumed by an individual during a day depends very much on the style of living. People with a high standard of living have the means to pay a price and have no difficulty in getting all the water they want. The following table prepared from data taken from the US Environmental Protection Agency, indicates approximately how much water is used by a person in America in one day.

Toilet flushing	about 25 litres
Showering	about 100 litres
Brushing teeth [tap running]	about 20 litres
Washing hands or face	about 10 litres
Drinking	about 4 litres
Cleaning vegetable [tap running].....	about 12 litres

Dishwashing [using machine].....about 60 litres

Washing clothes [using machine].....about 250 litres

TOTALabout 500 litres

This is roughly equal to 25 buckets of water per person, whereas a slum dweller in Africa may be able to get only 5 buckets of water per day for an entire family of 6 people.

BOX 8 POPULATION GROWTH

It took all of recorded history for the population to grow to one billion. This figure was reached in 1830. In just one hundred years, the population doubled, that is to say, in 1930, the world population was 2 billion. By 1960, it rose to 3 billion, and today we are over 6 billion. It is estimated that the population is growing by about 80 million every year – to get an idea of what this means, it may be noted that the population of Germany is about 80 million. So it amounts to adding one Germany per year!

Human population growth is the **number one** threat to the world's environment. In particular, it is the one factor that will soon make water availability into a great crisis in many parts of the world, particularly because most of the population growth is occurring in the poorest countries that are also water starved.

The big issue of the future would be: "With limited land and limited water, how is one to feed a rapidly expanding population?" As it is, the question is a frightening one; add to it economics, politics, business, and exploitation and you have the biggest problem in human history. Does that mean the end is near? Not really, if the whole of humanity takes Swami's teachings seriously, as is pointed out in the main body of the article.

BOX 9 WASTAGE

We next consider water wastage. When we talk of wastage, we are not merely referring to the obvious wastage resulting from leaking taps and taps left carelessly open, or even using too much water for flushing toilets. These issues are important and do need to be taken care of; however, there is much more to wastage. Let us start with some aspects of water usage connected with luxury living.

A golf course consumes a lot of water. What sense does it make then in a country like India to talk of golf tourism? And yet, there are people who think the country should earn foreign exchange by promoting golf tourism! Incidentally, the water situation in India is presented on the right. The point we are trying to make is that as living standards and life style ascend to the level of luxury, they invariably call for, either directly or indirectly, more and more usage of water – just imagine how much water a family with 3 cars would need just for a car wash!

Water wastage thus means much more than taps left open, etc. **Few realise that meat eating contributes enormously to water wastage, land wastage and, believe it or not, also energy wastage.** Let us focus on water wastage. It is reported that in the United States, the meat industry consumes slightly less than half of all the water used for all purposes in the country. To get an idea of how wasteful this is, consider the following fact. Twenty thousand litres of water are consumed to produce 1 kg of animal protein, whereas to produce 1 kg of wheat, only 200 litres is required. What a waste, quite apart from the cruelty inflicted on the poor cows! By the way, **worldwide the cattle feed works out to 735 billion kg of grains every year. Conveyed in a goods train, this would require 12.3 MILLION wagons! That train would span the equator six times!!**

BOX 10 INDIA AND WATER

India gets approximately 4000 billion cubic metres [BCM] of water every year from all natural sources. Out of this, 700 BCM are lost in evaporation and another 700 BCM are lost while flowing on the ground. Further, a large part of the water, namely 1500 BCM flows into the sea due to floods. Thus the remaining available water is only 1100 BCM. Out of this, ground water recharge accounts for 430 BCM per year and the present utilized water is 370 BCM. The balance unutilized water which can be harnessed is 300 BCM. The per capita availability in the year 2001 was about 1200 cubic metres [CM] per year, which is in the distress level.

Presently, 92 % of the water is being used for agriculture. The rest goes to industry and domestic consumption. Just consider what would happen if the population grows as at present and India tries to become developed like even Europe. There would then be heavy demands for water from the agricultural sector as well as the industrial sector. And the reserve is not all that much. Does that not spell trouble? The only way to avoid serious trouble is to take Swami's teachings most seriously!

BOX 11 MEAT AND WATER

Many are the arguments given in favour of vegetarianism but few realise that water conservation is perhaps the most powerful! How many know that to produce one kilo of wheat requires 200 litres of water, while to produce 1 kilo of meat requires 100 times more that is 20000 litres of water? It is said that the amount of water needed to produce beef for a country like Holland is equal to the drinking water consumed by two billion people in one year! And what about the land needed for raising the food for cattle?

In America alone 56% of the agricultural land is used for meat production. In Brazil, the cattle industry is the driving force behind the huge destruction of the invaluable Amazon forest; and that is definitely going to hurt the water cycle and also the environment. The time has come to seriously worry about all this.

BOX 12 ACID RAIN

There is one more source of water pollution that comes via the atmosphere. Many industries discharge highly corrosive substances into the atmosphere through chimneys. These chemicals, sulphuric acid for example, get into clouds and when it rains, come down with rainwater. Such rain is called acid rain. This acid rain causes damage to vegetation; entire forests are known to have been destroyed by acid rain. And when such rain water flows into a river or a lake, they too get affected causing much hardship to people who depend on those sources.

BOX 13 ARSENIC

The State of West Bengal in India and the adjoining country Bangladesh, both receive plenty of rain. Bangladesh in particular, is often ravaged by floods. Given this fact, one would imagine that in both these places, people would not have to depend on borewell water for drinking. Strangely they do, and that has led to an environmental health disaster, affecting millions of people.

Why have the people in this region been forced to use borewells, when so much rainwater is available? There is a good reason. Thanks to lack of proper sanitation, in almost all places in this region, the rainwater that accumulates in shallow wells and ponds is contaminated by bacteria. This caused severe water borne diseases of many kinds and in order to get out of this problem, borewells were sunk.

At first, there was no problem with borewell water but as soon as the water table fell, arsenic rich layers were encountered. Now arsenic is widely distributed through the earth's surface, and when water flows through arsenic-rich rocks, arsenic gets dissolved into the water. Sustained drinking of water contaminated with arsenic is harmful to health, and leads to skin cancer, lung cancer, cancer of the bladder and of kidney. It is now estimated that millions of people have been affected by arsenic poisoning in this region. Arsenic in ground water is not easily removed and there is thus a huge problem in West Bengal and neighbouring Bangladesh.

What this tragedy highlights is the need for proper water management, as also the link between water issues and sanitation issues. With good sanitation, many water-borne diseases can be avoided, and there would be no need to go for ground water. Because sanitation was neglected, millions now have to pay the price.

BOX 14 LAKE BAIKAL

Lake Baikal which lies in southern Siberia, is one of the oldest and deepest fresh water lakes in the world. Investigations show it to be at least 30 million years old. It is far from the ocean and fed by hundreds of rivers; but of these,

only one, namely River Selenga brings in a large amount of water. The main outlet is River Angara. In size, Baikal is pretty big, being about 800 km long and about 160 km wide. It holds about 23,000 cubic kilometres of water. The Russians have always venerated the lake as a source of beauty and power.

For thousands of years this beautiful lake remained pure and in its pristine condition. Trouble started in a big way in the mid-fifties of the 20th century, when the erstwhile Soviet Government set up a huge paper mill on the shores of this lake. The main task of the mill was to produce a kind of super cellulose that was to be used in making tyres for Soviet military jets. The plant polluted the lake heavily but in those cold war days, no one really cared. Additional pollution came from the Selenga River.

After the end of the Soviet regime, the new Russian Government woke up and realised with alarm that Lake Baikal is a self-contained aquatic system with its own isolated ecosystem that was unique in many ways. With determination, it started taking many steps to reverse the earlier trend, thanks to which the lake has shown some small signs of healing. Meanwhile, UNESCO is considering declaring Lake Baikal a nature treasure of the world. If that happens, then the lake would come under international protection.

BOX 16 CLUB OF ROME

In 1972, a report was published by a “club” nobody had ever heard of, which shocked the world. This report, which was all about the forthcoming collapse of life on earth, was written not by some doomsday prophet but by scientists of high repute, led by a M.I.T professor named Jay Forrester. The report was called *Limits to Growth*, and based on the results of a computer simulation of what the future of the world would be, if it went on at the rate prevailing then, i.e., 1972.

Computer simulation is a methodology in which the mathematician turns computer scientist. Applied mathematicians love to describe the real world in terms of models. A model is a mathematical representation of phenomena, both natural and relating to Society. Take for example, the weather. In India, long before the season, people are anxious to know what might happen during the forthcoming monsoon. Meteorologists try to forecast this using a computer model for the monsoon. To work the model, inputs are needed.

The Mets feed in all kinds of observations accumulated from the pre-monsoon season like surface temperature at different parts of the seas surrounding India, the land temperatures, the wind speeds observed at various altitudes, the atmospheric pressures at different places and different heights, etc. The computer is then allowed to roll and the results it churns out are the predictions of the model, for the input conditions specified.

How good is this approach? Well, basically, it depends on two important factors. 1) The quality of the model itself, and 2) the accuracy of the input data. Often the starting models are imprecise but almost invariably, most models get refined over a period of time, after which, with good input data,

they make fairly good predictions. Computer simulation is now a discipline in itself and is widely used in wide-ranging branches of science – from astrophysics to molecular biology, ecology, and even economics. Forrester's study was based on a model of world growth he had constructed. Professor Forrester's report contained three main conclusions:

1. If the present pace of growth is maintained and there are no changes, then within less than 100 years, Society will run out of the nonrenewable resources on which the industrial base depends. When the resources have been depleted, a precipitous collapse of the economic system will result, manifested in massive unemployment, decreased food production, and a decline in population as the death rate soars.
2. Piecemeal approaches to solving the individual problems will not be successful.
3. The impending collapse can be avoided only by an immediate limit on population and pollution, as well as a cessation of economic growth.

Limits to Growth gave mankind the unpleasant message that the world was heading for disaster because of unfettered population growth, reckless industrial expansion, exhaustion of stocks of natural resources, environmental destruction, and food shortages. Understandably, Forrester's report became the subject of heated controversy, and the Club of Rome soon gained the reputation of being a neo-Malthusian movement of doomsayers. In any event, the report became world famous.

Since 1972, countless experts have revisited the subject, and any number of books have been published. We obviously cannot go into all that here but might mention the three basic viewpoints that have emerged.

The first is by people using the tools of simulation and what they believe to be better and more accurate models. They essentially confirm the predictions of Forrester, though the details might vary.

The second is by experts who have great faith in man's ability to overcome obstacles through ingenuity. One of these is Herman Kahn, hailed as a great Think Tank expert. Kahn does not use a mathematical model but a logical model of human behaviour. In effect he says, necessity is the mother of invention, and that man can and will surely devise means to overcome all obstacles. In other words, Kahn has faith in technology and its ability to solve problems, however knotty they might be.

In the years that followed Kahn's study, many have gone further to actually script how technology can save the day. One of these is Lester R. Brown, Founder of the Earth Policy Institute, and the winner of innumerable awards. Brown has outlined the future in his book *Eco-Economy*. He analyses the present and concludes that all our problems are due to the use of wrong technologies and wrong practices, all of which harm the eco system. If we

switch to eco-friendly technology and careful recycling, then all would be fine and there can be no disaster in the future.

The third viewpoint is that of James Lovelock, an English scientist. Called the *Gaia hypothesis* after the Greek concept for Mother Earth, Lovelock's view of the world suggests that the earth is a living organism with a complex feedback system that seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment.

What Lovelock says is essentially the following: if growth proceeds as at present, Nature would intervene in her own way, perhaps via disasters of various kinds, to limit the population and to inhibit man progressing as now. In other words, mankind would take a step backward, and have less population and less technology as a result of which some kind of stability would be resorted, though with a much lower standard of living. In essence, according to the *Gaia* hypothesis the planetary environment is a self-regulating process.

A few comments now on the above. All the various studies quoted above are no doubt well motivated and thorough in their own respective ways. Of these, models like that of Forrester reduce man to a thoughtless consuming machine. Kahn and Brown, on the other hand, argue that man is an intelligent consuming machine. If he finds that his present style is damaging, he would invent another that is not damaging. He does not necessarily have to compromise on his present standard of living, at least not too much. Lovelock seems to feel, perhaps with good reason, that man might be very smart in a worldly sense but is otherwise a fool and headed for a crash. Nature will allow the crash to happen, and throw man back to a more primitive existence for restoring balance.

If we look at the different views summarised above, one thing that is common is that all the analyses have been made by experts in the West, and it would seem that their proto type man is essentially a Westerner, both in style and in attitude. Secondly, human nature is not explicitly taken into account. It is sort of assumed that man is driven by the Mind. This may be a fact of daily life but one cannot totally ignore that man, as Swami always reminds us is Soul first, Mind next and body last. This being the case, it is wrong to keep the Soul out of any discussion relating to mankind's future. May be the mathematician can ignore the Soul in making weather forecasts, but is that legitimate in this case?

This is where our thinking differs, as we point out in the main text. Basically we say, man has *Buddhi*. If only he activates it, he does not have to face disaster and slide back into primitive existence as Lovelock thinks he might. The disaster has not yet happened and we can stop it even now; only we must use *Buddhi* and not *Medha Shakti* or worldly intelligence alone.

The Club of Rome prediction applies to mankind that chooses to ignore *Buddhi*. As Krishna has clearly stated, if *Buddhi* is allowed to rust then disaster is certain. But if *Buddhi* is allowed to guide, then there is no need for any fear.

BOX 17 KOFI ANNAN

Reproduced below is a message from the Secretary General of the UN, drawing attention to the water problem facing humanity. The UN is no doubt making many laudable efforts in the cause of humankind, but in the ultimate analysis, problems of the world cannot be solved by politics, by economic planning, by World Bank or IMF loans, etc. They can be solved, as pointed out in the main article, only if man transforms, and the call for transformation is coming solely from Swami, who is also setting a personal example in so many different ways.

MESSAGE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL TO LAUNCH “WATER FOR LIFE DECADE” on 22ND March 2005.

Dear friends,

Water is essential for life. Yet many millions of people around the world face water shortages. Many millions of children die every year from water-borne diseases. And drought regularly afflicts some of the world’s poorest countries. The world needs to respond much better. We need to increase water efficiency, especially in agriculture. We need to free women and girls from the daily chore of hauling water over great distances. We must involve them in decision-making on water management. We need to make sanitation a priority. This is where progress is lagging most. And we must show that water resources need not be a source of conflict. Instead, they can be a catalyst for cooperation. Significant gains have made. But a major effort is still required. That is why this year marks the beginning of “Water for Life” Decade. Our goal is to meet the internationally agreed targets for water and sanitation by 2015, and to build the foundation for further progress in the years beyond.

There is an urgent matter of human development, and human dignity. Together, we can provide safe, clean water to all the world’s people. The world’s water resources are our lifeline for survival, and for the sustainable development in the 21st century. Together, we must manage them better.

Kofi A. Annan

BOX 18 WATER WARS

In the past, wars were fought for gaining control of land and oil resources. Experts now say that in the not too distant future, wars would be fought over water. This is not a fanciful prediction because, in the Middle East, there are already loud rumblings. In Africa too there is a strong prospect of war clouds gathering, over who is to get how much of the waters of the famous Nile river.

The Nile is the world's longest river, and passes through many countries. Besides these countries, many others which contribute major tributaries are also involved in the debate concerning the sharing of Nile's waters. For thousands of years, there was no problem. The population in the different regions was small and there was no technology to harness the waters of the river on a massive scale.

All that has changed now. Since the fifties, Egypt, faced with a growing population and large unemployment, has initiated massive programs to tap the waters of the Nile, especially for irrigation. But meanwhile, the upper riparian states all the way from Tanzania to Sudan are facing population growth, low employment, and acute water shortage. Understandably they are claiming their own share of water which till now they did not use. However, Egypt is in no mood to accept those arguments or recognise the legitimacy of the demands of the upper riparian states. To make matters worse, there is no proper international law or regulation that can be appealed to.

Right now, it seems to be a case of might is right; but how long can this go on? That is why some experts fear horrible water wars; and their fears might even come true, unless everyone accepts the principle of *some for all rather than more for some*, which is the principle of equitable sharing and a moral one too.

BOX 19 MORAL 1 MAYAN

This is what Nobel Peace Laureate Ms Rigoberta Manchu of Guatemala and Mayan descent says:

The Mayas, our grandparents, always said, every human being occupies a small piece of Time, Time itself is much longer, and because of this they always said that we must care for the earth while we are on it because it will be a part of our children, and of our grand children. They know that life is short, that it can end soon, and if that one gets lost on the way, others will come to take their place.

BOX 20 MORAL 2 RED INDIAN POEM

*It is only when the last tree has been cut
When the last fish has been caught
When the last river has been poisoned
That you will realise that you cannot eat money*

A poem of a native Indian tribe in North America

BOX 21 MORAL 3

The following is an extract from an article by Mr. Rajamani, a retired officer of the prestigious Indian Administrative Service. Throughout his career, Mr. Rajamani has been passionately devoted to environmental

matters. The article which is the source for the following appeared in **Wasteland News**, May-July, 2004. By the way, Mr. Rajamani is a devotee of Swami.

Why have we reached this stage in our existence where our own future, leave aside that of our future generations, is put at such a risk? It is easy to ascribe this as being due to overpopulation or the inevitability of economic growth where some sacrifices are inevitable. But the more deep causes are cultural in nature. The values of conservation and proximity to Nature, which prevailed for centuries and even permeated religious and other beliefs, particularly in countries like India, are facing erosion.

The dominance of the human species ignoring the equity if not the equality of all living things and organisms has reached a point where it is endangering our own survival. Unlike ancient cultures, we now see natural resources as those to be subjugated, used and even overused in the name of better management! The surprising aspect of these developments is the utter disregard of the interest of our own future generations who will find that non-renewable resources have already been exhausted, and renewable resources have been harvested to the point of no return.

What is required is a cultural attitude where the spirit governs us as much as matter. Contentment and being able to make do with less, altruistic practices that avoid driving the weak up the wall, respect and compassion for all living creatures which should include plants, shrubs and trees – these and more that our saints and scriptures have imbibed in us should drive us rather than greed and an attitude of the devil taking the hindmost. The thought for the tomorrow and the lives we shall ourselves create for living in it should ever be at the back of our minds as we use our soils, water and biodiversity.

BOX 22 MORAL 4 GANDHI

Gandhi: "If we want to remake our civilisation we must remake it around what is the spirit in us it is because we are violent inside that the environment is dying all around us. The nest in which we live, we are fouling."

BOX 23 MATTHEW FOX

Matthew Fox a radical priest and theologian says: "The addiction to avarice and greed is deep within our civilization. It is built in the very structure of capitalism, the quest for more. Avarice is not a problem of materialism – it is a soul issue, it is our quest for the infinite but it has been misplaced. Consumerism cannot satisfy us and that is why we are always looking for a new model every year, it is an infinite progression in the consumer addiction."

BOX 24 WATER HARVESTING

Rainwater is the primary source of fresh water used by mankind. Rivers, lakes, and ground water are all secondary sources of fresh water, as they are all stores and channels of rainwater. Water harvesting is the name given to an organised effort to collect rainwater and make use of it later, in the place where the rain falls.

Water harvesting is nothing new. In South India, for ages, people used to collect water in tanks and use them for irrigation. Indeed, for centuries a good part of the agriculture in State of Tamil Nadu used to be based on tank water. It was only with the advent of British rule when big dams came to be constructed, that people in many places began to depend on water distributed through canals.

Water harvesting is needed not merely for agricultural purposes but also for providing drinking water, especially in urban areas. The city of Shillong in India is the capital of the State Meghalaya. This State is located in the North East part of the country, and the word Meghalaya literally means the Abode in the Clouds; no wonder, for the State is all high mountains. Shillong receives very heavy rainfall but the irony is that the people there suffer from drinking water shortage! Why? Because all the rainwater runs quickly down the slopes into the valleys below. The people there have therefore started collecting water that falls on the sloping roofs and storing them in huge canisters for use, especially during the non-monsoon period.

Many cities in India have become so urbanised that the rainwater nowadays flows through drains, and is lost. Decades ago, houses in the city of Madras [now Chennai], for example, used to have wells from which water used to be drawn not only for drinking but also for other household use also. These days when drinking water itself is in short supply, water availability for other purposes is almost zero – there is no ground water anymore since there is no recharging; all the rainwater flows away through drains into the sea. This is precisely where rain harvesting becomes important.

DO YOU KNOW THAT

- **Over a billion people do not have access to safe drinking water – around one-sixth of the world's population.**
- **2.4 billion people do not have access to adequate sanitation – around 2/5th of the world's population.**
- **2.2 million people in developing countries, mostly children, die every year from diseases associated with lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation.**
- **At one time, roughly one half of the world's hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from water-borne diseases.**
- **The average distance that poor women in Africa and Asia walk to collect water is 6 km.**

- **The weight of water that poor women in Africa and Asia carry on their heads can be anything up to 20 kg.**
- **In the past ten years, diarrhoea has killed more children than all the people who have lost their lives in armed conflict since World War II. For example, in 1998, about 400,000 people died in Africa due to wars, but more than 2 million children died in Africa of diarrhoea.**

SAI BABA AND THE COSMIC CHRIST

By Ron Laing

This is the month of December, the holy month of Christmas, when thousands gather at Prashanthi Nilayam to pay their homage to their "Father". Here is an interesting article celebrating this sacred month.

Sai Baba and Jesus - Extraordinary Identity

I had studied the life and teachings of Sathya Sai Baba for two years before going to India, and I had come to the certain conviction that once again the Word had been made flesh, that the Divine Principle had incarnated to save the world from destruction. Everything Swami said and did struck a note in the core of my being. He crystallised virtually everything I had come to believe in 65 years of search. I had come home.

What also impacted me increasingly was the extraordinary similarity in the life, teachings, miracles, and personality of Sai Baba and Jesus of Nazareth. They even seemed to express themselves in the same phraseology. Of course it is true that all world teachers basically assert the same truths, but there is an extraordinary identity between Sai Baba and Jesus which is quite unique.

In 1968 Albert Eckhart wrote, *'The difference between Sai Baba and Jesus Christ is that the first is living and his miracles are confirmed by men, whereas the miracles of Jesus are reported in the Bible only. Nevertheless, the behaviour and the deeds of both are nearly and often the same.'*

The teachings of Jesus spread across half the globe. Sai Baba, in a little over 40 years, is said to have 50 million devotees and there are Centres in 64 countries of the world. *(This article was written in 1984. Now there are Sai Centres in about 180 countries and correspondingly a much larger number of followers - H2H Team)*. Puttaparthi is rapidly becoming the Vatican of the East. At the Birthday celebration in 1980 there were 350,000 people accommodated on a campus of 100 acres.

On Swami's 50th birthday Dr Diwaker, an Indian scholar and statesman, said this:

'Once Swami was a village urchin, uncared for, untutored, unloved. Now on his 50th birthday we assemble from the four quarters of the globe and what do we find? Philosophers and politicians, educators and legislators, scientists and technologists, the learned as well as the ignorant, the rich as well as the poor, and from all nations and from all religions, if this is not a marvel and a living miracle I would like to know what is!'

Sai and Jesus...Same Love

Jesus went about loving people and healing the sick. Sai Baba, too, does just that — loving people and healing the sick, serving mankind 24 hours a day. Both interpret the purpose of human life in exactly the same way. The

symbolic meaning of the Cross is the eradication of the ego — the vertical stroke represents the T with which we are born, and the horizontal stroke the erasure of the ego. Baba's interpretation is identical. **'The sole purpose of your incarnation is the crucifixion of the ego on the altar of compassion.'**

Both have made stupendous statements. Jesus said, *'I am the way, the truth, and the life. I and my father are one.'* Baba has made even more incredible statements, 'My power is immeasurable. My truth is inexplicable, unfathomable. I am beyond the reach of the most intensive enquiry and the most meticulous measurement. There is nothing I do not see, nowhere I do not know the way, no problem I cannot solve. My sufficiency is unconditional. I am the totality — all of it'

Both proclaim the brotherhood of man and the universality of the message. *'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,'* said the Christ. 'My mission is for all mankind,' says Baba, 'I have not come to collect disciples for any particular sect, creed or religion, such as the Hindu religion. I have come to light the lamp of love in the hearts of all humanity.'

Sai and Jesus - Same Teaching and Message

The teaching of both is exoteric and esoteric. Christ taught the masses in simple parables, yet astounded the scholars and theologians with the scope and insight of his knowledge. Baba also teaches the masses in parables, yet was explaining the most abstruse passages in the Vedas to India's pundits at the age of ten. Both come over as men of the people, intensely human and lovable, albeit divine, rather than as cloistered holy men. One might say 'divinely human and humanly divine'. One feels this about Jesus, at one and the same time a friend and a god-man. So too with Baba — at one moment borrowing a razor from Dr Gokak when travelling, and then suddenly performing some stupendous miracle (like 'cancelling' the cancer of a devotee).

We are told that Jesus commanded an audience of thousands, and was acclaimed by virtually the entire city on his entry into Jerusalem. Baba commands an audience of tens of thousands on a whirlwind visit to a big city. Both started their mission when children. Christ taught in the temple at the age of 12. Baba was performing miracles at 6 and started his mission at the age of 13.

The teaching on karma and reincarnation is common to both, although most of Christ's teaching on these truths were expunged from the four Gospels which were kept, at the Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. They are, however, still intact in the Aquarian Gospel and others. 'A man reaps what he sows,' says Jesus. 'Whatsoever acts a man does, good or bad, follow him,' says Baba. 'The Kingdom of heaven is within you,' said Jesus. 'We make our worlds ourselves,' says Baba. 'God is your best Guru, and He resides in your heart.'

Christ upheld the role of women and tried to raise their status above the level of mere chattels. He was often surrounded by women. Swami, too, reveres women, and elevates them in their vital role of motherhood as being the custodians of future generations. 'The mother is the child's first guru,' He says. Three of His first six colleges are for women only (and every year November 19th is celebrated as Ladies Day in Prashanthi Nilayam and all Sai Centres).

Christ preached joy and the life abundant. 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' Joy is the very essence of Baba's personality and teaching. Listen to those who know Him intimately — Howard Murphet, author of three books on Baba: *'We who struggle on through sorrow and passing joy, see in Baba the embodiment of perfect joy.'* Or to Dr Sandweiss, author of *The Holy Man and the Psychiatrist*, *'He appears to be in a state of constant bliss. His face and body are lit with an aura of energy which I have never observed in a human being.'*

Of course **the cornerstone of the teaching of these two god-men can be summed up in the one word - love.** No newcomer to the Gospels, unconditioned by theology, could possibly read them without gaining the overwhelming impression that the paramount message contained therein is one of love. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . ' and 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.' Sai Baba, too, is the embodiment of love. It is the essence of *all* His teaching, the golden thread which runs through everything He says and does, the criterion by which He judges everything.

There is the same similarity in the detailed teaching. 'Avoid killing, theft, adultery, greed, sensuality, anger, impatience, hatred, egotism, pride.' Are not these exhortations an appeal to the Christian values? In the ten volumes of Baba's Discourses can be found every precept of the Sermon on the Mount. I give here a *few* of the sayings of both.

The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus : 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.'

Sai : 'The pure heart becomes inspired; it sees beyond intellect and reason.'

Jesus : 'Search not for the mote in your neighbour's eye but look for the beam in your own.'

Sai : 'Instead of seeing faults in others, search for those in yourself.'

Jesus : 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'

Sai: 'Do not judge others, for when another is judged you are yourself condemned.'

Jesus : 'Cast not pearls before swine.'

