

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Every cloud, they say, has a silver lining. In the world today, we see countless ominous clouds hovering over the human race causing tremendous physical unrest and mental turmoil. If one mass of humanity is trying to come to grips with a financial debacle, the severity of which history had never seen before; in another region, a war between two groups never seems to cease, and has now turned even more gruesome and pathetic. Even before modern science successfully creates a vaccine for a hitherto incurable disease, there is a new malady marooning lives by millions. Maximization of the return on their investment has become the sole goal of virtually every business enterprise, with little concern to society's physical health or the damage of its moral fibre or the irreparable violation of the environment. Educational institutions, which historically had the goal of building a generation with strong character and skills, still have those objectives now, but only on paper; in practice, they run like commercial organizations. Reputed business concerns, which were the pride of nations, have, overnight turned into icons of ignominy. In spite of all human ingenuity over centuries, millions are without jobs, and one out of every six in the world today does not earn enough to eat two square meals a day.

In all these downcast clouds, where is the silver lining, one might ask sarcastically. But there actually is. In fact, there is a golden lining, if only we care to observe, understand and assimilate. In a time when professional education has become highly expensive and obtaining degrees from reputed universities is generally beyond the reach of the lower middle class, there is a University in South India that is rated as "A++" by the country's University Grants Commission, and for more than quarter of a century has offered not only quality education to facilitate a great career, but also has conferred on its students a sound character. Read the stories "From the Joy of Symphony to the Bliss of Sai" and "Powerful Reminiscences of His Presence" to get a feel of how this unique educational system creates enlightened souls out of ordinary individuals.

Similarly, in the present healthcare scenario, where to fall seriously sick with no health insurance is as catastrophic as committing a cardinal sin, and only divine providence can save the person whether he/she is in the developed or developing world, there are unique medical institutions which, for years together, have offered the most advanced tertiary care to the poorest of the poor, unconditionally, incessantly, and at absolutely no cost to the patients. When you read the story of Gayatri and Rajendra Kumar Kar in the Healing Touch section, you will get a glimpse of how miracles can manifest everyday in the sphere of Medicare if there is a pure intention and passionate zeal to help the suffering and downtrodden.

Ask any corporate executive today, "Are you strictly following your conscience and conforming to moral values in your dealings everyday?" More often than not, you will get an evasive or diplomatic reply. To compromise on principles, to get ahead in the organizational ladder or to make a fast buck, is a necessary evil, besides values are nice and good to be lectured upon, but are

not practical in a competitive world, is what most of the executives would privately opine. But at the same time, there are thousands today who maintain a harmony between their thought, word and deed, and lead a life which has truth and integrity as its basis. One fantastic example of this is the story “The ‘Value’d Investment” in the “Harnessing the Heart” section. You will be thrilled to know how a determined individual has been able to ride a crest in the Wall Street when everybody else is drowning, not because of his sound business sense but due to a strong moral compass.

Such streaks of gold and light in the landscape of gloom and doom are actually many, and that is because they emanate from a Brilliant Being – Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It is He who has set up these golden institutions of Educare, Medicare and Sociocare which have redefined the very concept of Social Responsibility. And He has done this not by mobilizing resources or hiring intelligent minds, but by creating hearts of gold; by demonstrating through His own Life how Love, and not money or power, is the greatest force in this world, potent enough to achieve the impossible.

When His 83rd birthday arrived in the month of November last year (2008), devotees longed and prayed that He ride on a golden chariot. They wanted to make the occasion really special, and acceding to their requests, He lovingly yielded. And that is how November 17, 2008 has become a historic day for humanity. This spectacle was actually the culmination of the grand event - *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam Mahotsavam*, an elaborate sacrifice with a lofty objective. Generally, this ritual is performed to pray for an elder who has had the opportunity to witness a thousand full moons in his life’s sojourn, which happens when one reaches the age of 83. But in the divine presence of Bhagavan Baba, this ritual attained a completely new dimension, and it was unprecedented in a number of ways. How was it unique? And what was the real intention behind this mega sacrifice? And how appropriate was it to perform on His Birthday, when we adore Bhagavan Baba as the timeless One? And curiously, what to pray for Him who actually is the One everybody prays to? In our cover story “The Scintillating Story of His Splendour” you will find answers to all these and many more questions.