Sai : 'Do not discuss devotion with those who have none; it will lessen your own.'

Jesus : 'Love your enemies.'

Sai : 'Carry on even if you are hated.'

Jesus : 'Not everyone who sayeth 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of the Father.'

Sai : 'The secret of liberation lies not in mystic formulas and rosaries, but in stepping out into action.' (Love and Service)

Jesus : 'For as much as you do injury to one of these, you do it to me.'

Sai : 'Do not slander or injure anyone, for you are slandering Me who is in him.'

Jesus : 'For Thine is the power and the glory.'

Sai : ' No man can claim achievement, for all are but instruments in the hands of the Lord..'

Jesus : 'Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.'

Sai : 'Bring Me the depths of your minds, no matter how grotesque, no matter how ravaged by doubts or disappointments. I will not reject you. I am your Mother.'

Sai and Jesus - The Same Divine Charisma

As with the teachings, so with the personalities and miracles. It is clear that Christ had a radiant transparency, a divine charisma, with no trace of affectation, pride or ego; that he was motivated solely by love which radiated from him. The impact of meeting him must have been soul-shattering. How else could a man walk up to a small group of illiterate fishermen, talk to them for an hour, and then say, 'Follow me,' and have them do just that, abandoning all?

Sai Baba has a similar effect. The sight of Him changes men and women. Often souls are instantly transformed. Dr Sandweiss was an example. When Swami first looked at him he wrote: *'What was communicated in that brief moment? The world! Something broke inside me. Some of Baba's love and joy penetrated my soul and I found myself laughing like a child ... I felt somehow transformed in one dazzling, incredible minute. I was left with my mouth hanging open.'*

The Christ is said to have had an aura that reached out for a mile, so that 'sensitives' who came within it were psychically aware of his presence and

were uplifted. Sai Baba's aura has been described by Dr Baranowski, a clairvoyant and Kirlian photography expert from Arizona University, as almost limitless. *'The white (energy) filled the entire room, the pink (intense universal love) went beyond the walls of the building and beyond this were bands of gold and silver reaching to the horizon.'*

The Christ had X-ray eyes, instantly knowing thought and character. Baba has said, 'I see into the mind and heart. I see who has an urgent problem and needs the help of an interview.' He sees the past, present and future of everyone he meets. His omniscience regarding the past and present is constantly proved.

One gets the impression that Christ preferred simple people with a good heart. He mainly chose simple men as his disciples. Baba often rails at the scholars and pedants, with their 'desire for disputation and the laurels of victory over those preening themselves as learned'. 'Be simple and sincere,' Baba tells His devotees. Both show their dislike of the Pharisee type. Christ called them 'whited sepulchres'. Swami calls them 'dry as dust scholars exulting in their casuistry and argumentative skills.'

Both have clearly shown their love of children. Jesus rebuked the disciples who wanted to keep the children away. 'Suffer little children to come unto me'. Baba shares this love. When a large group of children from the Wellingborough Centre (UK) went to the ashram they were too excited to sleep on the first night. Baba came to their quarters and asked them if they would go to sleep if He, too, went to sleep? Whereupon He lay down on the floor and pretended to sleep. Soon the only sound was blissful breathing — and Baba crept out on tiptoe.

Both demonstrate a capacity for vehement 'righteous indignation' when necessary for a purpose, as, for example, when Jesus drove out the money-changers from the temple with a leather lash because he opposed the buying of animals for sacrifice. A friend of mine who is a close devotee told me how one day a man with a very wealthy father, who was dying, actually came to Swami to seek financial advice about his coming inheritance! Swami thundered at him, with an emotion which astonished my friend, for thinking of money when his sick father needed his care, and dismissed him — only to revert to His normal loving self in a second. The 'anger' was just a necessary 'act'. As He says, 'Sometimes I have to make a noise!'

Jesus and Sai - The Same Personality, the Same Miracles

Both also show a combination of deep humility and commanding authority. Jesus is often referred to as 'one who spoke with authority' - one envisages a tall, commanding figure. Yet he knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples. Swami might often play and joke, but should anyone take undue advantage of it, in the twinkling of an eye He resumes His authority. Once, when a devotee enquired if he might ask a favour, Baba replied, 'Of course. I am yours. I have no rights.' At one time a servant of mankind, at another the Lord.

Both, of course, have been maligned and persecuted. 'Calumny is the lot of all great souls everywhere, at any time. It would be unnatural if it were not so,' says Baba. He is oblivious to praise or blame. Christ was accused of being a wine-bibber, of mixing with publicans and sinners. Baba has been criticised for allowing 'sinners' to use the ashram. Their replies were similar: 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' Baba has said, 'Sinners have more need of me than you have.' Christ was accused of healing by the powers of Satan (Beelzebub). Baba has been called a black magician.

There is also a remarkable similarity in the miracles. Christ healed the sick. Baba heals the sick daily. Christ raised Lazarus from the dead when his body is said to have been in a state of decomposition. Baba has raised the dead on at least two occasions. The body of Mr V. Radhakrishna was also in a state of decomposition.

Both multiplied food — Christ at the feeding of the five thousand, and Baba on many occasions when the food has run out. Christ changed water into wine. Baba has changed water into petrol and fuel oil. Christ could control the elements and calm the seas; likewise Baba has made a rainbow appear, and made floods recede. Christ could levitate and walk on the waters. Baba was levitating as a child to the top of the rocky hill at Puttaparthi.

The Divine Assurance of Sai

Christmas is a major festival at the ashram and celebrated with much more fervour than in the West where it has become so grossly commercialised. Baba often gives talks to small groups of Christians and points out the excisions and interpolations in the Gospels.

To those who feel a sense of disloyalty to Jesus He has on more than one occasion manifested a figure of Jesus above His head, thus identifying the two. There are also accounts of people praying before a statue of Christ and seeing it transform into an image of Sai Baba.

Finally, on Christmas Day 1972 Swami was talking to a group of Christians. He referred to a statement of Jesus which He said had been excised from the Bible. One day Jesus said to his disciples, 'He who sent me will come again. His name will be Truth. He will wear a red robe. He will be short, and have a crown (of hair).' Of course this description exactly fits Sathya Sai.

When I read about this it completely fascinated me, for I had already come to believe that Sai Baba was the great Celestial Being who had overshadowed Jesus - the One whom Jesus referred to, and prayed to, as 'the Father'.

Well, in January 1980 I plucked up courage during a private interview with only my wife present, and referred to Baba's statement on Christmas Day 1972. I said, '*Swami, does this omission in the Bible mean that it was You who sent Jesus of Nazareth into incarnation?*'

'Yes,' He replied. Then came the question which lay at the very core of my soul, *'In that case, are you what Western Christians call the Cosmic Christ?'*

'Yes,' He said again.

It is impossible to convey in words the tone, the quiet assurance in which He affirmed these two questions. Gently, lovingly, with total conviction, with a sort of ineffable simplicity, and perhaps most of all, with a total lack of self-consciousness impossible in a human being. He looked straight into my eyes, which were no more than twelve inches from His, and just said, 'Yes'. I only know that it was impossible not to believe Him.

- *From Sathya Sai Baba Magazine - Spring 1984.*

THE FAMILY OF HUMANITY

By Dr. Sara Pavan

This is a true story of the experience and practice of Baba's Message – “*There is only one caste – the caste of Humanity*” through love and service at the Wayside chapel in Sydney, Australia.

"Haven't you gone yet?" asked Swami, as He materialised *Vibhuti* and poured it into my hands at *Darshan* when we visited Prasanthi Nilayam in December, 1984. Nonplussed, I couldn't respond to Swami's enquiry and the Lord continued gliding onwards, leaving His footprints on the golden sand. I couldn't solve the riddle until I read a letter from Rev. Ted Noffs that was awaiting our return from India. Only then I realised what Swami had meant when He asked me that question and I inferred that Swami wanted me to meet up with Rev. Ted Noffs.

In that letter Rev. Noffs invited me to participate in the 21st anniversary celebration of the founding of the Wayside Chapel. Swami says, "*It is good to be born in a church, but it would be sad if you die in the same church!*" He also stresses the need for expansion. In His 60th Birthday Message Bhagavan asked: "*What is this 'Sai Family' you are claiming about?*" He declared, "The whole world is One Family." He emphasised the importance of the 'Integration of the World Community.'

In an interview in December 1982 Swami had blessed me to start publishing a quarterly Sai Newsletter for Australia. By 1984 we had several hundreds of subscribers from all around the country. In October 1984 I received a letter from Elvie B., a subscriber from a remote farming countryside in Queensland. I did not pay much attention to what she had written in her letter because I receive letters from many devotees about their experiences of Baba. In her letter Elvie claimed that Swami 'stood in front of her' during meditation and commanded her to write to me, that I should meet Rev. Ted Noffs, the pastor of the Wayside Chapel in Kings Cross, Sydney, in whom I would find a true spiritual friend, who cares and serves humanity beyond human barriers.

Until then I hadn't heard of the Wayside Chapel of Kings Cross or Rev. Ted Noffs. All I knew about the Cross was that it was a dangerous area in the city and the hub of all kinds of vice and crime. I had no interest whatsoever to go to Kings Cross and even felt why I, a Hindu by birth, should be associated with a Church! Around this time I happened to receive a parcel of books - *Embodiment of Love* and *Eastern View of Jesus Christ and Christianity* - from Peggy Mason, then the editor and publisher of the Sai Newsletter of U.K. and wife of Ron Laing, who was the first president of the Sathya Sai Council of U.K. In my enthusiasm to share Bhagavan's Love with broadminded people like Rev. Ted Noffs, I posted a copy of these two books to him before leaving for India to spend Christmas with Swami.

Having enshrined Swami in my heart, since 1980 I had spent most of my spare time doing my best to serve in His Divine Mission. Now, five years later,

Bhagavan opens another window in my life for spiritual expansion – to understudy Rev. Ted Noffs and experience spirituality in action! Did Bhagavan have a plan thus, in exposing me to the concept of the “Family of Humanity” and expand my spiritual horizon through personal experience? At this point let me outline the background of Rev. Ted Noffs and the Wayside Chapel.

The Story of the Wayside Chapel and Its 'Family of Humanity'

Ted Noffs was a Methodist minister, part of the Uniting Church in Australia, and had served the aboriginals with love and understanding in the outback of Australia. In 1964 the Uniting Church ventured into an experiment at Kings Cross and asked Ted Noffs to take charge of this unique ministry for the forlorn in the crime ridden suburb, among the ‘Godless’ people indulging in vice and crime. Ted Noffs was free to set aside some of the ‘religious’ traditions and constraints to carry out his unique ministry. He renovated a dilapidated old building in Kings Cross and called it the ‘Wayside Chapel’ and flung open its doors to all and sundry.

Seeing the Chapel not even remotely having any semblance of a Church with its pews empty and located where no one would ever build a church or a temple, a fledgling journalist then and media personality now, sceptically remarked, *“Mr. Noffs! You may find for your congregation some of the beatniks who lived down the road.”* (Beatniks were young persons in the 1960s who did not accept society’s customs and principles but who valued personal experience instead, and who had long hair and wore untidy clothes).

It is interesting to note that our Swami too had several such youths from America around Him in the sixties. Ted Noffs set off to meet these youngsters the next day to see if he might lure them to the Chapel. He told me that it was like walking into a lion’s den, for these beatniks hated any kind of establishment, especially the church.

Ted discussed philosophy, politics and current events with the beatniks and found them well informed and highly intelligent. As Ted was amiable they offered him a cup of coffee, which he gladly accepted in spite of their unkempt place and a sink full of unwashed utensils. There was no milk in the fridge and one of them dashed out to buy some milk and Ted accompanied him to the nearby shop. When the beatnik asked for a pint of milk Ted pulled out his wallet and asked for six. The young man turned to Ted and said: *“Mr. Noffs! We live by a bottle of milk a day.”*

Ted was taken aback by the resolve of this young man, who literally summed up the words of Jesus Christ, *“Take therefore no thought, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof.”* Ted reflected upon the happenings of the day and realised how restricted the church was. They wouldn’t even undertake an activity without having the resources upfront. His faith in God deepened as he reflected upon the kind of ministry Jesus had with ordinary people and how Jesus, with faith and conviction, always looked to his Heavenly Father to provide. Bhagavan Baba also reminds us that God will always provide the means when we

undertake noble tasks. The Chapel doors were open for all people irrespective of creed or race, and migrant communities – Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs – who had no place for worship of their own those days started using the 'Wayside Chapel' for their prayers which Ted Noffs would participate in. Soon he realised the urgent need for religious amity, which inspired him to have his own creed at the Wayside Chapel:

"I am a child of the stars. My religion, like the clothes I wear, belongs to the dust of the centuries. My spirit is immortal. Our children are sons and daughters from an eternal kingdom and are here to inherit the riches and resources of this planet for a span until they journey through time and space.

I AM a Catholic,

I AM a Protestant,

I AM a Jew,

I AM a Hindu,

I AM a Moslem,

I AM a Sikh,

I AM a Buddhist, Because I AM a Human and I belong to the Universe, nothing in the world can be alien to me."

Ted Noffs later added: *"The world today is torn apart on the basis of caste, creed, colour, nationality, as well as the socio-economic divide, and is in dire straits towards self-destruction, needing the Einsteins and Galileos of the spirit to show the human race a scientific basis for a spiritual life. Religions are man-made, here today and gone tomorrow. **Blessed are those who can distinguish between religion and spirituality and abide by the Universal Spirit of Love to build a better world for our children and their children."***

The "Family of Humanity" became functional and realistic, based not on religious dogmas but spiritual unity as the bedrock for a caring and sharing society through Love and Service. An outreach programme to help the lonely and helpless, Life-education for children and the 'Naming' Ceremonies and Marriages in the name of the "Family of Humanity" were pioneered by Ted in the seventies. Bhagavan Baba has always emphasised the importance of "Brotherhood of man and Fatherhood of God." The weekly open forum at the Chapel became the voice of conscience of the people on many a controversial issue in society.

His acceptance of other religions and 'Inter-faith' practises at the Chapel landed Rev. Noffs on heresy charges during his ministry. Regardless, Ted continued courageously with his work, which not only became well known throughout Australia, but also attracted attention from other countries as well.

Ted Noffs was awarded the highest award of the country twice – ‘The Australian of the Year’. His Life-education programme spread to several countries. The Readers Digest of March 1986 had a feature article about the Wayside Chapel titled, ‘The Biggest Little Church in the World’.

I attended the 21st anniversary of the Wayside Chapel in February 1985. Some leading politicians and some media celebrities were amongst the vast gathering. Ted Noffs came up to me before the service commenced and I had to introduce myself. He was so delighted to see me there and said, *“I want you to speak on behalf of Sai Baba on this special occasion.”*

What a request? I was terrified and wished I could disappear underground! I prayed to our Lord saying, *“Swami! You have put me in this situation and you alone can save me now,”* tightly clinging to the wooden pew. Throughout the service my heart pounded away as I continued praying to Swami. The merciful and omnipresent Lord gave me some confidence by giving me the imagery of Swami Vivekananda at the parliament of religions in Chicago, a century earlier.

Rev. Noffs invited me to speak thus: *“I have great pleasure inviting Dr. Pavan from the Homebush Sai Baba Centre to speak on behalf of Sai Baba.”* These words were enough to put me into a tail-spin, but I felt assured of Swami’s help. I spoke with confidence, as if Swami had whispered into my ears to start off thus: *“Brothers and Sisters of the Family of Humanity! I have come with a Message of Love from my Master, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who is God Incarnate for those who have had the experience of His Love. ...”*

That was enough to get started and the words were flowing as I filled my speech with Swami’s gems. Before concluding my speech I thanked Ted Noffs for giving me this rare opportunity to share the Love of my beloved Bhagavan with such an august gathering. At the end of the service many of them came up to me and embraced me and wanted to know from which book I had found such beautiful words of wisdom. I replied they were my Master’s simple but universal teachings.

That was the beginning of our spiritual alliance, a true experience of Inter-faith. In July, the same year, Ted Noffs and many senior members of the Wayside Chapel participated in our Sai Baba Centre meeting at Homebush, Australia. They were very much at home at our Sai centre and Ted Noffs reminded us of our common objectives and invited us to join forces in serving the wider community. The Homebush Sai Centre held the first Sai Baba service at the Wayside Chapel in August 1986 with all the senior office bearers of the Sai organisation taking part.

A special *Sarvadharmā* logo was unveiled as a mark of Unity of Faiths and this logo has become a permanent fixture in the Chapel. The Homebush Sai Centre has continued with this special Sai Baba service at the chapel once a year ever since. The Sathya Sai Organisation in Sydney invited Ted Noffs to deliver the keynote speech on Swami’s 61st Birthday celebration in Nov 1986.

Rev. Noffs had never been to Swami and yet, intuitively, was fully aware of Swami's Divinity. The following are just a few of the highlights of his speech:

“We are honouring a great spiritual giant who may be described only in Messianic terms. Even if nothing else has been achieved in the world, the fact that Sai Baba has brought a sense of spiritual unity and awareness among men of their family-hood in itself is a great achievement. How can I speak about someone who has influenced the world a great deal already? **So often the Messiahs of the past were recognised long after their death, but this great Master in His own lifetime is already recognised world over, and that in itself is something!**

We have in Him someone constantly manifesting new and great things in a world full of destruction, which is a mark of a person who has come from God. How can we celebrate His birthday? You have to be co-workers with the Divine Power and reach the level of spirituality to be Christ-like. Jesus was a man who became the Christ.

In our outreach programme we looked after a lonely person. He died at Concord Hospital and his hospital records showed the next of kin as the Wayside Chapel - not a brother, sister or any relative. **If this little Chapel is the next of kin to this lonely man, can you imagine the countless millions around the world, whose next of kin is Sai Baba?**

At the end of this function you go home and feel good about your wonderful singing (*Bhajan*), your children's drama and the variety of delicious food, and **if you do nothing to help the needy in your neighbourhood, I am sure, your Master would be very disappointed with you.** You have to reach out the needy and serve them, be a friend and helper of the helpless people in your community.”

When we reflect on the above extracts from Ted's speech made almost two decades ago, who had not even visited Swami, but aware of the Avatar and His Mission of UNITY, LOVE and SERVICE, it is a reminder that we need to put in more effort to get the most from the Avatar in this lifetime itself. Bhagavan Baba is the Cosmic Father, come in human form to show humanity the way to peace and prosperity through the realisation of:

ONE CASTE, THE CASTE OF HUMANITY: ONE RELIGION, THE RELIGION OF LOVE : ONE LANGUAGE, THE LANGUAGE OF THE HEART: ONE GOD, HE IS OMNIPRESENT

None of the Masters, Messiahs, Prophets and Saints came to earth to start a new religion. They came to validate the ONE ETERNAL TRUTH, ONE GOD, ONE LOVE, ONE CREATION, although periods in history, places on earth, cultures and traditions prevalent in their times may differ. Bhagavan Baba says, *“Ego will not allow two good men to stay together and work together.”* It is obvious that divisions among men are man-made. It is human weakness and ego that has brought about such religious multiplicity and conflicts in the entire creation, which essentially is ONE. The dawn of this

wisdom is God-realisation or Liberation from the bondage of darkness and ignorance.

Let us remind ourselves that Jesus was a Jew and not a Christian at birth. Buddha was a Hindu and not a Buddhist at birth. They did not start a new religion in their names. The multiplicity and divergence that has taken place with passage of time, centuries later is man-made. **This is division, fission or break-away, which is a product of ego. All religions are different instruments playing the ONE melody, of Love and Unity.** When the conductor brings them together, he will create a beautiful symphony, although the instruments may appear different.

The Messengers, Messiahs, Prophets and Saints are the different instruments sent by God to turn man towards God. **Now God Himself has come as Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, as the Conductor for the Divine Symphony. Millions of Sai devotees from different religions already practise Unity of Faiths around the globe and also are convinced beyond doubt that GOD IS ONLY ONE.**

The reverse of fission or disintegration is fusion or integration. The ego of man has caused the fission and created multiplicity - fragments that are essentially one and the same. **Love alone can bring about the fusion or integration of these fragments. Bhagavan Baba is Love in action.** Love is His sole property and He alone has the power to bring about this fusion and synthesis through Love.

Lokha Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu - May Everybody Everywhere Be Happy .

Dr. Sara Pavan is an Anaesthesiologist from Australia, serving at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prashanthi Nilayam since 1993.

SAI REVEALS ON JESUS

Christmas discourses of Bhagawan over the years have been occasions for great revelations on Jesus Christ. He has recounted various facets from the divine life story of Jesus which were hitherto unknown. Here we have one such discourse where He narrated some salient features of Jesus' personality and then went on to materialise a Unique Book during His discourse in 1996. Read on to enjoy this wonderful discourse!

The Life of Jesus

Bhagavan gave a brief account of the Jewish concept of the creation, of the cosmos and referred to the birth of Jesus as the son of Mary and Joseph and then said,

'As the name and fame of Jesus spread, opposition to him developed among a section of Jews. After his father's death, young Jesus considered it his duty to help his mother and revere her as divine. Jesus preached the primary obligation of everyone to show one's gratitude to the parents. Jesus came with his mother to Jerusalem when he was eleven years old. His mother was worried about the activities of Jesus. Jesus was critical of the ways of the Jews in the temple in Jerusalem .

He came out against the harmful practices in the temple and preached the omnipresence of God in all living beings. He exhorted the people not to cause harm to anyone. What he preached was in accord with the basic teachings of all religions. He engaged himself in a mission of mercy to the sick and the poor. He offered food to the hungry. Seeing his acts of love and kindness, people declared that he was a "Messenger of God." Jesus constantly referred to God as the father. Later he declared: "I and my father are one."

Jesus dedicated his life to the propagation of faith in one God who is common to all mankind. Men today celebrate the birthdays of great holy men but they do not follow the teachings of the masters. There is nothing great about the celebration of birthdays. People must resolve to uphold their ideals and act up to their teachings."

A Unique Book

"There is a book compiled in Britain around 1530 A.D, containing all the information about Jesus gathered during the preceding centuries. The Russians condensed all this material in a small book which they preserved in a place on the Black Sea coast," Swami then produced the little book you see below by a circular wave of His hand and held it before the audience.

He then continued,

"This is the book. You can see the cross on the cover page. The book was designed to demonstrate the common features of all religions. What

is contained in this book is not to be found even in the Bible. It contains an entirely new account of the life of Jesus.

It is not open to all to understand the ways of the Lord. To know about God one has to develop godly feelings. In this book, there are bookmark threads which distinguish every faith by a shloka (verse) relating to it. There is one page which contains the shloka from the Bhagavath Githa in which Krishna exhorts Arjuna to give up all beliefs and take sole refuge in Him and assured Arjuna that thereafter he will absolve Arjuna of all the sins. (Cheers)

The essence of all creeds is one and the same thing. Man's primary duty is to surrender to God. "Surrender" means attaining the state in which the devotee feels he is one with God. This feeling arises out of the conviction that the same divinity is present in all. Bodies of human beings are varied like bulbs, but the current passing through them is the same. The colour of the bulbs or their wattage may vary. But the current activating them is the same. This book contains the Vedic saying: "*Ekoham bahushyaam*." (meaning, I am The One which becomes many).

No Justification for Differences on Religion...

The same God dwells in all beings. There is no justification for differences on the basis of religion. It is attachment to the body which accounts for religious differences. Do not regard the body as permanent. It is a water bubble. The mind is a mad monkey. Don't follow either of them. Follow the conscience. That is the main message contained in this little book. The culture of India has experienced this truth in the concept of *Sath-Chith-Aanandha* (Being-Awareness-Bliss).

Today people read all kinds of books and go after all sorts of "great persons." They do not enquire about what constitutes greatness. Realise that there is no one greater than each of you. But you have not discovered the real truth about yourself, like an elephant that does not know its own strength. A mahout with a goad is able to control it.

Recognise the fact that the whole universe is within you. You have all the powers in you. They are derived from the Divine Spirit within you. It is the Divinity which endows you with a Free Will. Forgetting the supreme power of the Spirit, people place their reliance on the powers of the body, the mind and the intellect.

The Tether of Love

Embodiments of Love! If you want to realise God, if you wish to experience the Divinity within you, if you want to know your true self, you have to develop pure, unsullied love. It is this that binds all people. It is described as the *Prema-paasham* (tether of love).

Today there are numerous sects within Christianity all of which are engaged in propagating their respective doctrines. While this preaching goes on, there

is very little of practice in daily life. Practice is most important. People may be entitled to propagate their creed. But that does not achieve anything lasting. Only practical example matters.

When you practise what you preach, others will be inspired by your example. No one will care for the teaching of a person who does not practise what he preaches....

Develop the love of God. All other forms of love are not love at all, but only fleeting and impermanent attachments. Man's biggest folly is forgetting his divinity. All should realise that they come "from God." All are children of God. Everyone should seek to get nearer and nearer to God. That is *sadhana* (spiritual practice).

You must feel that God is *Hridhayavaasi* (dwells in the heart). You must develop compassion in the heart, because without it the heart is only a stone. That is the message of Jesus - the message of love. Love is God. Live in love. Start the day with love. Spend the day with love. End the day with love. This is the way to God. Only the person who is filled with love will be dear to the Lord.

Your Unfailing Friend...

This book contains the declaration: "*Yo madhbhakthah..*" "The devotee who is filled with love of God is dear to me," says the Lord in the Gita. God is your unfailing friend in weal and woe. You must acquire His friendship.

Embodiments of love! There is love in everyone of you. Develop that love. Share it with others. When you have this love there is no need for you to go in search of ashrams. There are some foolish, persons who go on hopping from one ashram to another. This is sheer folly. There is no need to go anywhere. The Divine is in your heart. Adhere to one belief firmly. Do not change your faith from day to day. Follow one path with firm faith. That is the Love principle.

- *Divine Discourse on Christmas, 1996*

THE VISION OF NON-DUALITY – III

SWAMI, CHRIST, BUDDHA AND NON-DUALITY

On two earlier occasions, we have had articles on Non-Duality, the first one in the August issue and the second one in the October issue. This is the third article on the same topic and we elaborate this time on how Swami and Christ preach the same principle of non-dualistic vision and wisdom.

“You Cannot Understand Me”

“You cannot understand Me. The best thing you can do is to try and understand yourself, and then you will know that you are not different from Me!” This is Swami’s profound declaration.

The finite nature of thoughts and reason (which but take a few steps), are not competent to gauge the Infinite. The limited mind tries to comprehend the Unlimited repeatedly, but fails to do so and finally gives up as an impossible task. How can one express that which is beyond time, space, cause and effect, with the help of vocabulary, logic, reasoning, numbers and size, however hard one may try? The rational mind with its bounded reasoning and intellect, can proceed thus far and no further.

It is for this reason that the great Seers and Sages declared, “*Yato Vacha Nivarthanthe Aprapya Manasa Saha.*” Meaning, it is beyond the mind to comprehend the infinite. For such is the nature of Brahman (or God), and such is the limitation of the rational mind. Spirituality is thus, purely subjective. “*Everything else can be objectified, as it belongs to the domain of Maya (or illusion),*” Swami says, “*but not the eternal subject - the Atman (the Self).*”

“Love My Uncertainty” – What is its Significance?

No one, no matter how many years he has lived with Swami or watched Him at close quarters, can predict Swami’s actions with certainty. One can never understand what He does when and why He does it. Whatever it is, His ‘uncertainty’ surely takes us beyond the concept of cause and effect.

Through logic and reason, we establish and link the cause with effects. This helps us to predict with some certainty, our *samsara* (or worldly life) of relative existence, and the process of rationally living a comfortable and a successful life.