You will know that the event was actually not for Him, but for all us. A South African who was present in the stadium during the event said, “I felt all my vices and evil tendencies are being burnt away in this holy sacrifice, I feel cleansed; I am transformed.” To another, a Croatian, it was “definitely the harbinger of the golden age; Baba, in the yellow robe on the Golden chariot, was verily Lord Krishna come again”. Whenever devotees wish Him “Happy Birthday”, Baba often says, “I am always happy, you be happy!” In fact, ethereal heights of happiness, is what every devotee experienced, when Baba glided into the Vidya Giri stadium on the golden vehicle on that momentous day.

Truly, the only activity Baba has been engaged in, right from the day of His advent on November 23, 1926, is to fill others’ hearts with love and bliss. And He has been able to do this because, as He Himself has revealed, there is no trace of selfishness in Him from “top to toe”. Love is selflessness. He has

demonstrated to us how glorious our “self” can be, if only we practiced unconditional love sincerely and relentlessly.

Whether we realize it or not, in spite of so many critical challenges facing the planet which are like “passing clouds”, the present times are actually the most magnificent, because the permanent Sun is now available for all of us to bask in His light and glory. Man may have conquered the Moon and in future may land on Mars, but what is splendid is God is now walking on earth! These are golden moments, undoubtedly. Let us make the best use of it, let us “make hay” by helping all and hurting none, while the Sun of Sai’s physical presence shines upon our planet during our lifetime!

Let goodness envelope our beings and transmute us into proficient instruments in His Hands.

Loving Regards,
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

From Shavam To Shivoham

On February 23 this year falls the sacred festival of Shivarathri. This celebration has been one of the most significant events in the festival calendar of Prasanthi Nilayam, every year right from the 1950s. On many years, Bhagavan Baba, gracefully has used this occasion to offer a glimpse of His Divinity with the mysterious manifestation of the Linga from His own being. Besides this, the message that the Lord delivers to the large concourse of devotees who gather for this festival is deeply profound and revealing. Let us recapitulate one of those priceless discourses. Here is an excerpt from Bhagavan's message delivered, nearly four decades ago, in 1969.

Aim of All Saadhana Is To Eliminate the Mind

Though we have the *Mahashivarathri* once a year, we have a *Shivarathri* every month, dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. And, why is the *rathri* (the night), so important? During the dark fortnight of the month, *sadhana* (spiritual practices) has to be done to eliminate each day a fraction of the mind, for, every day, a fraction of the Moon too is being taken out of cognisance. On the night of *chathurdhasi*, the 14th day, which is the night of Shiva, only a fraction remains. If special effort is made that night, through more intensive and vigilant spiritual practice like *puja* or *japam* or *dhyana* (ritual worship, or one-pointed repetition of holy names or meditation), success is ensured. Shiva alone has to be meditated upon that night without the mind straying towards thoughts of sleep or food. This has to be done every month; once a year, on *Mahaashivaraathri* a special spurt of spiritual activity is recommended, so that what is *shavam* (corpse) can become *Shivam* (God), by the perpetual awareness of its Divine Indweller.

Linga – The Symbol of God

This is a day dedicated to the Shiva that is in each of you. From the Himalayan ranges down to Cape Kanyakumari, the entire land of India resounds today to the authentic declaration "*Shivoham*" and to the adoration, "*Om Namah Shivaaya*." Since thousands pray here, and elsewhere in lakhs and crores, the *Linga* is emanating from Me, so that you may derive the Bliss that pervades the World through *Lingodhbhava* (emergence of the *Linga*).

The manifestation of the *Linga* is a part of My Nature. These *pandits* (scholars of spirituality) explain it as reminiscent of an epochal event in the past when Shiva challenged Brahma and Vishnu to gauge the height and depth of the *Linga* Form He assumed. They failed and had to accept defeat. But, the *Linga* emerges, as a result of prayer and Grace. You have to recognise in this event a glimpse of Divinity, a sign of infinite Grace.

Just as *Om* is the sound symbol of God, the *Linga* is the form symbol or the visible symbol of God, the most meaningful, simplest and the least endowed with the appendages of attributes. *Lingam* means, that in which this *jagath* (world of change) attains *laya* (mergence or dissolution), *Leeyathe*. All Forms merge in the Formless at last. Shiva is the Principle of the Destruction of all Names and Forms, of all entities and individuals. So, the *Linga* is the simplest sign of emergence and mergence.

Live in the Constant Presence of Shiva

Every form conceived in the *Shasthras* and scriptures has a deep significance. Shiva does not ride an animal called in human language, a bull. The bull is the symbol of stability standing on four legs, *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanthi* and *Prema* (Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love). Shiva is described as having three eyes; they see the past, the present and the future. The elephant skin, which forms His cloak, is a symbol of the bestial primitive traits which His Grace destroys.

In fact, He tears them to pieces, skins them, and they become totally ineffective. His Four faces symbolise *Shantham* (equanimity), *Roudhram* (frightening facade), *Mangalam* (grace) and *Uthsaham* (elevating energy). While adoring the *Lingam* on this *Lingodhbhava* Day, you must contemplate on these truths of Shiva that the *Linga* represents.

It is not this night alone that you should spend in the thought of Shiva; your whole life must be lived in the constant presence of the Lord. Endeavour - that is the main exercise which is the inescapable consummation for all mortals. Even those who deny God will have to tread the pilgrim road, melting their hearts out in tears of travail. If you make the slightest effort to move along the path of your own liberation, the Lord will help you a hundred-fold. That is the hope that *Mahashivarathri* conveys to you. Man is called so, because he has the skill to do *manana*, which means 'inner meditation' on the meaning and significance of what one has heard.

But, you have not yet emerged out of the stage of *shravanam* (listening)! All the joy you crave for is in you. However, you suffer like a man who has vast riches in the iron chest but has no idea where the key is. Listen to the instructions properly, dwell upon them in the silence of meditation, practise what has been made clear therein; then, you can secure the key, open the chest and be rich in Joy.

Visualise Shiva as the Inner Power of All

You have given up even the little *sadhana* that *Shivarathri* demands. In olden times, people would not put even a drop of water on their tongues on this day. Now, that rigour is gone. They used to keep vigil the entire night, without a wink of sleep, repeating *Om Namah Shivaya* without intermission. Now, the name Shiva, is on no one's tongue.

Resolve, on this Holy *Shivarathri*, to visualise the Shiva as the inner power of all. With each breath, you are even now, asserting *Soham* ("I am He"); not only you, but every being that breathes, lives, and exists does this. It is a fact which you have ignored so long. Believe it from now on. When you watch your breath and meditate on that magnificent Truth, slowly, the 'I' and the 'He' (the *Sah* and the *Aham*) will draw nearer and closer, until the feeling of separateness fades away and the *Soham* transforms into *OM*, the *Pranava*, the Primal Sound, the Fundamental Formula for God. That *OM* is the *Swaswarupa* - the Reality behind this "relative reality."

- *Divine Discourse on Shivarathri Day, February 1969*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI
Satyopanishad - part 13:
Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear Reader,

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

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

Published in two parts by the author, these volumes have 270 questions in all, which are neatly grouped under separate chapters. In this issue, we continue the fourth chapter: The Outer Door.

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

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We have on one side the most invaluable spirituality, while on the other, we have also friends and relatives diverting our attention towards the world. No doubt, it is our fault to pay heed to their words. Yet, we face the conflict. What is to be done?

Bhagavan: Today no one has true friends. Who are the friends of today's world and of what sort are they? (Addressing the students) After all, your friendship lasts for two or three years until you complete your studies here and leave the hostel. Later, you separate from each other and go your own way. So long as you have money in your pocket and your father is in a good position, everyone would come to you and say "hello", but the day your pocket is empty and your father retires, you will be left with none even to say 'good bye'. Can you still call anyone your friend?