When we investigate “Swami’s Uncertainty”, we find that the cause is not necessarily linked to the effect. This “delinking” has the prime purpose of taking the mind beyond reliance on its own little reason, thought and intellect. Gradual delinking of thoughts which relate to worldly life and duality thus leads to detachment. “*Thy Will be done, not mine*”, as Christ said.

The “Uncertainty” around Swami therefore serves a great purpose in the devotee’s progress towards surrender. Rationality and intellectual processes, which were an impediment, fall away. “Love My Uncertainty” leads the devotee towards the final goal of *Atma Nivedanam* (total surrender), provided he is able to put it into practise sincerely.

Touchstones for Progress

The seeker progresses because he:

stops looking for causes and their effects, stops being cerebral, stops weighing pros and cons, stops being judgmental.

“Judge not lest ye be judged” as Christ said. He transcends the dual world of cause and consequences. Intuition which fulfils reason, yet transcends it, predominates.

The Light of Lights

The word “God” or Brahman is synonymous with “light”, however this light is figurative and not the light which is perceived by the senses which is the opposite of darkness. Describing this light, the scriptures say -

*“That because of which the sun shines” “That because of which the eyes see.”
“That shining everything else shines!”*

It is this transcendent concept of light which the ancient seers declared saying “There the sun cannot illumine, nor the moon, what to speak of this mortal fire”.

Constant Integrated Awareness

Once Sri Ramakrishna asked the boy Narendra (Swami Vivekananda), *“If you were a fly and there was a pot overflowing with nectar, how would you drink it?”* Narendra replied, *“Why? I would sit on the edge of the opening and slowly sip bit by bit and enjoy it to my heart’s content.”* To this Sri Ramakrishna replied - *“You are a fool! You should dive deep into the pot and become one with the nectar!”*

This is true Advaita or non-dualism. It is here that the person who experiences, the act of experiencing and the object of experience become One. This is the state which often Swami refers to as “Constant Integrated Awareness”.

Who Is A True Atheist?

While speaking on atheism, Swami Vivekananda at one place says – *“A true atheist is one, who not only denies God, but also the world.”* Isn’t this an eye-opener on Reality? It is mind-blowing, in its starkness and import and worth contemplating upon. Pseudo atheism has no place here.

Denial of the Creator, God, but acceptance of the Creation (world) as real, can at best be termed pseudo atheism and a materialistic concept. To make it clearer, let's take the case of Buddha.

The Case of The Buddha

Buddhism is claimed by many to be an atheistic religion. This is because Buddha did not preach about any personal god, but always spoke of *Nirvana* (salvation) and rising above the world of senses and dualities.

Swami has spoken on the Buddha several times during the Buddha Poornima celebrations. The Buddha elaborated thus: "*Sarvam Dukham, Sarvam Kshanikam, Sarvam Anathmam, Nirvana Shantham*"

Meaning, "Everything is sorrowful, everything is temporary, everything is unsubstantial or illusory, salvation alone is peace." Buddha thus advocated the path of *Gyana Marga* (or the Path of Wisdom). It was therefore not atheistic, which is a misnomer. Buddha shows that *Tyaga* (Sacrifice) is the only way to immortality which Swami has emphasized on umpteen occasions.

Continuing the Buddha story, the Buddha did not encourage idol worship. But after his death, Buddha was adored as a God and fully accepted by the Hindu fold. In fact He is counted among the 10 Avatars - incarnations of the Supreme Lord - according to Hindu mythology. It is suggestive that the majority of the masses were not yet ready to imbibe his non-dualistic (or Advaitic) teachings. Hinduism accepted Buddhism as an off-shoot of Hinduism.

Christ and Non-Duality

Christ's statements on non-dualistic wisdom are numerous.

For example, Jesus said,

"I and my Father are One."

This is the, in fact, the ultimate state of realization, the *Advaita Darshan* – the vision of non-duality.

From the Messenger of God, to the Son of God, graduating finally to Oneness with God – these, Swami says, depict the stages of the 3 schools of Vedantic philosophy, namely, Dualism (*Dwaita*), Qualified Non-Dualism (*Visistha Advaita*) and Pure Non-Dualism (*Shuddha Advaita*).

This is the ascent that every individual has to undergo, irrespective of what religious denomination he may belong to.

Christ's expression – "*Be ye Perfect, even as your Father in heaven is Perfect*" relates to the realization of this Oneness. It again signifies the path of wisdom.

Let us conclude with a very apt aphorism of Swami:

The End of Wisdom is Freedom!

The End of Culture is Perfection!

The End of Knowledge is Love!

*- Sri S Suresh Rao and
The Heart2Heart Team*

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

PART-12

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT – V SCENE - 3

Baba is in His Mandir. Devotees sing Bhajan and then a lady offers Aarathi to Him.

BABA: Lady are you offering *Aarathi*?... Alright, go ahead.

Baba coughs badly. Devotees are very upset. With an effort, Baba now speaks.

BABA: Isn't the *Aarathi* over? All of you go now and have your meals.....Malsa!

MALSA: Baba!

BABA: Shyama!

SHYAMA: Baba!

BABA: Aren't you going to listen to the words of Baba? Are you going to starve this Baba? If you all do not eat, how will My hunger be appeased? That's why I am asking all of you to go and eat. Listen to Me and go and have your meals. Go....Are you not going? GO!GO! Say !! Go and have food.

People leave most reluctantly; Baba is left alone.

SCENE 4

Masjid again. The time is fast approaching for Baba to shed His mortal coil. Devotees are aware of it, and are full of grief.

BABA: Shyama!

SHYAMA: Baba!

BABA: Have all the works connected with the modifications to the Krishna Temple in Buti Wada been completed?

SHYAMA: Yes Baba, they have all been completed, and I want to take you there....

BABA: Are you taking Me there...?!

SHYAMA: Yes, we all have decided so together. Baba, please will you come?

BABA: Yes Shyama, I shall come, but not now! When it is time to go, we shall all go together!

APPA KOTE PATIL: Baba, are You saying that we will go after You get better?

BABA: Appa Patil, do you have any doubts that I will get better?

PATIL: Don't say such a thing, Baba!

BABA: Shyama! It is all your imagination to think that presently I am moving about here and there and that when I stop doing so, it would be *Samadhi*.....You won't understand the meaning of all that now, but when the time and the occasion comes, all of you will.

A LADY: When I hear Your words.....

BABA: Do you think something is going to happen to me? Listen Lakshmi Bai. What has to happen will certainly happen somewhere or the other, sometime or the other!

A MAN: Baba, don't say that! You must always be with us! Without Your Grace, can we survive even for a minute?

BABA: Mmmm,I am now going to ask all of you a straight question. All these days, did you see only My physical Form? Is there anyone amongst you who has also seen the glory of the *Atma*?

ANOTHER MAN: No Baba! When we have Your *Darshan*, we forget everything else!

MALSA: Baba, my vision is entirely directed towards You. And all I see is the compassion in Your eyes.

BABA: Malsa! If you see only My physical Form, it is your mistake. The Glory of the *Atma* cannot be seen; it has first to be experienced and then relished. The *Atma* is subtle and eternal. You cannot see it with your physical eyes; you can only see it with your inner eye and experience it.mmmm

LADY: Baba, please don't strain Yourself by talking. *Baba coughs*

BABA: Malsa!

MALSA: Baba!

BABA: Will you give Me some beetle leaves?

MALSA: Yes Baba, I will.

MAN: Baba, Your health is not good; please rest. You are very weak; Baba, please listen to my words! Can we live without You?

BABA: Shyama, life and death are not in our hands. When the work for which we have come here is over, we necessarily have to return! When we inhale air, does the air remain for ever inside? No, it goes out after some time. Similarly, when we eat food, does the food remain inside? No, it does not.mmmmm...The whole of Creation depends on breath, that's all!..... Life and death are related to inhalation and exhalation. Death pertains only to the body and not to the *Atma*. This being that you are seeing, will still be with you, even if you don't see the body. My *Atma* will always be amidst you. I will be like a shadow and a support, and a guide to all of you. It means I am in you, with you and around you.

Baba coughs badly

LAKSHMI BAI: Baba!

BABA: Lakshmi Bai!

LAKSHMI BAI: Baba!

BABA: Hold out your hand.....[*gives coins*] Do you know why I am giving you these coins? These nine coins signify the nine paths of devotion. *Sravanam* [Listening to sacred things], *Keertanam* [singing the glory of God], *Vishnu Smaranam* [chanting the Name of the Lord], *Charana Sevanam* [service at the Lotus feet], *Archanam* [ritual worship], *Vandanam* [offering salutations], *Dasyam* [servitude], *Saakhyam* [friendship], and *Atma Nivedanam* [surrender]. These, my dear, are the nine prescribed paths of devotion. Lakshmi Bai, you have offered to this Baba during His Shirdi sojourn, these nine forms of devotion with so much love! That's why, my dear lady, that's why I am giving you these coins. Keep them carefully!

Baba again has a coughing bout.

MALSA: Baba, Baba, please do not exert Yourself by talking. Please take rest. We are feeling very anxious. Please rest, Baba. We are all frightened, Baba! Yes Baba! Please take rest! Please don't talk.

BABA: Yes, I shall rest!I shall take rest! Till now, all of you have seen only My outer Form. In future, when you meditate on Me, I will be right in front of you; you will see Me just as you are seeing Me now.

Baba coughs once more.

LADY: Please rest, Baba.

MALSA?: Baba, please rest. We are very much worried.

MAN: Please take good rest, Baba. We are frightened!

BABA: I shall do so. Malsa!

MALSA: Baba!

BABA: Do you remember how you addressed Me when I first came to Shirdi?

MALSA: Baba, I do remember. I had the good fortune to address You as “Ya Sai”.

BABA: How then did that Sai change into Baba?

MALSA: When You were installed in our hearts, You became Sai Baba.

BABA: Mmm... Till today You have heard the words of this Sai. Nana Chandorkar, Shyama, Madhav Patle, Bala Shimbe, Balaji, Malsa, Appa Kote Patil, Ramachandra Patil, Nimondkar, Lakshmi Bai, the words I am now going to utter are not teachings or gospel but a prophecy. This is Baba Vani.

Coughing fit

BABA: None of you should get agitated on hearing this prophecy. Eight years after I attain *Samadhi*, My *Atma* will again take a body, and, for the sake of service to humanity, Incarnate as an Avatar. I shall incarnate again in the village of Puttaparthi that is in Anantapur District of the Rayalaseema region of Madras Presidency. This is a secret! This is a secret!.... Therefore, none of you should be upset. In this birth, I was born in Pathri but next time, the birth will be in Parthi! Puttaparthi!

Baba sheds His mortal coil. People cry & wail. They chant:

Asathoma Sadgamaya

Tamasoma Jyotir Gamaya

Mrithyorma Amirtham Gamaya.

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shantihi.

END OF THE SHIRDI STORY

To Be Continued...

Dear Reader, we started this serial in Jan 2005 and now with the last issue of 2005 the Shirdi Sai story is over. From the new year, Jan 2006 issue, we will start the Parthi Sai story. - Heart2Heart Team.

GITA FOR CHILDREN

PART-14

Chapter 6 – Dhyana Yoga

Continued from the previous issue....

29. 'Suppose you invite Me to your house. I come and we spend a nice time together. Five years later you think, "Oh how nice it would be if Krishna comes again," and start recalling My earlier visit. In the process, you begin to experience the SAME joy that you did earlier. You can actually relive every second of the earlier experience and taste the SAME happiness.'

30. 'Now do you get the significance of this? Since I live in your Heart, you and I can be together for as long as you wish, and in this way you can be in Bliss as long as you want! It is so very simple; it does not cost you a penny; no need to make travel plans, reservations and all that. Yet, people don't seem to want this bargain offer!'

31. Arjuna says, 'Krishna , You are making it all appear so very simple but I don't think it is. To start with, when You come physically to my house, I know what being with You means. But how am I to be with You in the Heart? That is not clear.'

32. Krishna replies, 'Arjuna, just take a lesson from what great devotees do. They like to hear people talking about Me, and that fills them with Bliss. They imagine I am physically before them and sing for Me; that fills them with Bliss. They talk to Me all the time, and that too fills them with Bliss!'

33. 'You can think of Me or chant My Name while doing your household work, and that would fill you with Bliss. You can be doing service and singing songs about Me; that would fill you with Bliss. There are a thousand different ways open to you. And they can be followed in any place, any time, free of charge!'

34. 'Are you now clear about the difference between Bliss which is Divine happiness and worldly happiness? Let Me now get back to the Yogi about whom I was telling you earlier.'

35. 'Man will ascend to the level of a Yogi only when he practises firm Mind and sense regulation. Anyone can become a Yogi but most people don't even try. Of the small number who try, most quit very quickly; this is most unfortunate.'

36. 'Arjuna in all this the Mind plays a vital role. It can be your friend or your foe. If you turn the Mind towards God, it is your friend but if you turn it towards desires, it becomes your enemy.'

37. Let Me give you a simple example. There is a lock and a key. You insert the key in the lock. If you turn one way, the lock opens; if you turn the other way, it closes. The Heart is the lock and the Mind is the key. Got it?’

38. Arjuna asks, ‘OK, I want to become a Yogi and I practise Mind and sense control or regulation, call it what You will. How do I know I have become Yogi?’

39. Krishna replies, ‘That is simple; just do a self-check. Are you able to see a saint and sinner as alike? Can you regard gold and clay as being alike? If so, you have arrived.’

40. ‘The Yogic state must be demonstrated with a real-life test and not simulations. People do not quite understand the point, and so let Me tell you a story.’

41. ‘You know Sage Narada, don’t you? He is a great devotee of Mine, and keeps wandering over all the three worlds, singing My Glory.’

42. ‘One day Narada came to Me and said, “Lord, I find that I am very short-tempered, and I want to get rid of my tendency to flash easily into fits of anger.” I said, “Narada, that is very good. What exactly are you going to do?” Narada replied, “I am going to withdraw into the forest and do penance in solitude for ten years.” To this I said, “Is that so? Well, good luck!”’

43. ‘So Narada went away and ten years later he came back beaming. Prostrating before Me he said, “Lord, you must congratulate me. I am now free from anger.” I replied, “Narada, I am very glad to hear that but are you really sure you have got rid of anger?”’

In a pained voice Narada said, “Lord, how can You doubt me?” I then said, “Narada, it is not like that. Great men have tried earlier to rid themselves of anger and have not quite succeeded.” Narada replied, “They may have failed but I am different.” Appearing to be tired I then said, “Well, that is what you say.” Narada was now beginning to get impatient and show signs of anger. In a testy voice he asked, “Are You doubting my words?” I replied mischievously, “Narada, did I ever say I was doubting your words? I merely said that great men have failed.”

By now Narada was furious; raising his voice he shouted, “You might not have said so but the fact is that You are doubting my words. Here I am going round the three worlds singing Your Glory all the time and You don’t have any faith in me at all! If You don’t believe Your devotee, whom else are You going to believe?”

44. ‘While Narada was exploding in this manner, I remained silent but was smiling all the time. After Narada had finished his outburst, I gently said, “Did you see? You became angry! My dear Narada, for ten years you were all by yourself in the forest. Where was the opportunity there to test your calmness? If you say you have conquered anger, you must prove it here in this world.

You must face situations that are likely to inflame you and show that you do not get angry despite the provocation. Without a proper demonstration, how do you expect Me to accept your claims?"

45. 'I narrated this story just to drive home the point that a true Yogi is always a picture of equanimity and perfect composure. And that can come only from strict disciplining of the senses and the Mind. One who constantly thinks of God progressively acquires this attitude, of course only over a long time.'

To be continued...

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

SAI SEVA IN NEW ZEALAND PRISONS

This article beautifully conveys the tension and reward in undertaking a challenging service project - trying to bring light into the lives of prison inmates. Please read it through to the end where you will find a moving and memorable twist.

In Auckland, New Zealand, which is the largest city in the country with a population of 1.2 million people, the Sathya Sai Service Organisation began a pilot programme some 3 years ago of visiting prison inmates in the Auckland City Mt. Eden Remand prison. This was initiated by a male devotee, who had had some tough times in his earlier life but knew how the prison system worked, and also how some inmates were crying out for spiritual help. The programme was first set up to visit the Women's Wing of the prison on a monthly basis for one and a half hours on a Sunday morning – the prison authorities feeling that there would be less tension if a pilot programme could be tried with women inmates first.

Some 10 weeks later security clearances and passes were issued, and the New Zealand Sai workers made the first visit on a Sunday morning in September 2002. The authorities asked them to limit our numbers to 4 or 5 so that they did not outnumber the 3 or 4 prisoners whom they thought would attend. Naturally the volunteers were very nervous and more so when they were admitted into the prison itself, as they could feel the tension and the negative energies within the walls inside, but by chanting 'Sai Ram' as they were escorted to a special visitors room all nervousness and concern rapidly disappeared and they could feel Swami's Divine presence was with them. **Imagine their surprise when they entered the room and found 25 inmates eagerly awaiting them!**

A few were there obviously out of curiosity and maybe filling in time on a Sunday morning, but the rest were genuine and there seemed to be a definite need for the programme about to be offered. This first session is best explained by a devotee who took part on that eventful day -

First Visit to the Women's Prison

"As we entered the room we could feel the tension, the suspicion and the aggression as some inmates felt that this would be a place where old scores could be settled. We had the security of prison guards being on site just in case, but they were kind and kept discreetly in the background. Mark my words - we were definitely nervous as there were some tough cookies attending, but we knew we had Swami with us and had a good feeling that the programme would be successful.

We immediately began with a prayer sung in the Maori language that had the effect of instantly settling everyone down and also gave out the message that

we were genuine and were there to try and help. The prayer is a beautiful interfaith one and is shown below:

Te Aroha (The Love)
Te Whakapono (The Truth)
Te Rangimarie (The Peace)
Tatou Tatou ei (Surrounds Us All).

We then explained briefly who we were, what we hoped to achieve and how we would structure the programme and that if anyone had any questions then they should feel free to ask at any time. We also explained that we were followers of Sathya Sai Baba, a wonderful Spiritual Teacher who resides in India and whose message of love and tolerance encompasses all religions and races. We told them that we had a quantity of small pocket photographs of Him and some holy ash (*vibhuti*) and would gladly give them out if requested to.

After this we began with the Jyoti meditation, fully explaining what we were doing as we went along and the benefit gained in doing it. **After some minutes of this we could feel a definite easing of tension within the room as a soft and gentle stillness took over. We knew instantly that Sai was with us and helping us.**

This was followed by some devotional songs, in both Maori and English and relevant to all religious faiths, as one of our members had brought in a guitar. The inmates loved this and began to open up to us and suggested other songs to sing that they knew. **To our surprise all the songs that they wanted to sing were spiritual as well. We then spent half an hour discussing one of Swami's quotations, then finished the session with a prayer and a promise to be back."**

All agreed afterwards that the session was very successful, the need was there and that it should be on a permanent basis. With the prison authorities' permission and agreement it was arranged to hold the sessions on a weekly basis as we had enough devotees registered and could run it on a roster session.

Request to Expand the Programme to Another Prison

Approximately one year after the programme was begun in the Mt. Eden prison, we received a letter from the prison authorities in another prison, Waikeria, situated approximately 250km south of Auckland, telling us that they had contact with the authorities from the Mt. Eden prison recommending the programme and asking whether we could set up a similar programme in their prison. **They also had advised that there was a noticeable change in the behaviour of the inmates who were attending the sessions in Auckland – a definite softening of their attitudes and a lessening of their aggressive tendencies.**

So began another training programme of Sai devotee volunteers in this new area and after some time, security clearances and passes were given out to a set number. The visits to this prison in Waikeria are done on a monthly basis at present but plans are in place to make it fortnightly after more of our Sai devotees from this region are trained and 'security-cleared'.

Programme Begins in the Men's Section of Mt. Eden Prison

Recently, back in Auckland, we were asked to take the programme into the men's part of the prison. After some careful thinking, the decision was made to go ahead and a new roster was set up to enable the Sai devotees to take this rather large step forward as they knew that the sessions in the men's prison would be vastly different than those done in the women's prison as they would be then face to face with some pretty hardened criminals and even some street gang members with long records. Once again, Sai's presence was felt very strongly as the first visit took place and went off very smoothly.

As our members prepared to leave they noticed that some of the inmates were crying softly and knew instantly that the decision to take on this new programme was the correct one. Right then something very beautiful and profound took place.

Swami has been there Before Us!

As one of our devotees put a small photo of Swami away in his pocket one of the inmates - a heavily tattooed gang member came up to him and said:

"Hey bro, the fella in that picture you have there is not just for you guys. Two weeks ago He came into my cell raised His hands as if He was blessing me then disappeared. I have not told any of my prison mates this as they would think I am going soft, but it's the truth!"

All of our people knew then instantly what they had felt all along – that our dear Lord was always with us, especially when acts of service without any expectation of any rewards are done, and also that He is always there helping those who are genuinely trying to change their ways and become better human beings.

We are sorry we could not capture these heart-warming scenes inside the prison on film as cameras are not permitted. If anyone would start a similar programme in your area and would like more information, please send an email to the following: dsaun@clear.net.nz

- Heart2Heart Team

INSPIRING SAI SEVA IN TAIWAN

In the “Sai Seva” section of the last issue, we gave you brief but inspiring accounts of service activities from 14 countries around the world. In this issue we want to take you to a country that we have not covered before - Taiwan. There is wonderful Sai Seva going on in this 394 kms long little island in the Pacific Ocean of East Asia. Taiwan, for those who do not know, lies close to mainland China and is south of Japan. It is counted as one of the “East Asian Tigers” because of its sound economy. The religious beliefs of the 23 million people who inhabit this island centre mainly around Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism.

Here Heart2Heart gives you glimpses of the last 3 months of Sai Seva done from the two Sai centres in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan.. There are stirring pictures of ‘love in action’ and we are sure that you will be touched to see them.

The first commemorated Swami’s 80th Birthday, when blood donation was arranged by the Seva team of the Sathya Sai Center in Tienmou. They collected 120 bags of blood.

Secondly, the young people from the Bal Vikas group visited a home for mentally and physically challenged children in Pali on 17th September 2005. They played with the children and sang songs for them. They gave out fruit and medicated milk. Just look at the pictures to see the joy given and received. Truly, there is no greater joy than sharing love with the less fortunate and special.

Thirdly, on 12th October 2005, the Seva team of the Sathya Sai center in Tienmou visited a home for the elderly and distributed **seven modern wheelchairs and a physiotherapy table**. Two more wheelchairs were donated at a later date. They gave a lot of love and care to the elderly people! Needless to say, the senior citizens were deeply moved.

The Hsichih *bhajan* group organized a *yagna* (sacrifice) in a beautiful local Chinese temple on 10th October 2005 to invoke Swami's blessings on the region and pray for peace. The *Sai Gayatri* was chanted for two hours along with the offering of *ghee* and cooked rice in the sacrificial fire. This was followed by *kumkum laksharchana* (chanting 1 lakh times with the offering of vermillion) and *bhajans*. Over 70 people participated in this function.

We can never tire of learning about the spread of Swami’s Love around the world – love that can be seen on people’s faces, love that can be apprehended by the sacrifices that people make to serve others and love that is received back again. Swami reminds us that we are serving ourselves by serving others. It is only in this way that we can transform ourselves and the world around us and share in God’s love - in action.

- Heart2Heart Team

PRASHANTI DIARY

Chronicles of Heaven on Earth

It was an "action packed month". Starting from the children's Festival of Joy to the dual conference of the Balavikas Gurus and ex Bala Vikas students, the inauguration of the Lakshmi Temple, the Gujarati New Year Celebrations and the *Akhanda Bhajan* leading onto the celebration of the Birthday proper, event followed event in quick succession.

The Birthday celebrations this year started with a marriage ceremony of couples on November 17, followed by the traditional *Rathotsavam* Festival on Nov 18 and of course the Ladies' Day on Nov 19.

Nov 20th and the 21st were the 8th World Conference days. The XXIV annual Convocation ceremony of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning was held on Nov 22nd, followed by the Big Day on November 23rd. Numerous cultural programmes performed by different countries were also held in Sai Kulwant Hall. We bring you a report on all these activities, with exclusive photographs. Due to the numerous events held this month, this installment of Prashanti Diary is much longer than usual.

OCT 24TH TO 26TH, 2005: A REPORT ON THE FESTIVAL OF JOY

It was another cool October morning in Prashanti Nilayam. In the holy space of time right after the morning *Omkar* and *Suprabhatham*, usually a pregnant silence diffuses into the atmosphere of Sai Kulwant Hall (SKH) while awaiting the arrival of the Lord. The devotees are in an expectant mood. The anticipation is keen; the desire to have the first glimpse of the Lord is palpable and overpowering. Some of the devotees sanctify the time by meditating; others roll the prayer beads in their fingers mumbling softly their favourite mantra. The only sounds that permeate Sai Kulwant are the twitter of swallows playing in the rafters of the hall and the cooing of the pigeons that have made SKH their home.

But Oct 15th was different. Very different. The air reverberated with the whispers of suppressed excitement from hundreds of young throats. It was an invasion of young kids ranging in age from 3 years to 15, all agog with excitement even at that early hour that had charged the atmosphere. Where did these kids come from? What are they doing here? What is going on?

Soon the mystery was unraveled. These were part of around 3000 young kids from all over India that had come to Puttaparthi to participate in a 3 day 'Festival Of Joy' from the 22nd to the 24th of October. These kids had all come a week early, so they could practise and fine-tune their performance, blend their young voices harmoniously in the choir, and just plain interact with their Sai brothers and sisters from across the country. Their enthusiasm was contagious and their ardour unquenchable. And above all, their faith in the Lord was exemplary!

After they had come, Swami left for a couple of days to Brindavan but leaving behind the cryptic instruction for the children to continue practising their routines and that He would be back. So while speculation abounded in the minds of the adults - would He be back in time? - the little ones had no such doubts. They redoubled their efforts for they knew that their Swami will be back to watch their performance. After all was it not their festival, a festival especially for children, for the first time ever in the holy land of Prashanti Nilayam.

A children's festival in Prashanti Nilayam! As Sri V. Srinivasan, President, All India Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, explained in his inaugural address on October 22nd that it was natural to hold one since Bhagavan has a special love for children and all children have a special love for Bhagavan. It was also felt that the year long Prashanti Nilayam festival calendar has many functions for adults but there was no special event just for children. So this 3 day 'Festival of Joy' was organised, a festival especially for all Sai children to come and bask in His divine presence and express their love for Him.

And they came from all over - from 19 states of India - braving the rigours of a long, tiring journey to reach Prashanti Nilayam and participate in this event. Children came from Assam, Manipur and other far-off states in the North-East and right up to Gujarat and Maharashtra in the West and Tamil Nadu in the South. About 200 children came from the state of Sikkim and there was even a contingent from the strife-torn Jammu and Kashmir state in the Northern most part of India.

The Kashmir contingent included 8 orphaned Muslim and Buddhist children who wanted to see their beloved Swami. The children from Kashmir and their caretakers spent 5 "tough and tedious" days in reaching Prashanti Nilayam. They took a bus to reach Jammu and from there caught an overnight train to Delhi. From Delhi they caught another train, in which they spent 2 nights to reach the Lotus Feet. I discussed with their State President how they were going back and due to the exigencies of getting a reservation, the return journey was even more arduous. First was a train to Yashwantpur Railway Station (a suburb of Bangalore) from Prashanti Nilayam. Then a local train ride to Bangalore Central Station. Then a 2 night train journey to Delhi. After a 10 hour layover it was another overnight train ride to Jammu Tavi and then they finally dispersed by buses to their respective places. And all the far-off states from Gujarat to West Bengal had a similar tale to tell, but all made light of it for the divine reward of having a glimpse of the Lord!

October 22nd- The Conference Inauguration in the Morning

The festival proper began with Swami lighting the lamp on the morning of October 22nd. After the welcome address by the All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations, Sri V. Srinivasan, the children welcomed Bhagavan with melodious songs sung from hundreds of throats. Following this three young speakers - Kumari Shweta, age 12, from Karnataka, Master Pranav Shyam Bhat, age 13, from Maharashtra and Master Arithro Krishna

De, age 9, from West Bengal tugged at the heart-strings of the audience by speaking feelingly on the topic "What Bhagavan's 80th Birthday Means to Me".

After that Swami rose to give His Divine Discourse and advised His youngest devotees to eat good food, have good company and foster good thoughts. Swami said,

"Embodiments of Love! You are now at the stage of childhood. This is the right age to cultivate Sattwa Guna. The quality of your life at later stages will depend upon the qualities you cultivate now. What is the use of trying to cultivate Sattwa Guna at the fag end of your life when your body refuses to co-operate with you in your Sadhana? Hence, you must cultivate Sattwa Guna in your childhood itself. If man wishes to experience Manavatwa (humanness) and reach Daivatwa (divinity), Sattwa Guna is very essential. It is only when you consciously cultivate Sattwa Guna that you will be able to attain the Sattwic state. You can never attain the Sattwic state by indulging in Rajasic and Thamasic acts. Therefore, you should cultivate Sattwic qualities right from your young age. All our ancient sages and seers did their Sadhana when they were young and strong.

We eat a variety of items as food to sustain the body. But no one is making an enquiry whether the food he eats is proper or not; whether it is beneficial for him or not. You should always eat Sattwic food. By having Sattwic food, you will be able to cultivate Sattwic thoughts. And, by cultivating Sattwic thoughts, you will be able to undertake Sattwic actions."

October 22nd - The Afternoon Programme

The afternoon programme of the 22nd was an enchanting musical by the young kids entitled, "The Glory of Sathya Sai." In a masterpiece of management and perfect co-ordination, the kids spread across a diverse area of the country, hailing from different States still performed as one team to depict several incidents from the life of Sathya and portrayed Him as "Pure Love Incarnate."

In a rather unusual and imaginative display, they portrayed this Pure Love as engulfing the entire cosmos and more so every human being. In the grand finale of the scene, a painted fabric representing the cosmos and tied to the roof of Sai Kulwant Hall was rendered apart and a spaceship landed on 'earth'. The 'aliens' who came out of the spaceship urged the people to realize their unique fortune of having the Avatar in their midst. Melodious songs, space age gimmickry and colourful costumes made this a memorable presentation for all.

October 23rd - Morning: The Rituals of Religions

The morning of Oct. 23rd saw a depiction of the rituals of different leading religions of Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. The depiction brought out that rituals have their place in a religion and are to be treated as a sign of devotion of Man to the Higher Power and as a way to

cultivate the spiritual discipline in him. The Bala Vikas children also brought out that we should respect and revere all religions and it is the ritual of "Love All, Serve All" that would take us closer to Him.

The Hindu religion also known as "Sanathana Dharma" was presented by the children from Tamil Nadu. The Vedas are the life breath of Sanathana Dharma and the Vedas gives importance to *Yagas* and *Yagnas*, which promote peace and prosperity in the world. *Yaga* means the giving up the material (or sacrifice) for the sake of the divine.

There were a number of *Yagas* which were performed in the previous times. The Tamil Nadu children focused on the ritual of the 'Ashwamedha Yaga' or the 'horse sacrifice' and brought out its inner spiritual significance - *Ashwa* means the mind and *Yaga* means sacrifice so the sacrifice of bad qualities like *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada* and *maschariya* (lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and jealousy). The well laid out sets, the sonorous chants and the depictions of the animals like horses and cows in the sacrifice performed by Lord Sri Rama and then later by King Yudhishtira were well rendered and touching.

Christianity was depicted by the children from Delhi next, starting with the ritual of Baptism, the holy sacrament through which one becomes a member of the Christian Church, receiving the grace of Christ. They then showed the administration of Confirmation, administered to a baptised young man to further strengthen his faith. The sacrament of Confession was also shown including the confessions of sins to a priest. Finally the Holy Mass is shown as a memorial to the supreme sacrifice made by Jesus on the Cross.

The devotees from Kerala were instructed to perform the ritual of Judaism. There is a strong presence of Jews in Kerala with a famous synagogue established in the city of Cochin. The problems faced by the Kerala devotees were many as the Jewish rituals are not well known. However, with Bhagavan's grace, devotees from all over the world actually sent them CDs showing their prayer rituals.

They went over many rituals connected with the Sabbath morning where the entire family reads from the Torah, eat together for the three meals of the holy day and sing the Sabbath song to create a sense of unity and love. They pray - Yidgal. This song details Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith. They are fundamental to Jewish belief and hence this hymn is the integral part of Sabbath and the festival evening service. They recite Kiddush (Sanctification) on wine and eat a loaf of bread. Truly all of us there derived an insight into one of the world's oldest religions.

Zoroastrianism is an ancient, sublime, Aryan religion that shares many features with that of Sanathana Dharma. The Parsis, as they are called, landed on the West Coast of India from Persia, where the king in true secular character offered them shelter with permission to practise their religion freely.

This depiction starts with a conversation between Jadhav Rana, the King of

those times and the leader of the Parsi Zoroastrians in the year 936 A.D. They then depict the *Navajote* ritual or thread ceremony which is similar to the *upanayayanam* ceremony in Santhana Dharma. The 'sudrah' and 'kusti' become his armour in the battle of life of the young initiate. The officiating priest reminded us that the bedrock of Zoroastrian ethics lies in the three words, *Humata*, *Hukta*, and *Huvarashta* - good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

This religion was depicted by the children from the state of Maharashtra where the Parsis have a major presence. In Mumbai, they have a big *agiary* or a fire temple. The Parsis have contributed much to the progress of the country with their entrepreneurship, philanthropy and contribution to the arts.

Islam is a much misunderstood religion these days. The children from the state of Uttar Pradesh explained that the word 'Islam' means the submission of one's will to the True God - Allah. Islam proclaims that the Allah is one and His prophet Mohammed was sent to Arabia in the 7th century to spread His Teachings. The Koran is the sacred Book of the Muslims which contain the teachings of Islam as revealed to Prophet Mohammed. Prayer or *namaz* is offered to Allah 5 times a day at fixed intervals, and is preceded by *Wudu* or ablution of face, hands and feet. Islam proclaims that it is the duty of every Muslim to give part of his wealth in charity and is called '*Zakat*'. During the holy month of Ramazan, every Muslim fasts from dawn to sunset in a ritual called *Roza*. The festival of *Eid* signifies the end of the month long fasting and is marked by feasting and celebration. They also explained the significance of the *Haj* or the pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina that every Muslim has to undertake at least once in his lifetime.

The children, mostly from the city of Lucknow which has a sizeable Muslim population, did a good job in depicting the story of Islam using the medium of a Muslim family. Good and authentic back-drops lent an air of realism that made the presentation enjoyable and very informative.

October 23rd Afternoon - A Cultural Programme by the Primary School Children

The afternoon programme on the 23rd was entirely orchestrated by the children of the Sri Sathya Sai Primary School. So many children participated that it looked like the whole Primary School had a role to play in front of Swami. The children depicted various incidents from the childhood life of Swami including Sai as the leader of His classmates, the incident at Hampi wherein Sai was seen at the *sanctum sanctorum* as well as outside at the same time and the famous cattle fair at Pushpagiri where Sai and the other scouts of His class engaged in *seva* activities. In keeping with the title of the play "Sai Prema Dhaara", or the Stream of Sai's Love, the musical play continued on to show the beneficial effects of Sai's social projects (education, water, health) on the people.

The play was done against a projection of videos of relevant portions of Sai's life in the back-ground in consonance with the depiction of His life in the

foreground by the children. The play was further enlivened using the novel concept of showing illuminary devotees like Kasturi sharing in Sai's glory. Comparing incidents from Sai's life to similar incidents from the lives of other *Poorna Avatars* made the play very spiritually uplifting. The well rehearsed play by the little ones, the catchy costumes, the melodious tunes, the fast paced rendition and of course the engaging primary school kids made this a very memorable occasion. At the end Swami was pleased and all the school kids swarmed around Him in batches for the coveted group photograph.

October 24 Morning - Heritage Sports Display, Speeches and Songs

The morning of October 24th, the last day of the 3 day festival, was enlivened by what was called Heritage Sports, a depiction of games played in the rural parts of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal and Jharkhand. These games were played in the yester years, before the ubiquitous influence of TV and sports like cricket and football. These easy to play games with simple rules and little props or kits brought about a sense of unity and brotherliness with a respect for the rural way of life. These games are now being forgotten since in this cricket-mad nation no one plays them anymore. It brought back nostalgic memories for me, since some of the games like 'rolling the top' were games I had played over 40 years ago.

Rural games with authentic village names were displayed - like *Daria Bandha* (where one defence teams standing in parallel lines prevents the enemy from crossing over); *Karra Saamu* (or stick fight) a martial art form from Andhra Pradesh using body length bamboo sticks developed first as a self-defence necessity but later developed into an art form; and *Atya Patya*, a team game from Maharashtra wherein a rectangular playfield is divided into squares called trenches. A team of assailants try to cross as many trenches as possible while a team of defenders try to make the assailants 'out' without transgressing the rules. From Orissa was a game called *Pucchi* - a vigorous game of squatting and moving the legs in and out in a manner such that the vital parts of the body like the abdominal muscles, heart and kidney get sanctified. It gives the body a vigorous exercise and ensures a free flow of blood everywhere. These games emphasize focus, concentration, team-work, co-ordinated and synchronised body movements which brought physical benefits and a great sense of well-being.

These heritage sports were followed by 3 little speakers - Master Shivadeep, age 12, from Haryana (Speaking on "Principles for Sai children to live by"), Kumari Chandni Derasari, age 11, from Gujarat who talked movingly on the "Childhood Stories of Sathya" and finally Master Mukund 12, from Andhra Pradesh who talked on "Sai - Mother and Father to all the Children of the World".

The morning session was brought to a close when around 51 children from different States presented 3 beautiful dances, aesthetically choreographed and set to foot-tapping dance music.

October 24th Afternoon: The Valedictory Function

And soon it was the afternoon of October 24th, the final valedictory session of the 3 day conference. The Bala Vikas children of Tamil Nadu presented a musical drama called *Bhagavath Sankeertan Mahima* (Power of God's name) portraying significant events from the lives of Saint Tulsidas and Bhaktha Kanakadas. The melodious songs and well choreographed dances portraying these holy lives were very inspiring for all.

Saint Tulsidas, an ardent Rama Bhaktha was born in a poor family in Rajpur in Uttar Pradesh. He married early and initially dotes on his wife, forgetting the Lord's name. After he realizes his mistake, he renounces the world and becomes a *sannyasi*, a renunciant and gives stirring discourses on Lord Rama which are well attended by the populace.

Once he recognizes Hanuman who had come to his talks disguised as a Brahmin. He begs Hanuman to fulfil his desire of having *darshan* of Lord Rama. But Tulsidas is so introverted and engrossed in the Lord's Name that he fails to recognise Them even when both Rama and Lakshmana come to him on two different occasions.

Tulsidas writes the famous work "Ramacharitra Manas" and in the end the Lord blesses him with His divine *darshan*.

Kanakadas was one of the foremost saints of Karnataka propagating the path of *bhakti*. Once his guru gave his disciples a banana and asked them to eat it without being noticed by anyone. Only Kanakadas could not eat it at all as he saw Lord Krishna everywhere smiling at him. Kanakadas' outpouring of heart in devotional ecstasy is one of the richest poetry in *bhakti* literature. Once, Kanakadas could not gain entry into the Udipi temple as he was low born. He prayed ardently to the Lord and the temple deity turned around and gave him Darshan through an opening in the back wall. Truly the lotus may be born in the mire but it is still dear to the Lord!

This unique three day festival thus came to an end. All the children had free food provided by the organization during their stay in Prashanti Nilayam. This gathering of children from all over India, not only had ample blessings from Bhagavan during their stay here, but also had the unique chance of reinforcing Bhagavan's message of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. As Sri V. Srinivasan said in his inaugural address these children gathered in Prashanti Nilayam represent the future of the Sai movement.

The impact of the Balavikas and the 3 day gathering can perhaps be best gauged by the following incident. One of the elders in the Ashram asked one of the girls which group she belonged to. The reply she gave was very beautiful. She said, "There are thousands of children gathered here and I belong to this one group". The long spiritual journey from I to We and then finally to He is clear from her reply!

OCTOBER 25TH AND 26TH - ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF THE SRI SATHYA SAI BALA VIKAS GURUS

The First Day

Bhagavan inaugurated the conference in the morning of the 25th by lighting the lamp. Delivering the keynote address on this occasion, Mrs. Sarla Shah, the National BalaVikas Co-ordinator, highlighted the evolution of the Bala Vikas movement from the early time to the present Sai Educare and its application to everyday life. She said that the movement aimed at transforming the youngsters by instilling Sai's teachings in their fertile hearts and bring about character building, conscientious and exemplary behaviour in the students. Stressing the need to make the movement more effective for the benefit of mankind, she said that love alone was the essence of education and where such love prevailed it resulted in transformation. Mrs. Sarla Shah concluded by saying that Sai Educare is the solution for today's ills and the Avatar's Mission couple with all our actions can affect a change for the better in this world.

Following Mrs. Shah was Sri Nimish Pandya who touched upon the Glory of Sathya Sai by calling them as *leelas* of pure love. He said that Bhagavan demystified God and showed that He can be achieved by simplicity and love. He reiterated Bhagavan's message that it is important to change individuals and their attitudes in order to change the world. He also stressed upon the important role of Bala Vikas in the Divine Mission.

The Divine Discourse was the last item in this morning session. Swami emphasized that real knowledge is Educare. He said, *"Real knowledge is the knowledge of Educare. Educare is the knowledge that comes from within. The knowledge that comes from the heart is real knowledge. What you learn from your parents and teachers and from paying money is not real knowledge. That which protects Dharma is real knowledge"*.

Bhagavan's physical presence in Poornachandra for the closed door sessions inside Poornachandra, during the afternoon of the 25th, surcharged the atmosphere. Four speakers addressed the thousands of Balavikas gurus in this session.

The session commenced with a talk by Smt. Kamala Pandya on "Sri Sathya Sai Bala Vikas - a Milestone in the Divine Mission". Dr. Anand Mohan next elaborated on "Sri Sathya Sai Bala Vikas - a Way of Life". He talked about having righteousness in the heart, the guiding path and principle of Bala Vikas, the importance of right conduct and the basis of peace at individual and world level. Ms. Deepali Changkaoti next urged all the gurus to be an exemplary model while talking on "Be, Do and Tell". She touched upon the importance of unity in thought word and deed, the need to practise before preaching, and the basis to develop a good character. Ms. Jayashree Bajaj concluded the afternoon session with Bhagavan's message of Purity and Unity in order to experience Divinity.

The Second Day

The morning of the second day of the conference on Oct 26th saw further elucidation on the theme of the 'Science of Bala Vikas' by four eminent speakers in the Poornachandra Auditorium. Ms Neeta Khanna ("Importance of Thought management"), Smt. Parul Sachadeva ("Importance of Good Habit Formation for Character Building"), Ms Shasibala from A.P. ("Importance of the Integration of the 5 Techniques in Imparting Course Content") and Dr Devi Rajagopal (who gave an insight on the benchmarks of an ideal Bala Vikas student) talked on the technical aspects of the Bala Vikas movement.

After a lunch break, the afternoon session was divided into two parts. The first part of the afternoon session was held in Poornachandra Auditorium dealt with the strategy of the movement. "The Analysis of the Role of the Bala Vikas Guru in the overall movement" (by Ms. Radhika Trase), "Parenting Essentials for the cycle of education to progress" (Ms. Binote Thakore) and finally "The Need for Co-ordination of the Different Wings of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation to Promote Bala Vikas" (by Smt. Vidya Srinivasan) were the topics discussed by the different speakers.

The second part of the afternoon session on Oct 26th was held in the Divine presence in Sai Kulwant Hall. Smt. Usha Nair enriched the audience by sharing her experiences in rural Bala Vikas. Smt. Nimmi Kunwar thanked Bhagavan for His amazing Grace and guidance. Swami then requested the Vice Chancellor Sri Gokak to speak and he exhorted the teachers to be a transmitter of positive impulses to the children and a detector of talent.

The conference concluded with a presentation of the recommendations made at the conference and a vote of thanks by Sri Nimish Pandya. Swami then called Smt. Jayashree Bajaj to the dais and asked her to speak. Smt. Jayashree talked upon love and said that love should encompass every creature and that love is expansion. After her talk Swami made a gold chain for her.

This conference brought together the Bala Vikas teachers from different parts of the world and gave them a forum to discuss their views and issues. The Bala Vikas movement is assuming increased importance and it is noticed that the Bala Vikas children are effecting transformation and character change in their parents also. For Indians living abroad, the Bala Vikas classes at the local Sai Centre is perhaps the only way for them to give their children an inculcation to their spiritual culture and tradition. Perhaps at some point in the future Heart to Heart may run a cover story on the Bala Vikas movement and its impact.

OCTOBER 28TH: ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF THE SRI SATHYA SAI BALA VIKAS PAST STUDENTS

After a day's break another All India conference was held in Sai Kulwant Hall. For the first time ever, a conference was held for all the past students of Bala Vikas. They had come from all over India, in spite of the incessant rains and cyclonic weather all over the state, to attend this inaugural conference of past

students and recharge their spiritual batteries at the Divine Lotus Feet. As expected it provided a day of reminiscences, a day of thanksgiving to Bhagavan as Bala Vikas had transformed their lives, and they swapped "war stories" of how the Bala Vikas influence helped them get over difficult and trying moments in their lives.

Swami inaugurated this conference by lighting a lamp, for the third time in the week. After a welcome address by Sri V. Srinivasan, 4 past students talked about the impact of Bala Vikas by presenting Case Studies of Excellence either from their own life and experience or what they had observed or heard. The first speaker was Sri Sathyanarayana Kumar of Karnataka who related how Bhagavan came into his life at an early age, when He visited his home. The second speaker was Smt. Meenakshi Dey of West Bengal who narrated how the teachings of Duty, Devotion, Discrimination and Determination in her Bala Vikas classes had saved her at critical periods in her life. Dr. Sumit Thakar of Andhra Pradesh narrated how nine years of Bala Vikas classes helped him discriminate between the good and the bad in life. Finally, Smt. Krishna Priya Mohanty said that Bala Vikas revealed to students their inner strength and laid a strong foundation for their life.

Then all the delegates retired to Poornachandra for a short session by accomplished speakers on the Divine Message for Excellence for the individual, the family, the society and the world. Two past Bala Vikas students also spoke on Role Models and Torch Bearers of Bala Vikas for about 15 minutes each. An action plan for the Sri Sathya Sai past Bala Vikas students was also chalked out in this closed door session.

In the afternoon all the past students assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall for the concluding session of the one day conference. Swami addressed the gathering and in His Divine Discourse He said, *"What education should we acquire? We should not stuff ourselves with outer knowledge – we should bring out that which is latent within us. The inner voice is true education and not outer knowledge."*

Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Non-violence are the 5 elements which constitute everyone's inner self. We have not realized these 5 elements. Truth and righteousness are within you. Truth is God, not God is Truth. Truth is not from outside, it is only within us. Though it lies within us we do not recognize it - it is a natural manifestation.

As truth is within us we should also turn within to know its origin. Truth is spoken but not practised. Speak truthfully, act righteously. But today truth is only spoken. True Dharma lies in a declaration which is fully put into practice."

NOVEMBER 02nd: GUJARATI NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS IN SKH

Traditionally the day after Diwali is celebrated by the Gujaratis as the Gujarati New Year (*Saal Mubarrak*). For this trading community this day also marks the beginning of their fiscal year. The devotees from Gujarat elected to spend this holy day with their Divine Parent in Prashanti Nilayam, and felicitated Him

with cultural programmes in both the morning and the evening.

This day also marked the culmination of their *Rath Yatra* (or pilgrimage carrying a divine chariot) for 166 villagers, representing 126 villages, from Dakor in Gujarat State to Parthi. During the period from November 2003 - November 2005 the Sai Youth of Gujarat had carried Bhagavan's message reaching out to approximately 45,000 villagers in this area through a screening of a film on Swami's life (His Work and Teachings) and distributing about 53,000 Sai photos and Sai literature in these villages. Mother Sai blessed the Divine Rath and all the villagers.

The Morning Programme

The morning programme was a drama by the Bala Vikas children and Sai youth entitled 'Bhagavan's Mission' emphasizing the establishment of *dharma* or *Dharma Sansthapana*. The drama presented Bhagavan's mission of transformation of the world in the Kali Age and the Bala Vikas children beautifully presented the concept of *Vaishnava Kutumbam* or "universal brotherhood" in a dance form. The boy who performed the classical dance was later blessed by Swami with a golden chain.

The Afternoon Programme

In the afternoon a folk dance by the tribal youth from Dang district was performed. This programme was followed by a beautiful dance 'Ganesh Vandana' by the Bala Vikas girls of Gujarat. The last item of the day was a drama entitled 'The Way Of Life' performed by the Bala Vikas students. The drama displayed the mercenary attitude of the present day doctors. However, when these doctors visited the Super-Speciality Hospital at Bangalore, they were touched by the selfless and free services rendered by the Hospital. Drawing inspiration from this, the doctors undergo a transformation and decide to render such services to society to their utmost capacity.

NOV 11th: LAKSHMI TEMPLE INAUGURATION

Readers of this column would probably recollect the description of the *Varalaksmi Puja* conducted a couple of months ago in SKH where we had described a deity of Lakshmi being carved out of black stone that had adorned the dais of SKH for a few days.

This day this deity found a special home when Swami inaugurated a temple specially constructed for Goddess Mahalaksmi, right next to the Gayathri Temple in the Ashram premises, early in the morning.

Unlike the other temples in the Ashram which are open, this temple has a beautiful façade, constructed out of granite carved with intricate patterns by 'shilpis' or temple artisans, and runs on three sides of the temple in consonance with the traditional temple architecture of South India. The temple has an entrance in the front.

Swami arrived to the sounds of the *Nadeswaram*, and was warmly received by the family members overseeing the temple construction, the priests and other special invitees. He spent over a half-hour at the temple accepting the invocations of the priests and also blessing the site where the deity would rest. He also later blessed all the children and the elders present during this auspicious occasion before returning to Sai Kulwant Hall to give *darshan* to the thousands assembled there.

NOV 12th-13th: 24 HOUR AKHANDA BHAJAN

The *Akhanda Bhajan* is traditionally conducted on the 2nd Saturday in November and was celebrated this year from 6 P.M. on the evening of Nov 12th to 6 P.M. on the evening of Nov 13th.

Talking about the "Akhand Bhajan" in June 1965, Swami in sweet Telugu said, "*Bhajan is done not only to make yourself divinely pure, but also to make your surroundings and everyone around you become spiritually uplifting, When you do bhajans for an akhanda (long) period, it means that you are calling all the Divine Souls and all the Gods to Purify the entire world, When one sings bhajans throughout the day and night with great vigour and devotion, the whole world is benefited and everyone becomes divinely charged. When you sing during akhanda bhajan, you sing for the whole world and for everyone's well being, that is why each and every person should sing during akhanda bhajan with great devotion.*"

Years later, when the International Sri Sathya Sai Organization came into existence, the *Akhanda Bhajans* became a global affair. Bhajans commence at Prashanti Nilayam at 6 P.M. on the second Saturday in November. Sai Organizations in other nations start the Bhajans at 6.00 P.M. according to their local time. The sacred vibrations of the holy *bhajans* then envelop the entire globe, initiating a massive cleansing of the minds.

Swami started the *akhanda bhajan* by lighting a new lotus shaped brass lamp in the Mandir hall on the evening of the 12th of November. He sat for long periods of time during the 24 hour *bhajans*, on the 12th evening and the morning and evening of the 13th. After 24 hours, and after 418 *bhajans*, Swami brought the *akhanda bhajans* to a close at 6 P.M. on Sunday.

Swami then blessed the *prasadam* of *pulihora* (tamarind rice) and *pongali* (sweet rice) and even surprised everyone by popping a little bit in His mouth.

He handed *prasadam* to the lead singers on the men's and the women's side and even went around the crowd before He went home.

NOV 17 MORNING: MARRIAGE CEREMONY OF 80 COUPLES IN SKH

On the morning of the 17th the entire Sai Kulwant Hall was decorated as a marriage *pandal* or hall. Done up exquisitely with traditional mango buntings and flowers, it was the occasion of the marriage of 80 blessed and lucky couples in the divine presence.

Swami had blessed these couples the day prior in the evening of the 16th itself when He went around and personally distributed clothes to the brides and grooms to wear on the wedding day the following morning.

On the morning of the 17th, the couples and their relatives marched in a procession from the Old Mandir to Sai Kulwant Hall around 7:30 A.M. They were seated in front of the veranda and all the ingredients for performing the marriage ritual ceremony were placed in front of them. Three priests seated next to Swami on the veranda lead the chants and invocations and guided the couples through the ceremony.

Swami went around the hall and personally distributed the *mangal sutra* (or the wedding band) that the groom ties around the bride. It was quite touching to see Swami play the role of the Divine Parent and bless His children who are starting life in holy matrimony. But the blessings did not end there. Seemingly there is no end to His giving. After the *mangal sutras* had been distributed, He had all the brides come up to Him one-by-one and handed over the marriage jewellery to them from His Own Divine Hands. What glorious good fortune. And all the brides took full advantage by also taking the *padanamaskar* of His Divine Lotus Feet. What an auspicious start to their married life!

But the copious giving still did not end. After the end of the Vedic wedding ceremony, when the bride and the groom had now become a wedded couple, the elders normally bless them by sprinkling *akshada* (rice mixed with turmeric powder) on their heads. These blessed and lucky couples had the rarest of rare fortunes to be blessed by the Lord Himself, for Sai decided that He was going to go around for the third time amongst these chosen couples and bless them Himself. There was scarce a dry eye as the Lord went around again, ignoring all physical discomforts and lovingly blessed each and every one of the couples who had got married on that morning by sprinkling *akshada* on their heads!

And after the wedding was over, still the giving did not stop! Swami even provided a wedding feast for the 80 couples and about 600 of their close relatives in the canteen. Truly there is no better way to begin married life than with these undreamt blessings from the Lord Himself on His 80th year of Advent!

NOV 18 MORNING: THE ANNUAL RATHOTHSAVAM CEREMONY

The *Rathotsavam* festival is always held on the morning of the 18th of November, when the deities of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita along with their *bhaktha* Hanuman is taken out along the streets of the village right up to the Old Kalyana Mantapam. On another chariot is Lord Krishna in all His Glory. These two chariots are carried by Seva Dals on their shoulders and the citizens of Puttaparthi greet these chariots and offer *arathi* as the procession slowly wends its way through the village.