Friendship in Sanskrit is known as '*maitri*,' pronounced as 'mythree'. Here 'three' represents the harmony in thought, word and deed. Are there friends with this purity? Nowhere! Who is your true friend then? God is your real friend. God is the only friend for you, as He is always with you and in you: Don't consider anyone else as your friend. Further, you should be very careful with people or your company. It is said, "Tell me your company, I shall tell you what you are". Therefore, all and sundry can't be your friends. A warrior of outstanding stature and an expert in archery, Karna fell into disrepute because he was in bad company, and so he is branded as one among the

wicked four, (the *dustachathustaya*) - Duryodhana, Dussasana, Sakuni and Karna.

Next, who are your relatives? In what way were you related to them before you were born? All of them come in with the passage of time and pass off like passing clouds. Is it not so? Relatives come up to the main door as one dies and the members of the family at the most follow one's corpse to the cremation ground; none follow the departed soul. It is only God who is with you during your life and even after your death. So, God is your real friend and the only relation. These worldly associations shouldn't be taken as friends and relatives.

Your life too is short. But God is awareness and existence. He is there before, during, and after your life. He is the eternal truth. So, follow Him, catch hold of God with your right hand as it is the right thing, and catch hold of the world with your left hand, as it has to be left behind sometime or the other. It is thus the right thing to remember God always.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! It is most unfortunate that there is no tangible change in our lifestyle though we have been here and listening to Your divine discourses over the years. We do not know the reason why it is so. Kindly show us the way.

Bhagavan: Lack of practice is the only reason. When there is no power supply and it is dark all over, can darkness be dispelled by just saying "lamp" unless you light it? The hunger of a starving man can never be satiated by merely looking at the menu of the most delicious items. He has to eat some of them to appease his hunger, shouldn't he? Can a sick man be cured of a disease by merely listening to the formula and composition of the medicine without his taking it? Can the suffering of a poor man be alleviated with all the knowledge of economics and accountancy? Can you attain liberation (*mukti*) by reading books without practicing any of the instruction found therein? Instead of saying something without doing, it is better to do and not say anything. I repeatedly tell you that until you practice what you say, there is little effect even after listening to talks for years together.

Take a small example here. Suppose you have with you a matchbox full of matchsticks and you want to light a lamp. You will now have to open the box, pick up a stick and strike against the side of the box to light it. In case you fail to light the matchstick, even after striking it again and again, what does it mean? You then come to discover the meaning: the matchbox is wet. You cannot light a stick striking it against the box. What is to be done now? You have to dry the matchbox in the sunlight for some time.

Similarly, you are drowned in the water of worldly desires and attachments. Therefore, you can't light the lamp of wisdom. Dry your mind with all its limitless desires and thoughts of worldly comfort in the sunlight of renunciation; only then can you light the lamp of wisdom. You may be here listening to any number of discourses for any length of time, but you will not

be able to achieve the expected results if you fail to translate the essence of one discourse into your daily life.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Because of wrong direction in our thinking, we feel dejected, restless and often fail in our attempts. Kindly show us the way out of it.

Bhagavan: For all these agitations, disturbances, disappointments, depressions and failures, what is responsible is your wrong way of thinking. Whatever may happen in life, you should think, "This is good for me". You should know that everything that happens ultimately turns to be for your own good. This is called positive thinking. Today you are full of negative thoughts. How do you expect to know and experience God?

Your body, mind, intellect and the senses are completely negative, but your spirit, conscience, or *atma* is positive. God is your conscience. Do you know why you are not able to realise and experience God? It is entirely due to these negative thoughts and attitudes. So, positive thinking and positive actions are very essential for spiritual progress. Only then will you be peaceful, blissful and successful.

Take your own example. (*To the students*) It is absolutely because of positive thinking that you are able to plan your academic programme and prepare yourself accordingly, as also aim to secure a good rank in the examinations and later a job. But planning to study whatever would fetch you a very fat salary, help you to go abroad, earn more money and marry a girl who would get you a large amount of dowry, is negative thinking.