The procession is led by Swami's pet elephant Sai Gita followed by the *nadaswaram* troupe. Swami's students chant the Vedas dressed in the traditional attire of a red dhoti and a white *angavestram* (upper cloth). This is followed by the students singing *bhajans* and then come the 2 chariots. The Rama, Sita and Lakshmana deities go first, with Lord Krishna in a big chariot bringing up the rear. The streets of the village have been freshly washed by the citizens and intricate floral patterns (called *rangolis*) have been drawn on the clean roads through which the chariots are going to pass. A palpable air of devotion pervades the atmosphere as the devotees throng the streets in their hundreds and drink in their fill of the Lords. The chariot wends its way very slowly satisfying one and all, till it reaches the Old Kalyana Mantap. There an *arathi* is performed by the ashram priest to Lord Krishna and He is left there for the night. The procession then wends its way back to the *mandir* with the smaller deities of Rama, Lakshmana and Mother Sita. Thus these deities are taken out annually with full devotional fervour to give the devotees a chance to feast on their beauty and further their own devotion.

NOV 18th EVENING: A CHINESE ORCHESTRA PERFORMANCE IN SKH

During the Tang Dynasty in China, the Chinese scholar and monk - Xuan Zang, traveled to India to bring back the sacred teachings of the Buddha to China. More than two millennia later, on the 18th of November, a group of devotees from Singapore, together with seven instrumentalists from the People's Republic of China, were blessed with permission by our Dearest Lord to present a cultural programme in Sai Kulwant Hall as part of the 80th Birthday Celebrations.

Seeing this as an opportunity for the Lord's children to demonstrate their filial piety towards their Divine Parent, the group started the performance in the traditional Chinese manner with offerings of longevity - Peaches and Noodles which were presented to Swami, Who lovingly accepted them.

This was followed by the musical presentation. These accomplished musicians from mainland China played a mixture of *bhajans* and traditional Chinese melodies. The instruments used each had at least two thousand years of history behind them.

They were the: *Erhu*; a two-stringed bowed instrument. *Pipa*; a four-stringed pear-shaped lute. *Yangqin*; dulcimer of varying lengths of strings struck with a pair of two padded bamboo mallets. *Guzheng*; one of the oldest plucked instruments with 16-26 strings. *Dizi*; traditional Chinese flute. And the *Sheng*: a mouth organ consisting of varying numbers of bamboo pipes.

The mounting anticipation could be felt throughout the hall during the length of the introduction as most of the audience had never heard or witnessed Chinese instrumental music, much less a live instrumental *bhajan* performance by a Chinese Orchestra.

As the first notes shattered the pregnant silence these musicians from China

captured the entire audience and held them hostage to each tug of the bow and each strum of the strings from these unusual instruments. Having such music in Prashanti was definitely a very welcome addition to the various kinds of music from around the globe that we hear here. The programme was warmly received by everyone and all of us hope that they will be back soon to enchant us again with their lilting music.

Swami Himself was extremely happy on that day, smiling broadly. And as for the devotee musicians - to have the Lord, our God, savouring their performance with everyone was more than enough to fill their hearts with bliss and their eyes with tears. Bhagavan blessed the performers at the end by posing for a few photos with them. Bhagavan specifically asked the instrumentalists to pose along with their instruments and they felt extremely blessed to be photographed with Baba on their very first visit.

NOV 19th: LADIES DAY CELEBRATION IN PRASHANTI NILAYAM

The Morning Program

Ten years ago, on Nov 19, 1995, on the occasion of the 70th Birthday celebrations, Bhagavan magnanimously declared that the 19th of November will henceforth be celebrated as Ladies' Day to highlight the sacred qualities of women and lay renewed emphasis of the quality of motherhood. Ever since, it has been the privilege of women to celebrate this day as Ladies' Day in His Divine Presence at Prashanti Nilayam.

Yet another red letter day for Ladies dawned this year on Nov 19th. On this day all the Mandir activities starting from the morning *Suprabhatham* to the *Nagarsankeertan* are carried out exclusively by ladies. As the devotees streamed into Sai Kulwant Hall, they were welcomed by elegant decorations that brought out the innate but most oft unnoticed beauty of the Hall. Floral decorations hung in an arc around the dais of the verandah. Intricately lit-up wooded carvings of the *dasavataras* (the 10 incarnations of Vishnu) were tastefully arranged around the verandah, lending a serene air to the atmosphere. Large oversized banners, each with a portrait of Bhagavan and an inspirational quote, hung from strategic positions on the rafters. The dais had a beautiful picture of Easwaramma just behind the lion statue with an oil lamp that was waiting to be lit by Bhagavan. A large picture of Mother Easwaramma was also hung from the back of the Hall so that she could benignly watch over the entire day's proceedings.

Bhagavan was escorted into Sai Kulwant Hall by the *Nadaswaram* Band from the Anantapur Campus and by the colourfully dressed girls of the Sri Sathya Sai Primary & Higher School chanting the Vedas. Swami inaugurated the Ladies Day function by formally lighting the lamp and then signaled for the festivities to start.

The Primary School Girls looking fetching in their "Scottish style" skirts gave a spirited display of bagpipe music that thrilled the crowd, some of whom were hearing bagpipe music for the first time. Bhagavan then released a Souvenir

commemorating the 80th Year of Love in action, brought out by Easwaramma Women's Welfare Trust, Prashanti Nilayam before the speeches for the day.

The first speaker was Smt. Mallika Srinivasan, an MBA from the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania, USA and Director of Tractors and Farm Equipment Limited (TAFE). She said, *"Bhagavan's Omnipresence makes each one of our experiences unique and personal. As we each personally experience His grace we see Him in a variety of hues as a parent as a teacher, as a personal guide as a protector from danger as a corporate guru, as a friend and as God. Swami we know You as our inner confidence. We realize You as our inner strength we feel You as the quiet witness of our being. When we determine to follow our hearts You are by our side. When we learn to care and share, You show us how and where. When we are compelled to face difficulties You give us compassion and courage. When we decide to become self reliant You place us on the path of Dharma."*

On Ladies Day last year Bhagavan inaugurated the Easwaramma Women's Welfare Project. And on the 19th July this year He launched the mother and Child Programme. Give a man bread and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to farm and you feed him for life. The Easwaramma Women's Welfare Project is powered by this idea of self reliance and sustainable development. Through this programme women are trained in a variety of skills using locally available material to make products such as papads, snacks, wicks and tailored clothes. The products distributed through Bhagavan's institutions act as a both a service to devotees and a source of income to those women whose livelihoods have hitherto depended on meagre seasonal earnings from subsistence farming. The Mother and Child Programme has been initiated by Swami for the health and well being of mothers and their expectant children. It is only by the strength of a mother's will that a child can come up in life; hence she must be cared for."

Smt. Geeta Ram, a school teacher from Washington D.C., speaking next, related enthralling incidents from her life showing Swami's omnipresence and omnipotence. The first incident related to her family and her infant son who was raised on Glaxo baby food. When a strike in the factory threatened the supply, she sent her husband to buy some scarce packets. On the way he saw a car that had broken down and helped the driver to push it to the side. The driver requested him to deliver a parcel for him. After he had come home, he realized that the parcel was addressed to his wife and contained 25 packets of the much needed Glaxo baby food. Their ardent prayers to Bhagavan had been answered in a dramatic fashion.

In another incident, Swami had given Mrs. Gita Ram a packet of Vibhuti in the interview room which she placed in her purse and forgot about it over time. A few months later, when she and her husband were attending a Music Concert in a New York theatre, she went to the Ladies Room during the intermission. A Hispanic Woman asked Mrs. Gita on finding out that she was an Indian, if she knew Sai Baba and then also asked her if she had some "white powder" with her. Apparently Swami, in answer to her prayers to Lord Jesus to save her 8 year old daughter who had failure in both kidneys, had visited her in her

dream and asked her to collect the white powder from an Indian lady and give it to her daughter. With a prayer Mrs Geeta Ram opened her purse and located the long forgotten Vibhuthi packet which she handed over to the Hispanic lady. Months later, Swami in an interview, told her, *"The girl is fine. Both her kidneys are OK. No surgery!"*

The third speaker for the morning was Smt. Chetana Raju, who spoke about Bhagavan's mission and exhorted everyone to derive the maximum benefit of having the Lord in our midst. She said,

"What is 80 years for the One who is ageless? What is 80 years of earthly existence for the One who is beyond time? What is 80 years for the One who is proclaimed by the Vedas as Sathya Brahman? And what is 80 years for Sri Sathya Sai who is existence eternal? We have been watching a profound transformation in the collective consciousness of the planet and beyond. It is a quantum leap in the evolution of consciousness and our only chance of survival as a race.

Six decades ago in 1940 when Bhagavan was Sathya then, at the age of 14, He declared 'I AM SAI BABA meaning 'I Am Universal Mother and Universal Father.' At that time Mother Easwamma hardly knew that her little son was going to be recognized as Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba of the Universe in the years to come. Bhagavan said 'My devotees are calling Me' and He left the house. His parents and family had to sacrifice their little lad for the sake of humanity.

In 1947 when Bhagavan was 21, He declared His mission statements and said 'I have a task to foster all mankind and ensure lives full of ananda. I have a vow; to lead all those who stray away from goodness back to goodness and save them. I am attached to the work that I love; to remove the sufferings of the poor and grant them what they lack'."

At the end of Smt. Chetana's speech, Bhagavan, to the delight of all, consented to give His Divine Discourse. He said,

"In this cosmic drama, God alone is the director and also the actor. He is donning all the roles such as mother, father, husband, wife, daughter, son, etc. Someone says, 'I have been blessed with a grandson today.' The grandson is a manifestation of Brahma. Brahma alone assumes various names and forms in this world.

It is God who speaks through each one of you. You should have this firm conviction. If someone accuses you, think that God in that form is accusing you. When you develop such a spirit of oneness and tolerance, you will never be perturbed by censure and blame. Your mind will always remain in peace. Whatever may happen, accept it wholeheartedly as the Will of God. Have firm faith that it is God, and God alone who is the doer. Do not consider your fellow human beings as mere individuals. When you talk to someone, think that you are talking to God. When you do not see God in others and treat them as your own, you will be giving room to evil qualities like anger, jealousy, hatred, etc.

Develop the spirit of oneness. Only then will your life be redeemed".

Bhagavan next related in very loving tones the three promises that He had given to Mother Easwaramma (to provide drinking water for the village, to provide elementary healthcare in the village and a school for the children so that they would not need to walk to the nearest village) that had finally resulted in the Sri Sathya Sai Water Project, The Hospital Projects and a University in rural Andhra Pradesh. Bhagavan concluded His Divine Discourse with the *bhajan*, "*Prema Muditha Manase Kaho ...*"

The Evening Programme

Bhagavan was again led into the Sai Kulwant Hall in the afternoon by the bands of the Anantapur Campus, of the University and of the Primary School. As He arrived on the specially decorated dais of the Hall, Smt. Kavita Subramaniam (formerly Kavita Krishnamurthy), renowned playback singer, and her husband the world renowned violinist Dr. L. Subramaniam were waiting to offer a bouquet of songs at His Lotus Feet, as a part of the Ladies' Day celebration.

Kavita's exemplary voice has taken her all around the world, including to the US, UK, Europe, Africa, Australia, Far East, Middle East and South America. She has performed in some of the most prestigious venues of the world including the Royal Albert Hall, London; The Kennedy Centre, Washington D.C.; Madison Square Gardens and The Lincoln Centre, New York; the Zhongshan Music Hall, Beijing and The Esplanade, Singapore; Putra Jaya World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur, among others.

She is married to Dr. L. Subramaniam, who is considered as India's violin icon, "The Paganini of Indian Classical music", and "the God of Indian Violin". Constantly propelled from Singapore to Paris, from Delhi to Los Angeles, Dr. Subramaniam has conquered every audience with the elegance and virtuosity of his style. His career as a childhood prodigy brought him into contact with the greatest musicians and he soon imposed himself as a master of the violin. At a very young age, he was honoured with the title "Violin Chakravarthy" (emperor of the violin). No other musician can boast of such diverse repertoire and collaborations, or even such mind-boggling techniques. Till date, Dr. Subramaniam has produced, performed, collaborated, conducted and released over 150 recordings. The entire crowd was waiting with bated breath for an unforgettable evening of music from these world renowned artists. Accompanying Kavitha and Dr. Subramaniam were Sri Deepak Walke on the keyboard, Sri Prasad Malandkar on the *dholak*, Sri Ravindra Yavagal on the *tabla*, and Sri Sathya Sai on the *morshing*.

Kavitha Subramaniam began her recital with the famous song, "*Janam Diya Tune Sai Ko ...*", about Mother Easwaramma because of whom we have the Lord in our midst. A few of her other songs were – "*Mein Aayi Thi Darshan Paane ...*" (I came for your *darshan* ...), "*Meine Prem Ki Jyoti Jalayi ...*" (I lit the lamp of love ...) and also the ever famous number "*Dhanyabaag Seva Ka Avsar Paya ...*" (I won an opportunity to do service, I am extremely grateful

...). She also sang some *bhajans* - "*Nanda Nandana Hari Govinda Gopala ...*", "*Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram ...*" and "*Antaranga Sai Anatha Natha Sai ...*" Her soulful and mellifluous voice has a surreal quality that makes one dissolve totally in the music and forget mundane body consciousness.

After this soul-stirring performance, the girl students of the Primary School gave a dance performance to a song that described the beautiful features of the Lord, His love and His compassion and Glory. At the end of their performance, Bhagavan posed for photographs with the Primary School Band group.

Afterwards Bhagavan talked with Kavitha's entire family and even made a ring for Dr. Subramaniam and also posed for group photos with the family. Bhagavan also recognised the contributions of the photographers who capture all these moments for posterity by personally distributing *prasadam* out of His divine hands to one and all.

Then all eyes were riveted to the bus 'Sri Sathya Sai Mobile Clinic' stationed in the back of the Hall, as an announcement was made that it was an air-conditioned bus with state-of-the-art medical equipment for treatment. The bus contains an X-ray unit, ultra sound scanner, automatic film processor, Schiller ECG machine, a semi-automatic chemistry analyzer, a binocular microscope, ophthalmoscope, otoscope, retinoscope, foldable simple table for x-ray, foldable screen with stand and an LCD projector. These are only some of the sophisticated equipment in the bus for providing advanced medical treatment to patients who do not even have the wherewithal to come to the nearest Hospital.

NOV 20th EVENING: THE SAI INTERNATIONAL CHOIR

November 20th was the first day of the 8th World Conference (see the full story in item 13 below). In the evening, all the delegates and the devotees who had gathered in the "packed to overflowing" Sai Kulwant Hall were treated to an aural treat in the form of the Sai International Choir. 175 members from 45 countries had put in hours of practice over the past few days to blend their voices in perfect harmony to produce mellifluous music that touched everyone's hearts.

They started with the rousing number called "*The Feast (Swami we celebrate your birthday)*" followed by "*Rejoice for Lord Sai is Here*". This was followed in quick succession with the following numbers - "*Yakanaka*", "*The day You touched my heart*", "*Eighty years with us*", "*Sai Mother/Baba Father*", and "*Carry the Light*". They ended the concert with "*Celebrate*", "*We wish you a Happy Birthday*" and for the finale "*Heaven invites you to a party*". The audience gave these musicians a thunderous ovation for the enchanting afternoon of music. Swami asked the conductor Ms. Alma Badings to continue with the music and the choir responded by singing the two numbers - "*Carry the Light*" and "*Celebrate*" again to the delight of the crowd.

NOV 21st: VIP VISITS, DISTRIBUTION OF SAREES TO LADIES AND A

CONCERT BY THE SAI SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

In The Morning:

In the morning the Ashram had some important visitors. The Honorable Chief Minister of the State of Andhra Pradesh, Sri Y. Rajasekhara Reddy along with Smt. Geeta Reddy, Minister for Tourism and the Anantapur District Collector, Smt. Y.V. Anuradha. called on Swami just ahead of His Birthday. After giving Darshan to the large crowd assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall, Swami granted them an audience and spent over a half-hour talking with them in the interview room.

In The Afternoon:

In an unexpected move, Swami after He arrived to Sai Kulwant Hall for the afternoon *darshan* started calling numerous ladies to the veranda. Everyone was perplexed wondering what was going on. As the number of ladies began to grow, it soon became clear. He was going to distribute saris to the "chosen ones". After Swami was satisfied, mounds of gorgeous saris were carried to the veranda by the student helpers. Swami with His Own Divine Hands handed one sari after another to each one of these ladies, thus blessing them profusely.

After He had finished distributing the saris to these ladies, He even went around the entire ladies enclosure, picking out even more ladies that He wanted to give saris to, so that they could wear it for His birthday. After this delightful experience of watching Swami enthusiastically give saris to so many ladies, we had a further treat in store. A group of musicians from around the world were dressed up in their "penguin suits" waiting and ready to perform and regale the Lord.

With Bhagavan's Grace, these musicians from around the world came together to perform as one a concert in the Divine presence on Monday, the 21st of November, 2005, as part of the 80th Birthday celebrations. Taking as a theme Swami's instruction "Love is one, live in love!" given on His Ladies' Day Discourse 2005, the 53 musicians from over 20 countries in Asia, Australia, Europe, North, Central and South America worked together during five days of rehearsals in a joyful spirit of unity and love so that they could perform their best before their Sweet Lord.

Before the concert began, Swami blessed Swiss conductor Klaus Maurer with the materialization of a ring. The programme began with *Hungarian Dance No.1*, written by German composer Johannes Brahms. The piece captures the spirit of the power of the Hungarian spirit. Moving to Italy, the next work was the overture from Gioacchini Rossini's opera *Gazza Ladra*, a musical story about a bird, the thieving Magpie. Returning north to Hungary and the music of pianist and composer Franz Liszt, often called the "God of the piano," the orchestra played his *Hungarian Rhapsodie No. 2*. Liszt wrote this piece as a tribute to his motherland. Moving west to France, and the music of composer George Bizet, the next two selections were from Bizet's opera

Carmen. *Aragonaise*, and the *Toreadors*, or the bullfighters are music brimming with courage and bravery.

Next was the waltz *Ainsi que la brise* (Just as the light Breeze) by French composer Charles Gounod. This piece reaches out to the Divine in nature, glorifying the wind, and making the countryside resound with a joyous celebration of God. This piece was followed by the 1st movement of *Symphony No.40 in G minor* by Austria composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The orchestra played this work as a praying of yearning to God. Next was Romanian *Rhapsodie No.1 Op.11* by Romanian composer George Enescu. Enescu has been called “the most amazing musician since Mozart.” In this *Rhapsodie*, with its tremendous energy, emotional depth, and forward momentum, we Sai devotees can hear the power of our beloved Swami. There is nothing that can stop the unfolding of His Divine Mission for the transformation of entire mankind!

The concert concluded with a musical call to action. The musicians called upon all devotees to take up the weapons of truth, unity, purity, divinity and love. With these silent weapons, they urged all to march forward fearlessly and invincibly as soldiers in the Sai Global Army, the Sai army of “Love in Action.” In this spirit, the orchestra played the inspirational *Light Cavalry* by Italian composer Franz Suppé. The piece depicts soldiers on horseback charging courageously into battle. At the programme’s conclusion, Bhagavan brought so much joy to the musicians by inviting them to gather around his chair on the portico for about 15 minutes of informal and intimate conversation, the cherished group photos, and the materializations of rings for two more musicians. This exhilarating time with Swami was truly a celebration of “Love in Action!” Jai Sai Ram!

NOV 20th AND 21st: A REPORT ON THE 8TH WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE SRI SATHYA SAI ORGANIZATIONS

Every five years in conjunction with Swami's Birthday, a World conference of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations is held in Prashanti Nilayam. The first World Conference was held on 1st May 1968 and has since then grown phenomenally. This year for the 8th congress more than 10,000 delegates from India and about 3000 delegates from over 120 countries participated and deliberated about the future course and direction of the Organization.

The Inauguration of the World Conference was held in Swami’s presence in Sai Kulwant Hall on the morning of the 20th of November. Sri Indulal Shah welcomed the delegates and expressed gratitude to Swami for the grace and love He has showered on them. He talked about the changes in the Sai Organizations since the first world conference in Bombay in 1968 —the Organization has grown to over 5000 Sai Centres in India alone and to 2200 Sai Centres in over 180 countries outside India. Sri Indulal Shah also discussed Bhagavan’s vision of a world transformed, with Sai in the hearts of all and outlined the tasks before the organization that have to be addressed.

Thereafter, Sri V. Srinivasan, All India President of the Sathya Sai

Organizations of India, expressed gratitude to Bhagavan on behalf of all the delegates for all He had done to make their stay in Prashanti Nilayam pleasant. He spoke about the organization's activities in India and its growth over the years because of Bhagavan's Grace.

Dr. Michael Goldstein, Chair of the Prashanti Council and Chairman of the International Sathya Sai Organisation, ended the inaugural proceedings eloquently by talking about the theme of the conference: Unity, Purity and Divinity. He mentioned that Unity, Purity, and Divinity were not three distinct things but three stages in our spiritual path. At the end of the path, we would experience what we really are - a personification of Love.

Bhagavan then called Sri Leonardo Gutter of Argentina and asked him to address the audience. Sri Gutter thrilled the audience by speaking feelingly from his heart and relating his personal experiences of Bhagavan's omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. Due to space and logistic considerations, the World Conference proceeded with the international organization having their own conclave and the national (Indian) organization meeting separately in Sai Kulwant Hall to discuss the conference theme.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Three thousand foreign delegates from 120 countries came to Prashanti Nilayam to take part in the two-day 8th World Conference of the International Sai Organizations. The Conference of foreign delegates took place in a huge tent set up behind the North Block residence complex. Six talks were given, all discussing Unity, Purity, and Divinity in the context of some aspect of the Sai Organization.

Dr. Narendra Reddy, member of the Prashanti Council and Chair of the International Medical Committee, talked about the devotion wing. His main message is that unity, purity, and divinity can be reached only through love. Everything about Swami —His life, His message, His Ideals— is Love. He touched on ways Swami has taught us to develop and express Love and spiritual evolution and talked about signs of devotion, mentioning experiencing peace and equanimity and desiring to show Love through service.

Anil Kumar, Professor of Botany at the SSSIHL, in his inimitable manner kept the delegates on the edge of their seats in discussing Unity, Purity, and Divinity in the context of education. His main message is that we should imbue education with Educare which means bringing out the latent divinity in a human being and establishing it as an ideal to the whole world. He discussed the difference between education and Educare by saying that while education will make you an intellectual, Educare leads to intelligence and wisdom; education deals with the physical world, while Educare is the subjective inner reality; and that education is conscience, while Educare is consciousness.

Retired Chief Air Marshall Sri N.C. Suri talked about selfless service. He indicated that we could progress along the stages of Unity, Purity and Divinity

through service. He made the point that religions tend to separate us and suggested that we begin saying prayers from all religions to break down barriers. There is only one God - take that message everywhere he said.

Sri Shitu Chudasama, the UK Youth Coordinator, discussed the Young-Adult Program of the Sai Organization. He mentioned that since the well-being of the world depends on our youth, the Sai Organization must provide circumstances in which Unity, Purity, and Divinity can manifest in the youth of the organisation. Devotion, education, and service programmes must involve all the Sai Youth to bring their enthusiasm, creativity, and courage into the organization in a way that promotes the development of selfless love.

Sri Narasimha Murthy, Warden at the Brindavan Campus of the SSSHIL and author of the fifth volume of Sathyam Sivaram Sundaram, spoke about the Sai Ideal Devotee, showing a depth of understanding that has come through years of faithful work for Swami. He related some interesting personal stories of his relationship with Swami. He talked about four qualities of an ideal devotee: (A) Awareness of the unsullied joy and selfless love that lies within each of us. (B) Balance of mind —equanimity. (C) Control over the mind and senses. (D) Dedication to the Sai Mission.

A high point of the Conference was the question-and-answer sessions, with panels consisting of Sri Michael Goldstein; Sri Bill Harvey, member of the Prashanti Council; Sri Anil Kumar; Sri Narasimha Murthy, Sri Narendra Reddy, and Air Chief Marshal Suri. Delegates submitted over 300 questions and comments covering a wide range of topics —cultural issues within Sai Centres, education versus educate, results of the subcommittee that reviewed all aspects of education, guidelines of the Sai Organization, service, spiritual questions, and so on. Some of these were discussed during the question-and-answer sessions, and all of them will be addressed in communications to Sai Organizations at a later date.

THE INDIAN CONFERENCE

The Indian Organisation held its deliberations in the Sai Kulwant Hall on November 20 and 21st.

The first session on November 20th addressed the theme of the conference in relation to the Individual and the Family. It covered the following:

- a. What Unity, Purity, and Divinity means to the Individual and the Family.
- b. The Inner Significance of Unity, Purity and Divinity for the Individual and the family.

The second session of the Indian Conference on November 21st broadened the theme of the conference to include the Organisation and Society. It covered:

- a. What Unity, Purity, and Divinity means to the Sai Organisation and its members.
- b. The importance of Unity and Purity for the Organisation.
- c. The inner Significance of Divinity for the Organisation.

The huge crowd of 10,000 delegates that had gathered in Sai Kulwant Hall were addressed on these issues by an eminent panel of speakers. They included Sri S. V. Giri, Sri G. Venkataraman, Sri Narasimhamurthi, Sri Anil Kumar, Sri Anjanaiah, Sri Nimesh Pandya, Dr. Narendranath Reddy, Sri Keki Mistry and Sri Ajith Poppat.

Not wanting to make this already long report even longer, instead of reporting the summary descriptions of their talks we will carry them in full over Radio Sai. We hope you will listen in on the talks by these speakers and benefit from their experiences also.

The Indian conference has formulated a series of recommendations, which will be further discussed by each State of India in their own State conferences and then decisions will be taken for implementation. Thus after two days of hectic deliberations the 8th World Conference came to a close so that the delegates could enjoy and savour in full what they all had been looking forward to all year - the celebration of the 80th year of the advent of the Avatar.

NOV 22nd EVENING: XXIV CONVOCATION OF THE SRI SATHYA SAI INSTITUTE OF HIGHER LEARNING

The Convocation Function

The 24th Convocation of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning was held in Sai Kulwant Hall on the afternoon of 22nd November 2005. The Hall was filled with students, their parents, relatives and well-wishers of the Institute as well as the many devotees who had come from far and near to attend Bhagavan's 80th Birthday celebrations.

Sai Kulwant Hall was elaborately decorated for the occasion with multi-hued flowers intertwined with thick green foliage being draped over all the columns of Sai Kulwant Hall. The temple façade was also richly decorated with floral patterns and a floral arch adorned the Ganesha statue at the centre of the dais. The steps in front of the veranda were laid with a lawn interspersed with bright flowers to give the whole stage the appearance of a garden setting. The dais was aesthetically arranged with the Chief Guest and the Chancellor's seat as the centre-piece. The other dignitaries sat on raised platforms behind this central arrangement. All the chairs were neatly labeled with the names of the dignitaries.

The procession comprising the Chief Guest Hon'ble Sri T.N. Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka; the Chancellor, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba; the Vice Chancellor, Sri Anil Vinayak Gokak; Distinguished Guests, Members of the Institute Trust, Members of the Governing Body, Dean of Faculties and Members of the Academic Council began its march from the Poornachandra Auditorium at 2.45 p.m. to Sai Kulwant Hall. The Institute brass band led the procession with the Registrar of the Institute bearing the Institute Mace, while two students carrying the Emblem of the Institute joined the procession on either side of the Registrar.

After the procession reached the dais and the dignitaries had taken their seats, a group of students from the Institute chanted the traditional invocatory chants which exhorts to follow truth and righteousness and revere the mother, father, preceptor and guest as God. Then the Revered Chancellor, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba declared the Convocation open.

The Vice Chancellor in his introductory speech welcomed the chief guest and the members of the Institute. The candidates for various degrees and Post Graduate Diploma were then presented to the Revered Chancellor by Prof. U.S. Rao, Principal of the Institute. At the behest of the Vice Chancellor, candidates to whom Degrees have been conferred repeated the following pledge after the Vice Chancellor.

"I hereby solemnly declare and promise that, if admitted to the Degree for which I have been duly recommended, I will, in my daily life and conversation and in thought, word and deed, conduct myself as befits a member of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning; that I will, to the utmost of my capacity and opportunity, support the cause of sound learning, humanity, morality and spirituality; and that, as far as lies in me, I shall uphold and advance the social and, indeed, all round welfare of my countrymen and fellowmen."

The names of the medalists who had achieved distinction in their respective disciplines were then read out by the Principal. The Sri Sathya Sai All Round Gold Medal was awarded to Sri Srikant Khanna, an M.Tech. (Computer Science) student, who had shown exemplary conduct and behaviour and excelled not only in studies but also in sports and co-curricular activities during his years of study at the Institute. 17 other students who achieved distinction in their respective disciplines also received their gold medals from the Divine hands and quickly posed for the coveted photo with Bhagavan.

The Chief Guest in his address praised the system of free education prevalent in Swami's educational institutions. He said, *"Bhagavan's benedictory addresses constitute a rich corpus of knowledge and wisdom on which the entire philosophy of education emerges. Sri Sathya Sai Baba has given us the remarkable concept of integral education; it is integral to our cultural and spiritual heritage; it is integral to the dynamics of modern times; it takes a holistic view of education. For Baba, education signifies the total development of man."*

Baba believes that quality in education has to be maintained but opportunities have to be provided for those who are bereft of them. He does not believe in levelling down but in levelling up. Excellence ought not to be the privilege of a select few. Hence, free education and the expansion of opportunities without any sort of differentiation. Baba wants to democratize excellence by providing avenues to those with talent and potential."

After the Chief Guest's Address, Bhagavan graciously consented to deliver His Benedictory Address. Bhagavan said in part, *"Education should enable one to cultivate good qualities, character and devotion. When there is unity between thought, word and deed, one can acquire purity and realise divinity."*

Modern education is fully self-centred. Contrary to it, true education teaches selflessness. People pursuing such type of education, give up their selfish interests and work for the larger interest of society.

It is said, 'Paropakaraya punyaya, Papaya parapeedanam' (one attains merit by serving others and commits sin by hurting them). Wherever you see, people today analyse whether a particular activity they wish to undertake will bring material benefit to them or not. People tend to forget that the real self is one's own Self (Atma), which is the same Self (Atma) present in every individual. And, that Self is Chaitanya Shakti (the power of universal consciousness). This Chaitanya Shakti is present in every human being, nay every living being. That is why it is said, 'Easwara Sarva Bhutanam' (God is the in-dweller of all beings).

Education is not for earning a fat pay-packet. It may perhaps help us to acquire name and fame and build palatial buildings with modern comforts. But, devoid of character, of what use are all these comforts? Unfortunately, today the world only respects such people.

Man loses peace on account of developing attachments. Man has everything – good food, comfortable life, etc. but, he has no peace of mind. Why? Because, he has developed an attachment to the objects of enjoyment. Peace depends upon one's attitude to life and living. Hence one has to develop Ekatma Bhava (feeling of oneness). If this Ekatma Bhava is developed, one can move about freely in the world with no attachment to any particular individual or object.

Today, trash literature is found everywhere. Wherever you see, you will find people, especially youngsters reading bad books that pollute their minds. You might have observed youngsters visiting the library invariably on Sundays and holidays. They search for bad books and read them with absorbing interest. Those bad books are very exciting to the young minds. Thus, youngsters spoil themselves on account of bad company. No force on earth can change such boys. Not even God."

Then the entire congregation rose to sing the National Anthem and thus brought this formal function to a close.

The Convocation Drama

Following the Convocation function, the students stage the convocation drama in the Poornachandra Auditorium. A lot of effort goes into its preparation and strict secrecy is maintained regarding the theme of the drama in order to maintain the surprise factor and enhance its impact on the audience. This year's drama was called *Prem ki Jyoti* or "The Light Of Love" and started a little after 6 P.M. after Bhagavan had taken His seat in the Poornachandra Auditorium.

Vishwakarma Constructions, a mega project construction company has won a prestigious contract to build the largest Sarva Dharma temple by under-

bidding and have narrowed the location to 2 sites. The more cost effective one is on level land but would involve evicting 500 families, who though squatting illegally are still the poorest of the poor and totally destitute. The conscience stricken architect, Mr. Praneet Kumar convinces his associates (the Managing Director Mr. Christopher Sabien, the Finance Officer Mr. Anwar Aziz and the Materials Manager Mr. Vijay Saxena) to go with the more expensive route of levelling a hilly tract and not evict these poor people, by explaining that God will help them out of this situation. True to form, the labourers volunteer two hours of free service helping to cut labour costs.

However, troubles soon appear. Mr. Praneet starts behaving indifferently and soon resigns to the anger of his associates. Without a good architect, the project is behind schedule and costs shoot way over the budget. Cement prices also skyrocket and soon the company is in dire financial straits. At this juncture, Mr. Saket Sharma, a world famous architect, offers his services free of cost to this noble cause and his genius brings the costs down to manageable levels. Astonishingly, Mr. Santosh Kumar, a cement dealer is also moved by the nobleness of the project to offer them cement at cost, thus helping them to complete the project within the budget and keep the company solvent.

On the opening day of the temple, Mr. Saket Sharma, Mr. Santosh Kumar and the laborers all reveal that they had all been inspired to perform their philanthropic act of offering their services free by Mr. Praneet Kumar. Mr. Sharma further shocks everyone when he reveals that Mr. Kumar has contracted a deadly disease and does not have much time to live. At this the animosity of his associates towards Praneet disappears and they pray for his recovery.

In the climax scene, Praneet Kumar comes to the stage to the joy of all his friends. He explains his disappearance by saying that he had gone to Puttaparthi to get Swami's blessings for the construction of the temple. Pointing at his heart, Swami had told him, "This is my real temple. You have given your everything for that temple, and I shall infuse new life into this temple - His true temple". A fully cured Praneet thus comes for the opening day ceremony.

The boys neatly brought out the theme that the body is the true temple of God; and good work is eventually rewarded in spite of initial hiccups; finally they also expressed that the need of the hour is *Sarva Dharma Samamvaya* or the unity of all religions.

NOVEMBER 23rd: HIS 80th BIRTHDAY!

The Morning Function

After all the planning, after all the preparation, after all the year long programmes and celebration the BIG day was finally here!! The day broke

early but the sky being overcast caused an initial pall over the proceedings. It had been raining for the last couple of days, but the inclement weather did not deter the devotees from assembling into the decorated stadium well before the break of dawn to get vantage positions for the blissful *darshan* of the Lord on this most auspicious of days. This day marks the 80th year of sojourn of the Lord in His Human Form on this earth; a descent undertaken solely for the benefit of humanity. Variouslly described as 'the Avatar of the Age', 'Love walking on two legs' and 'an Ocean of Compassion', the Lord who has always been and always will be, goes through this mundane business of celebrating "birthdays" solely for the pleasure that it gives us - His devotees!

A lot of preparation had gone in to make the viewing comfortable for the thousands of assembled devotees in the Stadium. Two big "Cricket Stadium" style viewing screens had been kept at vantage points to display the "live action" for everyone's benefit. These big screens obtained their feed from a network of 8 video cameras that were strategically located to capture all the nuances, of all the action, on the dais and elsewhere in the Stadium. A special high stage had been constructed on the hill side in the Western end of the stadium, near the statue of Lord Shiva so that everyone could view the proceedings unhampered. The *Shanti Vedita* had undergone an entire makeup with a tile floor being laid and other amenities being constructed to make the structure more user-friendly. Huge banners were hung strategically with mammoth photos of Bhagavan.

The entire stadium floor was covered with a green waterproof carpet for the devotees to sit on, so that the wet conditions would not cause discomfort. Contrary to previous years when Swami would enter the stadium from the far West side near the ladies enclosure; this year the stadium was bisected by a red carpet in the middle through which Swami's car would pass - thus according everyone in the Stadium a good view of Swami. Balloon bunches were tied at various points for release on Swami's entry. The entire place was glistening with a fresh splash of paint. The Hanuman statue and even the Administration Block and the Museum in the North side of the stadium were lit up giving the place an enchanting look right out of fairyland.

Soon a tension filled the stadium. Word had come that Swami had left Poornachandra. The Lord entered the stadium in all His Majesty in an open car at 7:40 AM, to a very fitting welcome by Sai Gita - His pet elephant. He was lead into the stadium in a grand procession lead by Sai Gita, the Veda Chanting students, followed by a group of dancing students in colourful costumes and all the Band squads from the campuses of the Sri Sathya Sai Educational Institutions. Continuous bursting of daytime crackers heralded His arrival. Confetti streamed all over the stadium. A pleasant welcome song hailing His advent provided the back-drop for His grand entry. Balloons were released and everyone was agog with excitement, continuously craning their necks to etch this momentous moment forever in their consciousness.

Soon He reached the stage and took His place on the high-backed silver throne and gave His glorious birthday *darshan* to the entire multitude. Looking resplendent in His white robe, He smiled benevolently at everyone, as

innocently and as excitedly as a young school boy on His first picnic! It was a sight fit for the Gods, and surely the denizens of Heaven would also be looking down, hailing the supreme Lord Narayana in His 80th year of advent on planet Earth.

Perhaps at His signal, the festivities soon began - first with a Amala Shankar & troupe welcome dance on the specially constructed stage. All eyes were still riveted on the Lord and it was difficult to tear the eyes away even to just peek at the dancers on the stage. Next on the agenda were contingents from 4 countries that marched past *Shanti Vedika* to hail the Lord on His Birthday while the specially prepared birthday song played in the back-ground.

There were two Masters of Ceremonies - Sri Sai Kumar (a Telugu film star) who compeered in Telugu and eulogized the Lord on His Birthday. Sri Sunil Gavaskar ("The Little Master") a well known cricketer of yesteryears was the English MC and he paid his respects to Bhagavan on everyone's behalf. Col. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, a rifle shooter from India and a Silver Medalist at the 2004 Athens Olympics, was one of the guests at the morning function.

There were also some unexpected but very welcome visitors in this cricket mad country - a few members of the current Indian cricket team. There was master blaster Sachin Tendulkar, a favourite who received a roar of welcome from the crowd. Along with Sachin were Yuvraj Singh , R. P. Singh , V.V.S. Laxman, Murali Karthik, J.P.Yadav, Suresh Raina, and emerging fast bowler Sreeshant, all of whom had come in a special bus from Bangalore.

Then, Sri Sunil Gavaskar, the Master of Ceremonies, invited Maj. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore to hoist the Global Peace Insignia for the well being of humanity. After receiving Bhagavan's blessings Maj. Rathore took the insignia out of *Shanti Vedika* and ran up to the specially erected stage like an Olympic torch bearer and then showed the logo to the enormous gathering before it was finally hoisted up the hill to the highest point of the stadium near the Hanuman Statue. ...And then the 80th birthday message was unfurled down the hill slope - "May there be Peace, Unity and Love in the World". Streamers were also rolled down the hill and the global birthday party at which the entire world was present was well underway!

All the cricketers presented Bhagavan with bouquets and obtained His blessings. In a brief speech Sachin Tendulkar expressed happiness on behalf of all the cricketers and said that they felt extremely honoured to be present at His 80th Birthday celebration. He also sought Bhagavan's blessings for the entire cricket team.

The first speaker for the session was Sri Indulal Shah, formerly World Chairman of Sri Sathya Sai Organisations, and currently Advisor to the Prashanti Council, the overseeing body for the Overseas Sathya Sai Organisations. Mr. Shah while offering his prayerful salutations at His Lotus Feet said, "For over 40 years I have been witness to the birth and growth of the Sathya Sai World Organisation, which I feel is the greatest gift from Bhagavan for experiencing the divinity within. The message of love has

spread across countries and cultures, religions and races to teach mankind the importance of good thoughts, words and deeds. We are led to believe that the era of worldwide peace is here for us to experience. The Avatar has two hearts: one bleeds for our pain, the other forbids our folly. Unless we share a little of these hearts in our own hearts we can not be included in His mission". He further added that Bhagavan's Message of Love is beyond countries, culture, religion and race and it is time for all of us to blend into a Brotherhood of Mankind.

Dr. Michael Goldstein, Chairman, Prashanti Council, in his exhilarating speech highlighted that the era of peace is here for us to experience. In his own words, *"He is fathomless, never ending selfless love. He is our divine mother and father. He is the saviour of His own creation. He is the Kaliyuga Avatar. One day I had the temerity to ask Swami to permit me to see a glimpse of the world through His eyes. Swami smiled condescendingly and He deigned to answer my question and said, 'If I let you see you will not want your job, your house, family or body. And if you see for more than a few seconds you will be gone.'"* At the end of his speech, Dr. Goldstein prayed to Bhagavan to bless the huge concourse of devotees with His Divine Benedictory Message.

In His Divine discourse, Bhagavan highlighted the importance of *Sathya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema* in one's daily conduct. These seminal values should permeate one's conduct from dawn to dusk. Swami said,

"We must realise that we are born to experience our innate divinity and not merely to enjoy worldly pleasures. We have to take to the path of spirituality to experience our innate divinity. If we lack in spiritual outlook, we do not deserve to be called human beings. In fact, it amounts to betrayal of God. God does not expect you to worship Him. He expects you to lead an ideal and purposeful life.

Who is God? In fact, you yourself are God. Hence, everyone should develop the firm conviction, "I am God". When you develop such firm conviction, there will be no room for ego and hatred. You are God and your fellow human being is also God. Develop such principle of oneness and equality. When you harm others, you actually harm yourself. Victory and loss are a part of the game of life.

*You may criticise someone as a bad person today and extol him as a good person tomorrow. Good and bad are your own thinking. Your mind is the cause for both. In reality, man is always good by nature. Human life is highly sacred. That is why it is said, *Daivam manusha rupena*. Do not belittle yourself thinking that you are a mere mortal. You are verily God Himself. The very fact that you portray God in a human form and worship Him proves that human being is essentially divine. Do not attach undue importance to names and forms. Understand the inherent principle of divinity.*

You may ask, "Is there anyone without worries and desires?" I am Myself the living example in this regard. I have absolutely no desires whatsoever.

*Everything is in My hand. I can give you whatever you ask for. However, do not crave for materialistic things from Me. They are transient like passing clouds. Ask for that which is eternal. The entire world is sustained by the twin principles of truth and love. They are present in everyone. **I am the truth that is present in all. I am the love that is present in all.** Truth and love are all-pervasive. However, you are not making efforts to experience truth and love".*

He also expressed His joy at the vast concourse of humanity that thronged the Sri Sathya Sai Hill View Stadium and blessed them to enjoy a long, peaceful and happy life. People would derive real *ananda* by practising His teachings, emphasised Bhagavan.

Dignitaries who attended the morning function included His Excellency the Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Sri Sushil Kumar Shinde; His Excellency the Governor of Karnataka, Sri T.N.Chaturvedi; the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Sri Vilasrao Deshmukh; the Hon'ble Finance Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Sri Rosaiah; the Hon'ble Minister for Tourism and Sugar of Andhra Pradesh, Smt. J. Geeta Reddy and the Former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Sri N. Chandra Babu Naidu, along with many other local and State Government officials.

After His Divine Discourse Bhagavan cut an oversized cake and lit a candle on the cake and also personally distributed the *prasadam* of laddus to the members of Indian Cricket Team and some of the dignitaries present. He had a special word for everyone and profusely blessed the entire gathering before He left the Hill View Stadium after *mangal arathi*.

The Afternoon Function

While the formal birthday function was over in the morning, the gaiety and fun was reserved for the afternoon. Swami came to the Stadium in the afternoon in an open car but now in a bright yellow robe, looking like Sai Krishna. Swami was led to the stadium by a long procession of performing artistes from the different States of India. The first group in the procession was a folk dance troupe from Tamil Nadu, followed by a *garba* dance group from Gujarat, folk dancers from Orissa and the Sangli district of Maharashtra, *kavadi* dancers from Kerala, the *nadaswaram* troupe from the Anantapur Campus, Pipers from the Primary School, the Anantapur Campus Band, the Primary School Band, the Institute brass band and *bhangra* dancers from the Primary School.

After arriving on stage, Bhagavan sat in the beautiful golden-hued throne for the programme. This throne was smaller in size than the morning's but had an umbrella at the top in the traditional style. While He sat there giving a feast for everyone's eyes, a welcome was sung in the background with the lyrics "Sai's Birthday is a festival for *Sathya, Dharma, Shanti* and *Prema*. Happy Birthday to You Bhagavan."

The special stage set up on the western side of the stadium looked magnificent with lights and other decorative paraphernalia. Two renowned artistes of Hindustani music Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan sought the blessings of Bhagavan in *Shanti Vedika* before climbing up

to the stage to begin their performance.

Sri Sai Kumar compeering the show began by saying that people from all countries and cultures without any barriers of caste, creed, religion and nationality have assembled here in Prashanti Nilayam for Bhagavan's Birthday.

The first to perform was Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma and his son Rahul Sharma on an instrument called the Santoor. Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma said that he had the good fortune to perform in the 60th, 70th and now in the 80th Birthday of Bhagavan. Sri Fazal Quereshi played on the drums and Sri Yogesh Samshi accompanied him on the tabla. The audience was treated to the rich and haunting sounds of the santoor lingering lightly on the cool dusky air of the stadium. The *santoor* recital ended on a high note with the refrain "Baba, we love you".

The *Sarod* maestro Amjad Ali Khan with his sons, Aman Ali Bangash, Ayan Ali Bangash and wife Subbalakshmi gave a scintillating performance. Ustad Amjad Ali Khan said that it was a great opportunity for them to offer a musical tribute to Swami. His second piece *Raghupathi Raghava Raja Ram* was especially enjoyed by one and all.

Begum Parveen Sultana, doyen of Hindustani classical music, thanked Bhagavan for this greatest opportunity. Begum Parveen Sultana has been a regular performer on the Birthday afternoon for a few years now. She began her performance with a composition that her husband and guru Ustad Dilshad Khan had specially composed for the occasion. Her next song was *Payoji Maine Ram Ratan Dhan Payo* (I have got the precious wealth of the gem of Rama Nama). She ended her performance with the song *Sai Ram, Sai Ram, Sumiran Karoon Sakhal Dukh Haran* (the holy name Sai Ram, if chanted removes all types of grief).

The music programme was interspersed with green streaks of light originating from the hill-side making and breaking green patterns all over the stadium. The laser show had started with appropriate instrumental music in the background, thrilling the rural populace who were seeing such a show for the first time in their lives.

Singing next were Dr. L. Subramanyam and Ms Kavita Krishnamurthy. They had played in Sai Kulwant Hall a few days ago on Ladies' Day. This time however, they were accompanied by 80 students of Institute to sing the chorus. Dr. Subramanyam began with *Vathapi Ganapathim Bhajeham*, a composition of Muthuswami Dikshitar. Then the special Birthday song composed for the occasion was led by Smt. Kavita Krishnamurthy, in which the students participated. The lyrics of the song ran thus: "We seek Your blessings Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, You are the guiding light."

The celebrated blues singer Ms Dana Gillespie from the U.K. was the next to perform. She sang two songs which enthralled the audience and maintained

the fast tempo of the programme:

“What can I give to the One who has everything Who holds the whole world in the palm of His Hand? ...” and “With the lamp of love you’ll never be in darkness if you hold it near, it’ll take you far ...”

At the end of Ms. Gillespie’s programme, again the laser light show lit the night air but this time it was accompanied by a fabulous display of fireworks. The fireworks illuminated and streaked across the sky in many hues too grand and spectacular to describe with mere words. These fireworks were even better than the fireworks I have seen in major American cities on the 4th of July. The multicoloured fireworks lit up the night sky to prolonged oohs and aahs from the audience. The primary school children especially were most awe-struck and with the music in the background it made for a very enjoyable time for all.

While these sound and light shows were going on, Ms. Richa Sharma sang a devotional song, urging the audience also to participate and sing along. After Ms. Richa Sharma’s performance, all the artistes went down the stage to seek blessings from Bhagavan. Again there was another display of fireworks. After *arati* was offered to Bhagavan, He left for His Abode at 7.25 P.M., leaving behind thousands of His devotees who will carry the day’s events forever in their memory.

So finally the celebrations of the 80th year of Advent had come to an end. After all the gaiety, and all the fun, and all the celebration we still need to take a moment and ask ourselves a few simple questions. The Avatar has been with us for 80 full years, but have we taken full advantage of it? Have we drunk deep from this Ocean of Wisdom?

We are also an infinitesimally small part of Him but have spent eternity wandering aimlessly and taking birth and rebirth through the 8,400,000 species of life. Have we even now made a sincere effort to take full advantage of the Avatar’s presence, break the bond of *maya* and regain our divine heritage? Have we made any progress in ridding ourselves of our ego? Have we begun to realize the divinity within and the oneness of all!? Otherwise all this hoopla would just have been mere hype. Let us all resolve that from this 80th Birthday, every moment will be spent in putting into practice all that He has taught us, let that be our birthday gift to Him, to Him Who has given us all.

NOV 25th: A BIRTHDAY FOOT-NOTE: A RUSSIAN LANGUAGE CHOIR AND A SINGAPORE BALAVIKAS DRAMA DOUBLE HEADER PROGRAMME

Even after the completion of the Birthday there were still so many countries that had cultural programmes prepared that Swami on November 25 permitted two programmes to be held in Sai Kulwant Hall - a Russian Language Choir and a Balavikas drama by children from Singapore.

The Russian Language Choir

About 280 devotees (out of a total group strength of 1300) from the Russian speaking countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine gave a concert in the Russian language entitled "Sathya Sai Baba, Our Hearts are singing for you...."

The group of men and women, who were all dressed alike for their opportunity of a lifetime to sing in His Divine presence, sang the following songs in Russian: "*Glory to God*", "*Our souls are full of luminous light*", "*God is your best friend, God is love*", "*There is nothing better than Swami coming to us*", "*Our dearest Sai*", "*In the luminous light*", "*Sounds of flute*", "*Evening Bells*", "*Sathya Sai Baba, our hearts are singing for you...*" and finally "*Kalinka*".

Their palpable devotion and singing from the heart had everybody clapping their hands and keeping tune. Though the songs were in an alien tongue, still it found resonance with everyone through the language of the heart. Swami was happy with their performance and also acceded to their prayer for a group photograph with Him.

ATMA NIVEDANA- by The Bala Vikas Students Of Singapore

Following the Russian language choir, the Bala Vikas students from Singapore presented a humble offering to beloved Bhagavan entitled, "*Atma Nivedana*" based on the story of Bhaktha Pothana, a great poet and devotee of Lord Rama whose life is exemplary of total surrender to God.

The programme began with a musical performance known as *Dikir Barat*, a time-honoured Malay art form in which a group of performers sit and sing with synchronized body and hand movements. The play itself was performed in many parts. The first scene highlights Pothana's attitude of selfless love and service when he gives his own food away to a hungry man. In the next scene Lord Rama entrusts Pothana with the sacred task of composing the Bhagavatham in Telugu. This scene also shows the Gajendra moksham episode.

The third scene shows the stark contrast between the divine Pothana and his worldly brother-in-law Srinatha. It also depicts Prahlada's great devotion and surrender to the Lord. In the next scene, Mother Sita showers grace on Pothana and Srinatha's pride is humbled. After this scene the *arathi* was taken and thus officially the Birthday celebration had come to an end.

So till we meet again in the New Year, Sai Ram!

SWAMI AND ME

CONVERSATION WITH A FORMER STUDENT OF BABA'S INSTITUTE

Prof. G Venkataraman (GV) in conversation with Prini Wimalachandra (PW)

Prini Wimalachandra, wife of Hasita Wimalachandra is an alumni of Swami's Institute. Born in Sri Lanka, she is now a citizen of New Zealand. Her mother Dr. Wamsa is an ophthalmologist who has been living in the Ashram in Prashanti Nilayam for decades and does service in the General Hospital here. So dedicated is Dr. Wamsa to her work, that she did not even take time off to attend Prini's wedding!

In New Zealand, Prini served for many years as the spiritual Co-ordinator in the Sai Organisation. Some years ago her husband accepted a UN job which then took Hasita and Prini to many countries where the UN has peace-keeping operations. They started in Bosnia, then went to Israel and Pakistan and are currently in Cyprus. In all the countries where Hasita was posted, Prini did her best to engage in local Sai activities.

GV: Sairam! Prini, Welcome to our Studios. Did you ever think that at anytime you would be interviewed for Swami's Radio Station?

PW: I was not expecting it.

GV: Now, tell me a little bit about yourself. I think you studied in Anantapur. Which year was it?

PW: I joined Anantapur in 1980, pre-University and then we were the first batch from the institute to complete.

GV: How come you came to study here in Anantapur. You are originally from Sri Lanka. So, what brought you here?

PW: Well, when I first came here I didn't plan to join the college. I came from a very different background.

GV: Why did you come here in the first place?

PW: Well, my mother was here.

GV: How did your mother know about Swami?

PW: She was always interested in Spirituality. And so one of our friends gave her books on Swami and she started reading Swami's teachings.

GV: You are Buddhists. Were there any problems reconciling the teachings of Buddha with Swami's teachings?

PW: I come from a Buddhist background. But I studied in an Anglican Missionary School. I suppose Buddhists are very broadminded. At the same time my mother also visited the Hindu temple regularly which was next to the Buddhist temple. So, I was exposed to three religions about the same time.

GV: How was your experience in Anantapur in the early days of the Institute?

PW: It was not easy to adjust because I came from a very westernized family and there were a lot of things I had to get used to, to unlearn.

GV: The heat also, I suppose. Anantapur is very hot.

PW: Summer was terrible and what really helped me was Swami's grace.

GV: He used to come quite often then those days, didn't he?

PW: Quite often. But we also used to come to Puttaparthi very often. He would speak to me which gave me strength and courage to get used to the Ashram life and the life in the college. And slowly I adjusted.

GV: Is there anything very special about those days that you remember and cherish?

PW: I suppose we had more access to Swami then, as the crowds were less. And quite often when we used to come here, at least once in a month, He used to call us for interviews to the Mandir and speak to us, advise us – how we should behave, how we should be an example, as a student of Sri Sathya Institute, when we get married, how we should behave with our in-laws. So, we had a lot of fatherly advice from Swami, and I have written some of the discourses down and even now, I still read them and they bring back some nice memories.

Swami did come to Anantapur a few times when we were there. We had the opportunity to have a cultural play, programmes and also a sort of a Sports Meet in front of Him. We had lunch with Him. So, we had of some intimate moments which probably the students now don't get because the numbers have grown.

GV: In those days you remember there were the arches and sand upon which Swami would walk?

PW: The sunrise and sunset was beautiful and Swami would walk around frequently. So, times have changed. We have to learn to adjust.

GV: So what did you do after leaving college?

PW: I went back to Sri Lanka, briefly. Since, there was nothing in Anantapur in the commerce discipline and then I got married and then we went to New Zealand to live in Auckland. We went there in the late 80's.

GV: Were you quite involved in Sai activities?

PW: Yes, when I first went there it was taken for granted that I would be fully involved as soon as I came, being a student from Swami's college.

GV: Was there was a Sai organization even then.

PW: Yes, there was a fairly large Sai organisation even at that time. Then I started teaching Sathya Sai Spiritual Education and also joined one of the biggest centers in Auckland as an Office Bearer and within a few months, I was still quite young then, but they made me the National Spiritual Convener.