As far as your parents are concerned, their idea of educating you is absolutely positive, but making a business out of your education is negative thinking. For a doctor, to treat a patient and cure him/her is a positive approach, but if money is the criterion for the treatment given to the patient, it is a negative approach. Today we should fill our hearts with all positive thoughts like divine feelings, divine sentiments and good thoughts. Only then you will experience God, who is *satchitananda*, the absolute positive principle. Therefore, it is necessary for you to take everything as good for you. This is positive thinking. Come what may - problems, difficulties, troubles, failures, losses, blame and what not, you should always be positive. You will know later that all this had happened for your own good.

A small story: there was a king who had a fancy to cut sugarcane all by himself to small pieces and eat it piece by piece. One day, while he was busy doing this, as ill luck would have it, he cut his finger. The minister, who was by his side, remarked, "Oh King! You have cut your finger. This is good for you." On hearing this remark, the king grew wild, and thought, "What! How can this be good for me? What would the minister say if I lose my head too?" So the king ordered, out of fury and anger, that the minister be put in prison. Then, the minister said, "Oh King! This imprisonment is my good fortune".

After some time, the king went hunting all alone to a nearby forest. He lost his way and was noticed by some tribals moving in that area. They were actually in search of a man suitable to be sacrificed to propitiate their deity at the end of their ritual. They caught hold of the king and took him to their head priest. After checking the king thoroughly, the head priest said, “We can't kill this king and make an offering to our deity as one of his fingers is missing. A handicapped or crippled body is unfit to be an offering.” Saying so, he set the king free.

On the way, the king realised the truth of what the minister had said when he had cut his finger. He summoned the minister and said, “Oh Minister! How true is what you said! It is just because of the fact that I had lost my finger that the tribals set me free, unharmed. Now I have one doubt. You remarked that it was good for you when I put you behind bars. How has this imprisonment turned out to be good for you?” Then, the minister replied, 'Certainly! Had I not been kept in the jail, I would have followed you. The tribals, after leaving you, would have caught hold of me, killed me and offered me to their deity in your place. So, this punishment has been to my good fortune’. This is positive thinking and attitude; then happiness and success will follow you.

akkaraku rani cuttamu

mrokkina varamiyani velpu

moharamuna tanekkina parani gurramu

grakkunna viduvangavalayu gadara sumati

This Telugu poem, means, 'A relation who doesn't come to your help in time of need, a God who doesn't grant you boons even after you pray, a horse that doesn't run in the battlefield, will have to be given up immediately, Oh! Wise one! Is it not so?'

Here, in this poem, first of all, know that it is addressed to a *sumati*, a wise one. It is true that you have to sever connections with a relation who doesn't come to your aid in the hour of your need, give up the horse that fails to run in the battlefield, and forget a God who doesn't grant you rewards even after you pray. Here, you should note one important point. Why don't you think this way? Before you blame your relation that he is not of any help to you when you need him most, why don't you for a while ponder if you have ever been of any help to your relation when he needed you? A horse that doesn't gallop in the field must be given up, but why don't you question your competence in horse riding? God, who doesn't respond to your prayers, is not God; but do you deserve what you desire and pray for? This poem is meant for that person, *sumati*, who thinks positively before blaming anybody. This is how your thinking process should be.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Now we understand that we should also have such intense faith in God. Naturally, our experience will be proportionate to the

depth of our faith. Swami! Does God also respond commensurate with the intensity of our faith?

Bhagavan: Certainly! If you put in *krsi*, effort, you will earn God's *krpa*, grace. Moreover, with *krsi*, effort, you can even become a *rishi*, sage.

A village boy happened to meet a scholar who said to him that God could be experienced through *pranayama* (breathing exercises) and *dhyana* (meditation). Hearing this, the boy began practising it most sincerely. Pleased with his devotion and sincerity, God manifested Himself before the boy and blessed him. The boy then told the scholar that he had seen God by doing what he asked him to do. The scholar could not believe it. He said, "Oh! Don't talk rubbish! How is it that you could see God while I couldn't, by practising *pranayama* and *dhyana* for years? Don't speak lies!"