GV: How many years were you in New Zealand, before you went to Europe along with your husband?

PW: Well almost 8 years.

GV: Would you say that the Sai Organisation grew in those 8 years?

PW: Yes, definitely.

GV: You went to Europe some 4, 5 yrs. ago.

PW: Yes, my husband went in 1997 and I went in '98.

GV: Where to?

PW: To Bosnia.

Sanskrit Bhajans In Bosnia

GV: Bosnia. It reminds one of war. Why did you go to Bosnia? You have to tell us that.

PW: Well, my husband works for the United Nations. From New York he had an assignment to Bosnia with the UN Peace Keeping Mission on the administration line. I didn't really want to go, because I had a good life in Auckland; I had my regular job as well as many Sai activities. Life was comfortable and I did not know what I'll do in Bosnia. I didn't even know if they were Sai devotees there. Swami in fact instructed me, at an interview that I should go and it was not right for us to be in two different countries.

GV: So, what was your first impression when you went to Bosnia?

PW: The war was over by then, but economically it was in a very bad condition. The damage of war was very much visible. There were lots of land-mines, many buildings and houses were destroyed and people didn't have money, they didn't have jobs.

GV: Bosnia, has different religious groups, is that not so?

PW: Well, it has 3 religious groups. Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims. But predominantly it is Muslim.

GV: When you went there, it must have been very difficult because the country was torn apart by war and its culture, language and lifestyle were different. How did you manage?

PW: Even though it was a Muslim culture, they were quite westernized in some ways, but language was a major stumbling block. Nobody spoke English. It was mostly Russian, German and, of course, Serbocroat the Yugoslav language. And it was not easy in the beginning.

GV: Did you come across any of Swami's devotees?

PW: Well, to our surprise we found that our apartment was only 5 minutes walk to the Sai Centre. That was a very pleasant surprise for me.

GV: That's very interesting. How did a centre start there?

PW: There have been devotees in Bosnia for many years. I really don't know how it got started. But people had heard about Swami, and known about Swami for many years. In the centre there were plenty of pictures all around the walls. It was a very small room and there were many people, so we all crammed into this little apartment with a lot of people who couldn't actually communicate with us but were singing Sanskrit *Bhajans*.

GV: Were the Sai devotees Christians, or Muslims or both?

PW: From all three religions.

GV: And did they get along well?

PW: Yes, they got along very well. The leader of the Centre was a Muslim.

GV: Can you tell us whether any of these devotees in Bosnia had spiritual experiences?

PW: There were only 2 places for the whole city that people could go and actually collect water. They would have these queues for water and bread. There were mountains around and the people who lived in the city were being attacked by those who are in the mountains; so when these queues were formed it was a very easy target from the mountains to shoot at the people.

A Lady Saved From Death - Twice!

There was a lady in the centre called Alexandra. She told me one day when she was standing in the water queue, **she saw the back of Swami's figure walking on the other side of the road and just walking around the corner and she was very surprised, she thought she was dreaming.** She quickly crossed the road to follow and see whether it was actually Swami and the

moment she crossed the road a granite rock fell in the exact spot where she had been standing in the queue. Had she been there a moment longer she would be no more.

That's the way Swami saved her and that was not the only incident she had. There is a famous vegetable market called Green Market. One day she was there shopping and a voice inside kept saying 'Go home go home'. She ignored it for a while but this voice kept saying 'Go home' and she couldn't ignore it any longer. It was very strong. And she felt strongly that it was Swami asking her to go home. So she walked home, which was not very far and there was a massive explosion. **Many people were injured and died and had she delayed a few minutes, she would not have even reached her house.** She was at the doorstep when she heard the blast.

GV: Any other such stories you could tell us?

Policemen Reassured

PW: The devotees used to meet in a lady's house. They would meet for regular devotional singing sessions and for festivals. But during the war everybody suspected each other. You would suspect your neighbour who had been your friend for many years. So, the people were afraid that when they were having devotional singing that they could be attacked, they would get into trouble and there was police all over. So the lady in whose house they used to have devotional singing was quite worried that they will have a problem with the neighbours who were already giving them a hard time. So she had in her mind prepared answers if the policemen were to come and question her.

Sure enough, one day, the policemen came and she was so nervous that she didn't give them a chance to even ask questions, she just rattled off her answers. The policemen were quite amused by her explanations. They came into the house and looked around. She was afraid because she had a life size photograph of Swami which could be seen from the entrance and she didn't have time to hide it. She thought she was finished and was going to be in trouble and then **she turned around when the policemen came in and Swami's picture was no longer there!**

She was sure she had seen it when she went to open the door. So she didn't understand what had happened. The men looked around the house and did not see anything strange and walked out. She closed the door and ran to the place where Swami's picture was supposed to be and looked around and she could not believe it. It could not have disappeared! **But she noticed that the picture had slipped under the carpet!** Just before the man came in the picture had slipped under the carpet. And she found the picture there to her amazement.

GV: That's never happened before. And it's a life size picture – it's not a small picture. It's not very easy to go under the carpet and hide itself.

PW: It's not easy. It's amazing how Swami helped her in that situation, to not get into trouble with the Policemen.

GV: Do you have any more stories of that kind?

Bullets Avoided On Shivarathri

PW: I really must say that their devotion to Swami was a humbling experience for me. They had been through this terrible war but their devotion and faith had not wavered. Some of the members had been injured and even killed but they were very strong in their faith. One lady Azra told me that when she was carrying firewood for a *Shivaratri Bhajan* she was actually struck by snipers.

The bullet hit the sack but did not hit her! She continued going and did not stop; praying to Swami saying 'Swami please let me get to the Sai Centre because we need the firewood otherwise we cannot sing right through the night.'

Swami's Picture Radiates Warmth!

That night, I believe when they were singing they could feel warmth from Swami's picture. Not heat that heated the whole room. But when you kept your hand close to Swami's picture there was enough warmth that you could feel. Just Swami's sign, I suppose, to show them that He was there with them at this difficult moment. That moved them a lot and gave them the strength to sing through that night.

Sai In Israel

GV: So from Bosnia you moved to Israel, am I right?

PW: That's right in mid 2000. We had a reassignment to Israel and we went there just before what we call the *Intifada* started, the Palestinian uprising. The time we went it was very close to a peace accord that President Clinton was trying to organize, but unfortunately it fell through. There were a few Sai Centres – a small one in Hifa and a bigger one in Tel Aviv. We were close to Hifa. And so we made enquiries, and after a couple of weeks we managed to find them and started going there regularly once a week, to join them in devotional singing.

GV: How did the people in Israel first come to know of Swami?

PW: There was a lady called Merium from Israel, who had to come to Swami about 20 years ago and she became convinced that Swami was God. She went back and she started to speak about Swami. A lot of people started reading about Swami and slowly the movement grew in Israel.

GV: But there are many orthodox people there. Did they object?

PW: Well, you have to be careful to a certain extent and orthodox people would not welcome any other beliefs, but at the same time there is room to practise other beliefs in Israel. Many Israelis now come to India as tourists, so I found wherever I went, whether I went to frame a picture of Swami's, or if I had a picture in the car when I went to the gas station, they all know about Swami. Recently, there has even been a film on the Super Speciality Hospital on the National television in Israel.

GV: That's very interesting. Of course we see quite a few Israeli devotees here. How would you compare the Sai moment in Israel with that in Bosnia?

PW: In Bosnia the organisation was more service oriented because the need was service.

GV: What is the orientation in Israel?

Swami's Personal Direction

PW: In Israel people, I would say, have a good quality of life. The standard of living is high. When I came here Swami asked me 'What are you doing?' I was taken aback by that sudden question. Then He turned around and said 'Education in Human Values'.

So, I got the hint. In Israel it was Education in Human Values. When I first went to Israel there was a young couple who had been in Puttaparthi for about 6 weeks and they were very enthusiastic. But the rest of the group knew very little about EHV.

I wanted to get someone to train us officially in EHV before we go off to the schools. And about 2 days after Swami had given me this directive, I met the Education Convenor from England, Carol Alderman. So a few months later when I went back, Carol came and we had a wonderful workshop in Israel attended by Sai devotees and non-devotees. Now we have regular 3 monthly EHV training workshops for people interested.

I have been teaching EHV in the United Nations School in Israel. We follow it in Hifa and it is slowly starting to spread. The teacher's training college has invited the Israeli Education Convenor to do a course next year.

GV: Did you meet anybody with experiences?

PW: One, a Coordinator for Israel, lives out in the bush. Once there was a suspicious fire in the bush and the fire was coming towards their house, so they were advised to close all the doors and windows and just leave the house.

She ran out of the house and when they were leaving she suddenly remembered that the robe Swami had given her a few years ago was still in the house and even though it was risky for her to go back in, she went back into the house to her bedroom to take the robe.

She then realized that she had left a large window open in the bedroom and the robe was just near that. So she went to take the robe, closed the window and came out. The house was saved otherwise the fire would have blown into the house and everything would have caught fire.

GV: What is it that the Israeli's like about Swami ?

PW: It is Swami's teachings on the Unity of Religion, Love all Serve all, Human Values. They are all looking for Peace.

GV: Do you have a lot of children attending the EHV classes?

PW: It's growing slowly. When I did it in the UN school I had children from all over the world. They loved it and the best part of it was the silent sitting at the meditation. I was surprised because they were teenagers, they were in mid-teens but they would be always tell me the best part is the silent sitting.

GV: How did the parents react to this programme?

PW: They were very happy with it. I would send lesson plans home and the teachers were very happy with it. They were asking me for books, for lesson plans and they would sit in at the classes. Just a few months ago we had the first National Sai Retreat which was attended by about 80 people.

GV: So, on the whole you enjoyed yourself with Sai work in Israel. Where are you are going next?

PW: We have just moved to Lebanon. I have started volunteering in a religious Islamic school teaching English. The school is a foundation for orphans, they also have a nursing school, special education and various other projects as well as medical projects. I also teach English to the President of the foundation and I do it all voluntarily because it is a voluntary organization.

I took a book on Swami and I showed all the good work that Swami is doing with Hospitals and Water Projects; I spoke about Education and Human Values and they were very impressed. I asked to start this project in their school and they are very happy with it.

GV: Okay, Good luck to you and see you again with more news from all the places where you've been working. God Bless you and Sairam.

PW: Sairam.

- Heart2Heart Team

DEAREST OF THE DEAR

By Bharat Kumar S S

- A Former Student of Swami's Institute.

Excerpts from a talk given by Bharat Kumar in the Divine Presence of Bhagawan Baba on 23rd Oct 2004, Vijayadasami Day.

On behalf of the billions of people throbbing with life on this Planet Earth, I offer the blossoms of my devotion at the Lotus Feet of Mother Sai. At the Lotus Feet of this Searcher of Hearts, who is eternally engaged in the Divine sport of hide and seek with His beloved children. *Amma* (Mother) Sai, Respected Elders, Sisters and Dear Brothers:

What God Wants From Us

The Master of the Universe, at whose glance The Suns, Moons, Stars, and Planets quiver, runs behind man and asks: "Can you give me your affection? Can you love Me, your Creator more than what I have created for you?" And man says, "I am busy right now. I have things to do... work pending... just hold on." And God says "Yes, I'll wait."

The saints and seers of yore have churned the ether with the ladle of their devotion and have brought forth the spirit of that Divine Mother in this Beautiful Form. Now, when a child refuses to partake it's food, the mother very lovingly takes the child into her embrace, shows to the child with a pointed finger, the full moon which is floating in the star studded sky, and then, when this child is fully engrossed in it's appreciations for this queen of night skies, the mother very lovingly feeds the child even without it's knowledge.

Similarly, when man refuses to imbibe the teaching of the Lord, that in God alone one can find everlasting joy, then He takes us into His embrace, shows us His moon-like miracles - which are no doubt enchanting - but in the very course of these miracles, He feeds us with the morsel of truth that God alone is the Nearest of the Near, the Dearest of the Dear, He alone is the one who is Closer than the Closest.

Closer Than Our Mother

I would like to share with you a very prized possession from the museum of my recollections, one of the channels of Bhagavan's Love, of which we students are recipients of. These are at the dear hostel where the entire atmosphere is permeated with brotherly love. Whenever there is a rainfall there is a brother coming up from the dispensary department with a homeopathy pill saying:

"Brother, it has rained. Tomorrow you may catch a cold, you may catch fever, please take this."

So one day, in that hostel, due to some reason, there was a 2-hour delay in my lunch. In spite of being in that kind of an atmosphere, I was missing that love saturated motherly enquiry as to 'why you didn't have your food?' (*"Bhojan Cheyi leydemi? Bhojan cheshnava?"*). I was missing that motherly element and with these thoughts, I had a very absent minded lunch session.

Then after a bath, I came to Mandir. Swami came, graced the cushion *simhasana* (Throne), there was a nice *Darshan*, and as He was going back, He turned towards me and said: "*Yemi ra, bhojan cheshnava?* (Did you have your lunch?)" That is the Divine Mother! He whispered a thundering truth into my ears that **He is the Nearest of the Near, the Dearest of the Dear.**

"I Have Heard This Before..." Once, in a private audience with Bhagavan, my mother expressed a desire to sing a song in His presence and Swami very graciously consented. So she sang: "*Ee janmaki idi chalura...Sai Karunamaya Sagara*". Now, when the song was over, my mother said to Swami:

"Swami, this is the first time I am singing a song in your presence. Thank you." And then very casually Swami said: "*Ledey* (No), this is not the first time! *Inta mundikuda Vinnanu..Idey patta ne kalalo ochi vinnanu, kada?* (No way, this same song I have heard earlier also...I came in your dream and heard this, isn't it?)"

Mother was nodding her head, so after the interview session I asked my mother to throw some light on this incident and she said she's a decently accomplished classical singer, and once, she had the opportunity to sing the glory of Swami in one cassette; the recording of which was elsewhere. So after the recording was over, she traveled by train to her native place. She recollected that it was a tedious train journey, but there was something pleasant about it. It was that at night when she was asleep, this very Swami had come to her in her dream and she had sung the same song and she herself had forgotten about it. **"I am closer than the closest, closer than even your thoughts,"** Swami says.

Now, having known this, what can we pray for to the Lord? Swami says that making a prayer to Me is like making a telephone call. I either receive the telephone right away and then grant it: "Yes, yes". Or, my dutiful answering machine comes up saying "Wait". So there is either a yes or there is a wait. There is no: "No". So having been assured of that kind of an affirmative response, for any legitimate prayer, what can we aspire to pray for?

Tears Of Divine Grace

I always used to wonder as to how Shabari (from the epic Indian *Ramayana*) cultivated that kind of devotion wherein her once tasted berries were sublimated to a level of a fitful offering to Lord Rama? What inspired the great singer Saint Tyagaraja to compose those 32,000 splendid *kirtanas* (devotional compositions) on the Lord of Seven Hills (Lord Tirupathi)? How could the Gopis of Vraj develop that kind of devotion wherein Krishna was their end all and be all of life? Now just as the waters of the ocean rise and fall just

because of the gravitational pull of the moon, similarly, **these feelings of devotion can search in our hearts only because of the grace of the Lord.**

I remember one afternoon I was sitting in the *bhajan* hall, when my eyes fell on a devotee whose sight was very lovingly fixed on Bhagavan's Beautiful Form. He was feasting with boundless fondness on that Beauty Incarnate. And then tears of devotion were rolling down his cheeks. I marveled at this display of devotion and wondered if I could ever experience or display that kind of devotion towards the Lord. That night, I wrote a letter to Bhagavan asking Him to bless me with a similar experience. The next day, I had the opportunity of sitting in the most coveted first row. Swami came. He didn't take my letter, but then at the stroke of 5, when the *bhajans* commenced, a very strange feeling was welling up in my heart, which was very new to my being.

Tears of devotion were surging in my heart, in my eyes, and then they were flowing down not for a couple minutes or so, but continuously for the next half an hour. I was not at all in control for was it I who had initiated it? Just a wholehearted prayer and He filled a holed heart with devotion!

Swami, bless us all that we would desire You than anything else. We would seek Thee all the time and keep chanting Your name while involved in the battlefield of life.

Jai Sai Ram.

SAI WORLD NEWS

FIJI GOVERNMENT MINISTER HAILS THE SATHYA SAI SCHOOL IN FIJI

On the 7th of November, 2005, the *Fiji Daily Post* (a Fijian National Newspaper) in an article entitled, "The School with a Difference" movingly declared -

"Do you believe in a Fiji where there is no violence, hatred, ethnic division and crime? Or have you lost that hope already - a hope of living in our country like we used to be in the early seventies and eighties? Be rest assured because there is still hope for our children to bring back that life we all know. The life that made the late Pope John Paul II to describe Fiji as 'The way the world should be'.

If you need aspirations for a better Fiji for the future then try and visit the Sathya Sai Primary School located near Matawalu Village on the outskirts of Lautoka."

This is the media's opinion on the very successful Sai School in Fiji. It was a grand affirmation of the good work diligently going on in a small corner of Fiji for five years now.

For those unfamiliar, Fiji is a group of 300 south Pacific islands (100 inhabited) renowned for their coral reefs and natural beauty. The ethnic mix in Fiji is comprised of Melanesians (51%) and Indians (44%) and was a land of peace until some community based conflicts a few years ago marred the island's previous peaceful ambience. And yet by God's Grace light always exists to show the way forward - light in the form of human values taught in the island's Sai School.

About The School

The Sathya Sai School in Fiji was founded in 2000 and accommodates 136 children from **various ethnic and religious backgrounds**, who come from the nearby farming communities and village. The school has nine teachers, three of them trained at the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, Thailand.

The children imbibe Swami's teachings on human values, integrated into the Fijian national curriculum. Every morning the day starts with meditation. Then follows inspirational stories derived from the lives of great men and then everyone joins in congregational singing. All this enhances the group feeling of unity and togetherness.

Mr. Brij Bhan Singh, the deputy head teacher, told the *Fiji Daily Post*, **"They sing songs about good virtues to fill them with positive thinking because when they enter their classrooms, they are filled with love and this makes their discipline in class very good.** The children that started off this project in 2000 are in Class Six now and we can see the changes in them. They are more disciplined and you hardly see any disturbances in class.

Everyone respects one another because everybody speaks the same language and that is love."

He later told Heart2Heart, "One of our mothers was very moved to compare her two children, one of whom goes to another school and one to the Sai School. With tears in her eyes she related that the behaviour of the child who goes to the Sai School was so markedly better than her other child."

Minister of Works Praises the School

On November 2nd 2005 the school was visited by the Minister for Works, Government of Fiji, Mr. Savenaca Draunidalo, who gave glowing testimony to the school. Many Fijian national dailies carried stories on how the Minister expressed immense happiness at the unique educational philosophy of the school and also pledged support to the school on behalf of the government of Fiji.

Mr. Draunidalo said that other Fijian schools should learn from the Sai School and that it is a model of true reconciliation and unity for the country. It is interesting to see the connection between the flow of government support and human values in that Mr. Draunidalo said his commitment towards the development of the area's infrastructure was cemented **after learning of the principles behind the school's development.**

The Philosophy Behind the Sathya Sai School in Fiji

In an interview with the *Fiji Times* the chairman of the Sai organization in Fiji, Mr. Vishnu Deo, mentioned -

"When we purchased the 36 acres in 1999 the Sathya Sai organization was determined to develop a school which would make children realize the true benefits of human values. **We believe that by teaching the children human values we will be able to rid Fiji of the many social problems plaguing the country.** Providing **free education** to all students of Sathya Sai we hope that the lessons learnt within our gates will be passed on to their parents and friends."
(*Fiji Times* – Nov 5th 2005)

Mr. Deo also emphasized that **"This school is not a religious school but a spiritual school."**

It is also noteworthy that the *Fiji Times* carried Swami's message on education being for life not for a living in the opening of their article on the Sai School: **"Learning how to live your life in the proper way is the whole purpose of education.** But schools in Fiji seem to have moved away towards a greater emphasis on teaching students ways to earn a living."
(*Fiji Times* – Nov 11th 2005)

It is encouraging that the Fijian press has not only brought attention to this worthy project but has also unequivocally supported the ideals which Swami is promulgating.

The Works Minister mentioned that he had learnt a lot about human values and how it affected children's lives simply by observing the students of the school. **He confirmed that he would personally take steps to ensure that the Ministry of Education recognised the efforts of the Sai Sathya Service Organization and the Sathya Sai School in helping create a better Fiji. He also promised to have the road to the school tar-sealed and provide proper water supply to the school replacing the current bore-well.**

Educare....Transforming the World

The Sai School has just celebrated Swami's birthday with 400 people, many from the local community and with a two page supplement in the Fiji Times.

It is heartening to see how Educare – the Sai philosophy of education - is so active even in a remote island tucked away in the Pacific ocean. Slowly but surely, the world is moving towards a greater appreciation and understanding of the eternal and universal values of love and service and integrating these into educational curriculum for children. This, Swami has often said, is of paramount importance for the new world order of love and peace to dawn.

- Heart2Heart Team

SAI NEWS FROM NEW ZEALAND AND TAIWAN

Heart2Heart is very pleased to bring you two newspaper articles, one from Taiwan and the other from New Zealand. Swami's mission of service has always been global and these are just two examples which have come to our attention from 'far off' places. Both are fully supportive of the Sai Organization and the work undertaken. The articles cover Swami's extraordinary life, His service projects and how so many have been inspired to follow His call to 'Love all Serve all'. A New Zealand newspaper, the *Auckland Courier*, on Nov 10th 2005, said -

"Its (the Sai Organisation) range of service activities include providing free sandwiches and nutritional food items to needy school children and the City Mission Night Shelter occupants, soup kitchens, rest home and hospice visits, visits to children's hospitals and the sick, befriending the elderly and lonely on a one to one basis, conducting free medical clinics, running food banks for the needy, serving meals on wheels, tutoring needy school and refugee children in English, Mathematics and Science, helping settling of refugees, blood donation and conducting meditation, prayer and light yoga for prison inmates. The organisation has been recognised as the leading blood donor in the country.

The wide range of services provided and the sprit of love, compassion and empathy with which these are implemented have earned the organisation the regard of community leaders and the wider community as a dependable and compassionate service giver and strengthened its spiritual bond with the community."

Mention is also made of the very successful EHV programme at the Sathya Sai Pre-school in Rongomai, Ottara – *"Where education is given free to the 40 children on its roll. The Sathya Sai Values Education Programme is skillfully woven into the New Zealand National Early Childhood Curriculum and high quality values-based education is provided. **The quality of preschool education is well recognized by the Ministry of Education and by the wider community.***

*This programme has another dimension. **It has been introduced in some schools and the school authorities are delighted with the impact of the programme on building the character of their children. An action plan is currently being implemented to introduce it on a phased basis to other schools.** Teacher training workshops for values based teaching are being arranged and work is proceeding apace in the preparation of suitable lesson plans and the collation of resource materials."*

The article finishes with a very upbeat and positive summary,

"The above activities are underpinned by the study and practice of spirituality, drawn from the essence of the teachings of all religions, scriptures and cultures and emphasising the underlying oneness of humanity behind the apparent diversity.

The conduct of weekly devotional singing sessions, regular study of spiritual material and the practice of external and internal spiritual disciplines for making spirituality an integral part of daily living constitute the bedrock of the organisation's spiritual programme.

These practices and the activities carried out are having tangible impact and bringing about a real transformation in the lives of peoples of all faiths, all races and all backgrounds.

The spiritual radiance of Sathya Sai's teachings and his immeasurable Love harnessed in the service of humanity are manifesting his influence in all corners of the globe and are working a revolution which will illumine humanity and transform the world from gross materialism and selfish competition into one of Divine understanding, unity and peace."

TAIWAN

The article from Taiwan in the *China Post* of Nov 11th 2005, is entitled 'Giving Selfless Service and Divine Love in Swami's Name'. It comments on the worldwide service activities of the Sai organization, Swami's life and His message, and also the massive service projects such as for drinking water, free education and healthcare. The article covers the activities of the two Sai Centres in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, and reads:

*"The two centres in Taipei – one downtown and one in Tienmu – have held many community service activities in the past few years. They have conducted numerous teacher training seminars under the Sathya Sai Education in Human values programme. Blood donation camps are held every 3-4 months. **'To date over 3000 bags of blood have been collected for the Blood Bank of Taiwan'** said an active Sai Baba devotee.*

The downtown centre operates a kindergarten where 9 students are educated free of charge. Forty children of various ages benefit from the weekend Sathya Sai Educare classes. The members regularly visit orphanages and old people's homes, providing residents not only with food and other commodities but also with time care and attention. The centre lends a helping hand whenever disaster strikes Taiwan or neighboring countries.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba has inspired millions to pursue self-realisation and to serve others. In a world filled with incessant terrorism threats and continual natural disasters, it is exhilarating to encounter his message of love and compassion." (China Post - Nov 11th 2005)

These two articles above show how the divine vibrations of the Avatar reach all around the world and create divinely inspired actions which lead to a better and more caring world. Where would we be without His Concern and Grace?

- Heart2Heart Team

GET INSPIRED

THREE LITTLE TREES

Once, three little trees stood upon a mountain top and dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up.

The first little tree looked at the stars and said, *"I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I will be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world!"*

The second little tree looked out at the small stream trickling by on its way to the ocean. *"I want to be traveling mighty waters and carrying powerful kings. I'll be the strongest ship in the world!"*

The third little tree looked down into the valley below where busy men and women worked in the busy town. *"I don't want to leave the mountain top at all. I want to grow so tall that when people look at me, they'll raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world."*

Years passed. The rains came, the sun shone and the three little trees grew tall. One day three woodcutters climbed the mountain. The first woodcutter looked at the first tree and said, *"This tree is beautiful. It is perfect for me."* With a swoop of his shining axe, the first tree fell. *"Now I shall be made into a beautiful chest, I shall hold wonderful treasure,"* the first tree said.

The second woodcutter looked at the second tree and said, *"This tree is strong, it is perfect for me."* With a swoop of his shining axe the second tree fell. *"Now I shall sail mighty waters,"* thought the second tree. *"I shall be a strong ship for mighty kings!"*

The third tree felt her heart sink when the last woodcutter looked her way. She stood straight and tall and pointed bravely to heaven. But the woodcutter never even looked up. "Any kind of tree will do for me," he muttered. With a swoop of his shining axe the third tree fell.

The first tree rejoiced when the woodcutter brought her to a carpenter's workshop. But the carpenter fashioned her into a feedbox for animals. The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold nor with treasure. She was coated in sawdust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals.

The second tree smiled when the woodcutter took her to a shipyard, but no mighty sailing ship was made that day. Instead the once strong tree was hammered and sawed into a simple fishing boat. She was too small and too weak to sail on an ocean, or even a river. She was, instead, taken to a little lake.

The third tree was confused when the woodcutter cut her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard. "What happened?" the once tall tree wondered. "All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountain top and point to God."

Many, many days and nights passed. The three trees nearly forgot their dreams. But one night golden starlight poured over the first tree as a woman and her husband whispered. The mother squeezed his hand and smiled as the starlight shone on the smooth and sturdy wood. "This manger is beautiful," she said. And suddenly the first tree knew that he was holding the greatest treasure in the world.

One evening a tired traveler and his friends crowded into the fishing boat. The traveler fell asleep as the second tree sailed quietly out into the lake. Soon a thundering and thrashing storm arose. The little tree shuddered, she knew she didn't have the strength to carry so many passengers safely through the wind and the rain. The tired man awakened. He stood up, stretched out his hand and said, "Peace." The storm stopped as quickly as it had begun. And suddenly the second tree knew that he was carrying the king of heaven and earth.

One Friday morning, the third tree was startled when her beams were yanked from the forgotten woodpile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hands to her. She felt ugly harsh and cruel. But, on Sunday morning, when the sun rose and the earth trembled with joy beneath her, the third tree knew that God's love had changed the world. It had made the third tree strong. And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God. That was better than being the tallest tree in the world.

So the next time you feel down because you didn't get what you wanted, just sit tight and be happy because God is thinking of something better to give you.

- *Source: Unknown.*

- Heart2Heart Team

THE CARPENTER'S HOUSE

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer of his plans to leave the house building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family.

He would miss the paycheck, but he needed to retire. They could get by. The employer was sorry to see this good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career.

When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the employer handed the front-door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you."

What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well.

So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. At important points we do not give the job our best effort. Then with a shock we look at the situation we have created and find that we are now living in the house we have built. If we had realized that we would have done it differently.

Think of yourself as the carpenter. Think about your house. Each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall build wisely. It is the only life you will ever build. Even if you live it for only one day more, that day deserves to be lived graciously and with dignity. The plaque on the wall says, "Life is a do-it-yourself project." Your life tomorrow will be the result of your attitudes and the choices you make today.

- Source: Unknown,
Illustrations: Rohit and Sakti, SSSHSS.

- Heart2Heart Team

THE OBSTACLE IN OUR PATH

In ancient times, a king had a boulder placed on a roadway. Then he hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the king's wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by and simply walked around it. Many loudly blamed the king for not keeping the roads clear, but no one did anything to move the big stone out of the way.

Then a peasant came along carrying a load of vegetables. On approaching the boulder, the peasant laid down his burden and tried to move the stone to the side of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded.

As the peasant picked up his load of vegetables, he noticed a purse lying in the road where the boulder had been. The purse contained many gold coins and a note from the king indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway. The peasant learned what many others never understand.

Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve one's condition.

As Swami says,

"Do you think I would confront you with pain, were there not a reason for it? Open your heart to pain as you do now to pleasure, for it is My will wrought by Me for your good. Welcome it as a challenge. Do not turn away from it, do not listen to your mind, for mind is but another word for "need". The mind engenders need, it manifested as the world, because it needed this. It is all My plan, to drive you by the pangs of unfulfilled need to listen to My voice, which when heard, dissolves the ego and the mind with it."

- *Story Source Unknown..*

- Heart2Heart Team

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

QUIZ ON SWAMI AND CHRISTIANITY

The message of "Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man," which Jesus Christ proclaimed 2000 years ago, should become a living faith for the achievement of real peace and the unity of mankind.

- Baba, August 1981

1. Complete Swami's teaching on the progressive realizations that Jesus experienced - Firstly he realized "I am the Messenger of God." Then, after some time he said "I am the Son of God." Finally Jesus declared,
 - a. "There is only one God."
 - b. "I and my Father are One."
 - c. "I am the Holy Spirit."
 - d. "Holy Spirit and I are One."
2. Why did Jesus wash His disciples' feet?
 - a. To demonstrate the spirit of service.
 - b. To show cleanliness is next to Godliness.
 - c. To inculcate a feeling of brotherliness among the disciples.
 - d. To demonstrate to His disciples that he was not superior to them.
3. On the occasion of Maha Shivarathri in 1973, Swami created a cross showing the crucified Jesus for Dr. Hislop. What was unique about the cross?
 - a. It produced Vibhuti and was made from the very same wood on which Jesus was crucified.
 - b. It showed Jesus as He actually looked at that time and was made from the very same wood on which Jesus was crucified.
 - c. It was the replica of a great work by Michelangelo and made from one of the rarest metals on earth.
 - d. It was made out of an alloy of precious metals and showed Jesus as He actually looked at that time.
4. What ethereal words did Jesus hear when He was on the cross?
 - a. "Dear Son, do not despair."
 - b. "God is with you, Dear Son."
 - c. "I shall never leave you, Jesus, my Son."
 - d. "All life is one, my dear Son! Be alike to every one."
5. St. Paul used to persecute Christians; what happened to change him into a great Christian writer and missionary?
 - a. He came to know some close disciples of Jesus.
 - b. He fell sick and Jesus cured him.
 - c. Jesus appeared in his dream.

- d. He lost his memory and got it back miraculously.
6. At one point Jesus' mother and father became very worried as they could not find their son; what was this situation?
- a. Jesus had gone to the river.
 - b. Jesus was teaching His young friends.
 - c. Jesus was listening to the priests at the temple.
 - d. Jesus was giving food to the poor.
7. Swami tells us that at one point Jesus went into the hills to pray. On return he came across a group of fishermen who were worried over their inability to catch any fish. What happens next?
- a. Jesus goes out with them in the boat and finds many fish.
 - b. Jesus takes them to the hills to pray with him.
 - c. Jesus begins to teach them the scriptures.
 - d. The men start to ridicule Jesus.
8. What was one reason for Jesus facing antagonism from the religious authorities in Jerusalem?
- a. Because he refused to change his attire.
 - b. Because he opposed religious animal sacrifices.
 - c. Because he refused to become a priest.
 - d. Because he refused to speak against the Romans.
9. Jesus was condemned to be crucified. What was the reaction of his disciples?
- a. They pledged to take revenge against the Romans.
 - b. They stayed loyal to Jesus and were ready to get crucified.
 - c. They refused to recognize Jesus.
 - d. They gathered support for Jesus.
10. What was the name of Jesus' disciple who always doubted Jesus?
- a) John
 - b) Matthew
 - c) Bartholomew
 - d) Thomas

ANSWERS

1B: *During His Christmas Discourse in 1986, Baba said, "He looked upon himself, at first, only as a Messenger of God. Later, sensing closer relationship with God, he announced himself as the Son of God. As the awareness of Self developed, through contacts and meditation, he realised his identity with God, and he could assert, "I and my Father are One."*

2A: *Swami stated in the Christmas Discourse in 1984, "In the Bible it is recorded that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. When they asked him why He was doing so, Jesus answered: "I am washing your feet as your servant, so that you may learn to serve the world."*

3D: *Swami tells Dr. Hislop and few others after the Materialisation of the Cross, "This shows Christ as he really was at the time he left his body, not as artists have imagined him or as historians have told about him. His stomach is pulled in and his ribs are all showing. He had had no food in 8 days. The cross is from wood from the actual cross on which Christ was crucified. To find some of the wood after 2,000 years took a little time! The image is of Christ after he dies. It is a dead face." (Ref : My Baba and I)*

4D: *Swami tells us in His Christmas Discourse, 2001, that "When Jesus was being crucified, he heard an ethereal voice, "All are one my dear son, be alike to everyone ". When the mother Mary was shedding tears, Jesus told her, "Death is the dress of life." Death is like changing of dress. Do you find anybody wearing the same dress every day? Just as you change your dress every day, you change the body from birth to birth."*

5C: *Swami states in His Christmas discourse, 1987, that "St. Paul, who was in the beginning an inveterate critic of Jesus, became the first propagator of the Christian faith after having a vision of Christ in a dream in which Jesus told him: "Every man is a spark of the Divine. When you hate me, you are hating yourself and hating God." Paul had to face many ordeals in propagating Christ's message.'*

6C: *Swami explains this very beautifully in His Christmas discourse, 2002,*

"It was the time of a festival in Jerusalem and the child Jesus was taken there along with his parents. They lost the child in the crowd and could not find him anywhere. Mother Mary naturally was very much worried. Finally, they went to the temple to pray. To their astonishment, they found young Jesus coming out of the temple. All the while the child had been in the temple, listening to the holy discourse of the Rabbi of the temple. The anxious mother took hold of her child and started asking him several questions as to what he was doing all the while. The child replied, "Mother, why were you afraid? All the while I was in the hands of God. I have been listening to the words of God expounded by the Rabbi in the temple.' Thus, the child was God-minded from a very young age."

7A: *Jesus said, "Follow me; are there any waters that do not have fish?" He took them along with him in their boats to the middle of the sea and asked them to cast their nets at a particular spot. To their utter astonishment and great joy, the fishermen found that their nets were full with fish. This event created a lot of faith in the minds of the fishermen."*

8B: Swami narrated this in His discourse on 25th December, 2002.

"Jesus opposed the practice of animal sacrifice in Jerusalem. As a result, he had to face strong opposition. People who help mankind are put to harm." Swami said in His Christmas discourse in 1988.

9C: *"When it was ordered that all devotees of Jesus should be crucified along with Him, even His closest devotees, Peter, Matthew, and Paul, refused to identify themselves as His followers. Can these be called true devotees? One should be prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of God,"* Swami stated in His Christmas Discourse in 1988.

10D: *"Thomas used to doubt the divinity of Jesus,"* Swami said on 25th Dec 1988, *"Such doubting Thomases are on the rise in this Age of Kali. Never be in the company of such people. God is like fire and you are like coal. When coal comes in contact with fire, coal becomes one with fire. Similarly, when you come in contact with God you become one with Him. Have total faith in God."*

H2H CROSSWORD #2

ON CHRISTIANITY

Dear Reader, the first crossword of H2H was in the April, 2004 issue. After a long hiatus, we have in this issue the second crossword. This being the month of Christmas, all the clues are based on Christianity. If you cannot solve a few...there are answers along with explanations in the answers page. Mind you, this crossword is not to test you but educate you, so feel free to see the answers and learn.

CLUES

Note : All starred clues are provided with a hint.

Across

- 1 His wife turned into a pillar of salt (3)
- *3 The first high priest of Israel (5)
- *6 A Book of the Bible (3)
- 8 A group of persons living under a religious rule (5)
- 11 The Greek *knew* (2)
- *12 It looks bigger in the other's eye! (4)
- *14 A Christian surname (3)
- 15 A reference to an inanimate (2)
- *16 A persecutor who turned into a preacher (4)
- *17 A token of mortality as a mark on the forehead (3)
- *18 It spoke!
- 21 Feast commemorating the Resurrection of Jesus (6)
- *23 The sacrament of the Eucharist (4)
- 24 Jordan is an example for this (5)
- *26 He was the savior of all beings (4)
- 27 God's bride (3)
- 28 Count from the Mount (3)
- *29 The principle saint of many Christian churches. (4)
- *30 A season of fasting and penitence observed by Christians (4)
- 31 Vatican, The Holy _____ (3)

Down

- 1 Not of the clergy (3)
- 2 A tenth of one's earning given as an offering to God (5)
- *3 God of fertility (6)
- 4 Color that indicates expansiveness and power (3)
- 5 An emperor who persecuted the early Christians (4)
- 6 The kingdom ruled by the Herod. (5)
- *7 The "House of Bread" (9)
- *9 Great grandmother of King David, ancestor of Jesus (4)

- 10 A Christian name (4)
- *13 Sathya (narayana), i.e., Swami, who is the Star of Parthi (1,1,1)
- 14 Questions and Answers (9)
- 19 The Lord loves this one too (1,6)
- 20 Members of an ascetic Jewish sect around the time of Jesus (6)
- 22 Second wife of Jacob and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin (6)
- *23 An ancient prophet believed to have compiled a sacred history of the Americas (6)
- *25 A poem or incantation of mysterious significance, especially a magic charm (4)

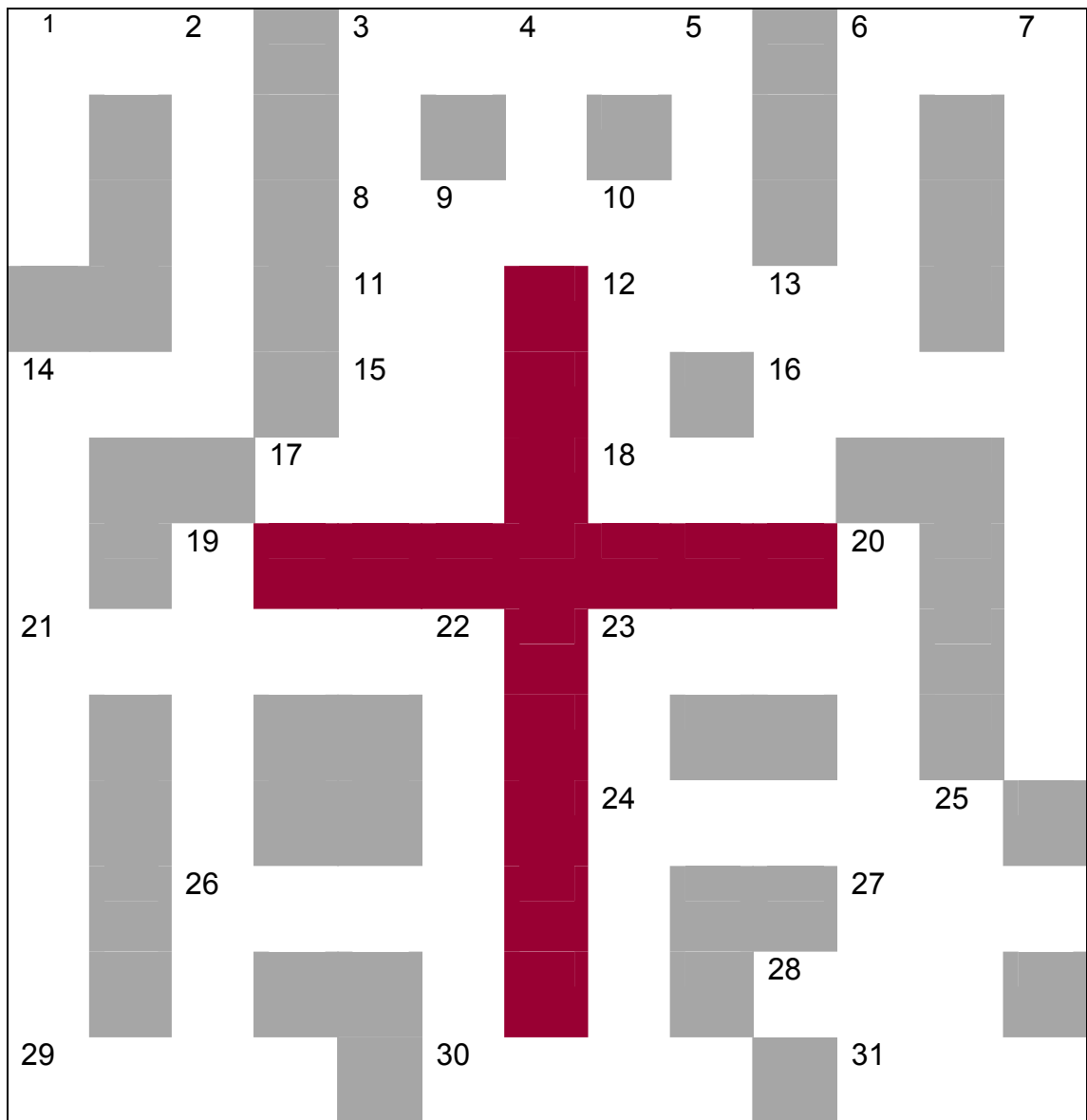
HINTS

Across

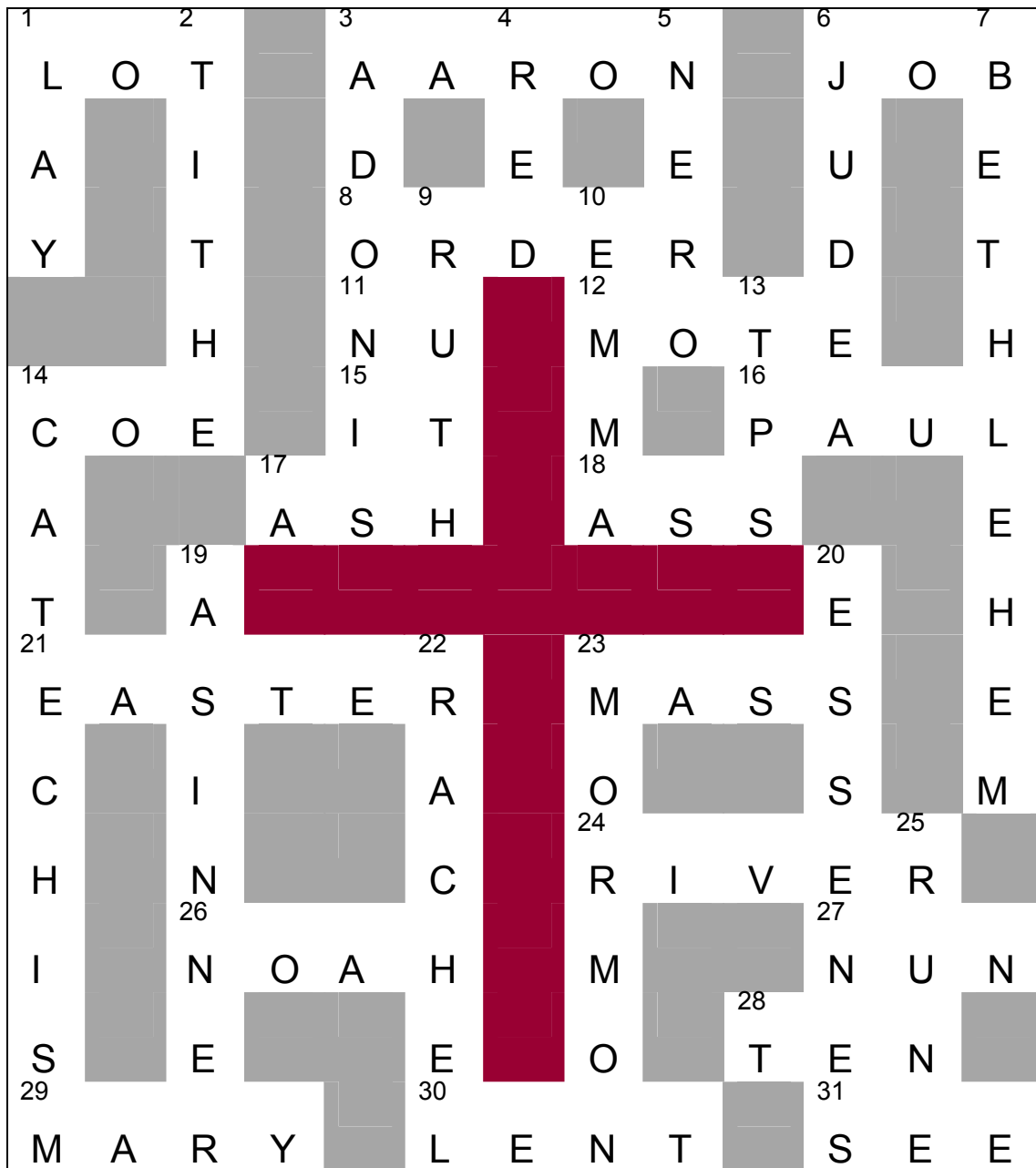
- 3 Elder brother of Moses who helped Moses to lead the Jews out of Egypt
- 6 A task (synonym)
- 12 Jesus said "And why beholdest thou the ____ that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"
- 16 Also called Saul.
- 17 ____ Wednesday, a day of fast.
- 18 It belonged to Balaam.
- 23 An offering is made at the altar during this ceremony
- 26 In a literal sense
- 27 A religious woman
- 29 Three or four women with this same name, associated with Jesus
- 30 The 40 weekdays from Ash Wednesday until Easter

Down

- 3 A Greek mythological character, a handsome youth loved by Aphrodite, the goddess of love
- 7 Birthplace of Jesus
- 9 A book of Old Testament is named after her.
- 13 Locket given to Dr Fanibunda had this engraved on it.
- 23 He is also called a latter-day saint
- 25 Also, any character from an ancient Germanic alphabet used in Scandinavia from the 3rd century to the Middle Ages, "each character having its own magical significance"



SOLUTION



EXPLANATIONS

Across

1 LOT > In the Bible, he is Abraham's nephew. Afterwards, he separated from Abraham and settled in Sodom, one of the many cities whose inhabitants became notorious for their wicked ways and unnatural activities. At length, when the judgment of God descended on the guilty cities of the plain, Lot was miraculously delivered. When fleeing from the doomed city his wife "looked back from behind him, and became a pillar of salt." There is to this day a peculiar crag at the south end of the Dead Sea "which really does bear a curious resemblance to an Arab woman with a child upon her shoulder."

3 AARON > Brother of Moses, Aaron stood by Moses and interceded with the Pharaoh for the release of their people. In the desert, when Moses went up the Mount to receive the tables of Commandments, Aaron was influenced by the people to set up a Golden Calf and light a sacrificial fire before it. The Lord wanted to punish him, but Moses interceded with God and obtained pardon for him. Then, God anointed Aaron as the chief priest of the Israelites and gave detailed instructions about His worship.

6 JOB > An Arabian patriarch who resided in the land of Uz. While living in the midst of great prosperity, he was suddenly overwhelmed by a series of sore trials that fell upon him. Amid all his sufferings he maintained his integrity. Once more God visited him with the rich tokens of his goodness and even greater prosperity than he had enjoyed before. He survived the period of trial for one hundred and forty years, and died in a good old age, an example to succeeding generations of integrity and of submissive patience under the sorest calamities. His history, so far as it is known, is recorded in his book.

16 PAUL > Saul, the Paul, was a devout Jew, a contemporary of Jesus, who passionately persecuted the followers of the New Messiah, Jesus. One day, the Lord Jesus appeared before him in all his glory and asked "Saul, why do you persecute me so?" With that, he was transformed. Shortly thereafter, he started preaching the Gospel.

17 ASH > Ash Wednesday, the 7th Wednesday before Easter; the first day of Lent; the day following Mardi Gras ('fat Tuesday'); a day of fasting and repentance

18 ASS > Story from *NUMBERS*: Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his ass and went with the princes of Moab. But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his ass, and his two servants were with him.

When the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road. Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the ass saw the angel

of the LORD, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again. Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff.

Then the LORD opened the ass's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" Balaam answered the ass, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." The ass said to Balaam, "Am I not your own ass, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said.

Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

23 MASS > The Council of Trent taught that the Mass is the non-bloody renewal, or rather re-presentation, of the Sacrifice of Calvary upon the altar and the most perfect method the Church has to offer, *latria* or adoration, to God. Not that Christ is sacrificed again at each Mass, but Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is made present at every Mass. Catholics believe in *transubstantiation*, that is, that the offerings of wheaten bread and grape wine are truly substantially changed into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, retaining the *accidents* (i.e. the appearance and form) of bread and wine.

Down

3 ADONIS > Greek mythological character. Adonis was a beautiful youth much loved by the goddess Aphrodite. While hunting he was attacked and killed by a wild boar. The grieving Aphrodite caused a red-flowered plant to spring forth from his shed blood. Linnaeus named the genus *Adonis* after the mythological character.

13 TPS > Swami created a locket for Dr Fanibunda (*Author of "Vision of the Divine"*) which had the letters TPS at its lower end. When asked about it, Swami said "TPS stands for *Tara Parthi Sathya* - Sathya is the Star of Parthi"

14 CATECHISM > A book giving a brief summary of the basic principles of Christianity in question-and-answer form.

23 MORMON > An ancient prophet believed to have compiled a sacred history of the Americas, which were translated and published by Joseph Smith as the Book of Mormon in 1830.

THE HEALING TOUCH

RAJU'S BRIGHT EYES BECOME EVEN BRIGHTER

This is a story of the teenager son of a factory worker from the state of West Bengal, India who regained his eyesight, thanks to Swami's Hospital in Bangalore.

Raju Das is a bright-eyed teenager from West Bengal. Youngest in a family of four sons, Raju is studying in his II year B.Sc (Zoology). His father works in a plastic manufacturing factory and his mother is a house-wife. Raju, being a hard-working boy, it looked certain he would complete his B.Sc and then M.Sc, and then earn his Ph.D, which he always dreamt of. But then something happened.

One day he developed a severe head and neck ache. After a week of excruciating pain, he developed high fever. His father, worried about Raju's ill-health, took him to a doctor. After routine blood and urine tests, Raju was diagnosed as having high blood-pressure. Some tablets were prescribed to improve his condition.

Mysterious Problem... No Light, No Hope

Very soon though, there were signs that his problem was not something which could be solved by tablets. Raju started complaining that he was having problem seeing with his left eye. His parents took him to an ophthalmologist, who gave him a clean chit. Raju's condition worsened and he turned completely blind in the left eye. The light from his left eye seemed to have ebbed away forever.

The parents were shocked, to say the least! Doctors at this stage advised a CT scan. This was followed by an MRI study wherein the cause of Raju's problem surfaced - a brain tumour. Raju Das had developed a brain tumour, which was secondarily affecting the optic nerve thus impairing his eyesight. The doctors suggested immediate surgery, which, if not carried out could cause the other eye also to go blind. The cost which the doctors mentioned was way beyond his father's capability.

For those unaware, brain tumours are abnormal growths of the neural tissues or its supporting structures which secondarily affect the functioning of the normal brain. Brain tumours are more often than not missed as the complaints may not be very suggestive, as in this case and especially so if the patient is a child or is having difficulty communicating his symptoms. Brain tumours may be benign, i.e. allowing the patient to enjoy a normal lifestyle after removal, or malignant, i.e. cancerous, in which the chances of recurrence are very high.

Coming back to Raju, after a brief interval, Raju started complaining about the progressive degradation of his vision through his right eye. The already shocked parents were caught completely unawares. Losing the valuable

sense of sight would render Raju an invalid. Raju's parents were in complete dismay.

The Darkest Hour Before The Dawn...

It is said that the darkest hour is just before dawn. So too, it was Raju's darkest moment, when there appeared light. Opposite their house was a shop owner who had visited Swami's Whitefield Hospital for treatment of his cardiac ailment. He explained to Raju's distraught parents all about Swami's Hospitals, which are beacons of hope for the hopeless. Raju was soon brought to Bangalore in October this year (2005).

After registration and consultation with the neuro surgeon, Raju was given a date to come in early November for his surgery. As there were a few days time before they could take a train to return home, Raju requested his parents to take him to Sai Baba, whose Hospital they had come to. They reached Parthi on 7th October 2005, when the Dasara celebrations were on in full swing. Though Raju could not see Swami, he was overjoyed to hear Swami delivering a discourse and he was thrilled listening to the *bhajans* and then returned home.

A New Lease Of Life...and Light

He later returned to the Whitefield Hospital was admitted to the Hospital on the 1st of Nov 2005. On 4th Nov, in a 4-hour surgery the surgeons removed the tumour situated in the cerebellum (smaller brain). He had an uneventful and good post-operative recovery from the surgery and the tumour analysis also was a reason to be happy as it was at the lowest spectrum on the cancer scale (WHO Grade I).

After the surgery, the pressure on the brain regressed and Raju found his vision improving in the left eye. The vision to the right eye is being regained gradually. Advances in the field of neurosurgery, brought about by latest technologies, available at the Hospital helped in Raju Das' cause. Such technology can help bring smiles to many more patients.

Raju's bright eyes have just become brighter. His parents, relieved to see their joyous Raju as he relates to them his plans to do his Ph.D., have a look of gratitude in their eyes, to Swami and His hospital, which has given their child a new lease of life...and light.

- Heart2Heart Team

HOSPITAL STATISTICS

BANGALORE SUPER SPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 19th Jan 2001 to 31st Oct 2005.

Cardiac Surgeries: 5,873

Cardiac Catheterisation: 11, 608

Neuro Surgeries: 5, 217

CT Scans: 16,860

MRI Exams: 19,301

PUTTAPARTHI SUPER SPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 22nd Nov 1991 to 31st Oct 2005.

Cardiac Surgeries: 15,142

Cath Procedures: 15,947

Urology Surgeries: 27,660

Ophthalmology Surgeries: 27,091

Echo Cardiography: 3, 91,671