The boy returned to his place of meditation and saw Lord Narayana there. He said to Him, "Oh God! The scholar calls me a liar! How am I to make him accept what I have experienced? Swami! Kindly stay here until I bring him here and make him see You and experience the truth for himself. But dear God! I am afraid You may run away from here and it will make me very miserable in the sight of the scholar who doubts me. Therefore, with this rope let me tie You to this pole here." He did so, ran to the scholar and requested him to see Narayana for himself.

Although the scholar came over there, he couldn't see God tied to the post, but the cowherd boy could see Him and converse with Him. Ultimately, the boy cried and prayed to Narayana to make Himself visible to the scholar too. God obliged him. This is what true devotion is. God even allowed Himself to be tied to a post. You have to note another point here. The faith that the cowherd boy had in the words of the scholar was the cause of his experience.

If you spend your life in prayer, it is bound to be peaceful and blissful. For example, if you climb up the seven hills and reach the shrine of Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala, you will feel very tired. On the other hand, if you go to Tirupati in a group, singing God's glory all along the way, you will hardly feel any strain.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! In this age of Kali, devotion, faith and steadfastness are on the decline. Not only this, we often find people making fun of devotees and leading a life opposed to religious norms. This is a very sad state of affairs. What do you want us to do in these circumstances?

Bhagavan: First of all, correct yourself. Rectify your own defects and mistakes. When you are not flawless and idealistic, you have no right to blame anybody and point out the mistakes of others. So, see that your own faith is strong, deep and unflinching.

In Andhra Pradesh, there lived three Rajus, kings in their own field of activity: the king of poetry, Goparaju; the king of devotion, Tyagaraju; and the king of sublime lyrical music, Potaraju. The latter refused to dedicate his rendering of

the great work, the Bhagavatam, to the king who promised him immense wealth as a token of his appreciation of the work. Potaraju, or Potana, dedicated his work only to Lord Ramachandra.

Goparaju, or Ramadasu, also called Gopanna, spent all the money he had in the treasury for the renovation of the temple of Rama, for which he was severely punished. Tyagaraju considered *ramuni sannidhi*, proximity to God, more precious than *nidhi*, money. All these three Rajus followed their chosen paths out of their deep conviction about the supremacy of God. They worked and suffered for their own self-satisfaction and for the satisfaction of their own conscience. They did not bother about the views and opinions of others. They did not yield to temptations of any sort.

Dogs may bark watching an elephant passing by, but the elephant loses nothing. You know the vastness of a sea. Have you not heard the *puranas* (ancient scriptures) proclaim that *amrta*, nectar, and *halahala*, poison, are produced by the same ocean? *Amrta* makes you happy while *visha* or poison is dangerous. Isn't it so?

Similarly, society is like a vast ocean where you have nectarous and good people, as well as poisonous and bad individuals. Bad people make fun of good people. It doesn't mean that you should give up your nobility and goodness.

A crane may make fun of a swan. The singing of a cuckoo bird is horrible to the ears of a crow. A koel eats the tender leaves of a mango tree while a crow eats the bitter leaves of a neem tree. Similarly, some in society struggle for worldly, fleeting and sensual pleasures; while others make all sincere efforts for God's grace to enjoy divine bliss. A donkey that carries a bundle of sandalwood on its back doesn't know the fragrance of the sandalwood. A buffalo doesn't know the taste of beaten rice. Similarly, divinity is not relished by all and sundry.

If you deny God, it means you are denying yourself. You are not different from God. You are God. Your praise and blame do not affect God. The good and bad of your own actions come back to you as reaction. The axe cuts the sandalwood tree that has not done any harm to the axe. Because of this evil deed, the axe loses its sharpness for which it is kept in fire and hammered. The sandalwood tree does not subject the axe to any punishment. So, it is the action of the axe that comes back as reaction.

Consider another example in this context. When gold is burnt in fire it shines brilliantly. But, as a reaction the goldsmith has to suffer because ash falls into his eyes in the process of burning the gold, and his own clothes become dirty due to smoke. Here, the gold, that is burnt and hammered, does not punish the goldsmith. His own action punishes him. Similarly, if you accuse or blame or deny God, it will not do anything to Him. But, your action will come back to you as reaction; you punish yourself.

Suppose you throw some dust at the Sun, what happens? It only falls in your own eyes. If you switch on an electric fan, you will enjoy the cool breeze. If you don't switch on, it will not lose anything; it suffers no loss. If you switch on the bulb, you get light. But, if you don't switch it on, the bulb suffers no loss. Therefore, good and bad depend only on you. Just as you can buy any material object in this world with money, similarly with the money of God's name, you can be blissful. Under a streetlight, you will be able to see all around including the bulb that illumines. Similarly, divinity makes you, and everybody around you, happy. So, deepen your faith in God and experience divine bliss. That's what you should do.

Fruits can't protect themselves. It is the tree that protects the fruits it bears. The tree is protected and kept green by its roots. If you supply water and manure to the roots, they protect the tree, which in its turn protects the fruits. Isn't it so? God is the root of this world. If you surrender to God, everything will be taken care of.

People with worldly thoughts can't relish divine feelings. A person from the fish market can't imagine who a jeweller is. A sea has most precious gems at its bottom but the seawater is full of salt. Isn't it? Similarly, we have people of different temperaments in this world. God is never against anyone. There are none close to or distant from Him. All are alike to Him. You may hold a jasmine flower by either your right hand or left hand, it smells equally well in either hand. God is that one who is in all.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

No Gratitude, No Grace

Once Mother Parvati and Easwara (Lord Shiva) saw a person sitting on the branch of a tree, which was about to break. Watching this, Mother Parvati pleaded with Easwara to save the man. Easwara teasingly remarked, “Why should I protect him? Since You saw him first, it is Your duty to save him.”

But the Mother said, “How can I protect him without Your grace. I am the negative and you are the positive. Unless You shower Your grace on him, he cannot be saved. Please do not delay any further.”

Then Easwara replied, “Is it not his duty to call Me for help? How can I go to his rescue without being called? As the proverb goes, ‘one should not attend a function without being invited.’”

Mother Parvati, out of her motherly compassion, wanted to protect that person at any cost. So, she said to Easwara, “If that person, when he falls down, cries out *amma* (mother), I will go to his rescue; and if he cries out *appa* (father), you should protect him.”

Easwara agreed to her proposal. Both of them eagerly waited for the call. But the person fell down crying *Ayyo* (alas)! The words *amma* or *appa* did not come to his lips, as he had never respected and revered his parents in his lifetime. Such was his fate!

How can God come to the rescue of a person who has totally forgotten his parents? Both our Mother and Father are verily God. And when with such feelings, we offer our gratitude to our parents, even God cannot refrain from helping us.

- **Baba**

COVER STORY

THE SCINTILLATING STORY OF HIS SPLENDOUR

SAHASRA POORNA CHANDRA DARSHANAM – AN OVERVIEW AND INNER VIEW

Encase the ocean of Pure Love in a vial of Supreme Splendour and voila, you set a million seeking hearts aflutter! The chemistry of the moment is sheer magic, and its memory, simply spectacular. Etched deep into the collective DNA of the human consciousness, the recent celebration that marked the physical presence of the Avatar on this planet through a thousand full moons, lent a whole new meaning to the concept of the global village, as the world seemed to have descended on Prasanthi Nilayam, the abode of Supreme Peace, to experience a spiritual high that is hard to capture in prose, poetry or mathematical formula. Yet, for each of the hundred thousand participants on the ground and thousands of virtual participants around the globe, the event marked the culmination of sincere spiritual aspirations of their soul, an answer to their deepest yearnings.

The Glory of the Grand Celebration

November 17, 2008 – the day posterity will preserve like the oyster safeguards its pearl. For eons to come, mankind will delight in revisiting this momentous page in history to bask in the bliss of that beatific occasion when time stood still and a million hearts gasped in awe as they beheld the heavenly vision. What unfolded on that gem of a day was not only unprecedented and extraordinary, but also so moving and majestic, entrancing and elevating, that to describe it in words would be akin to holding a lantern in front of the Moon.

Right from the early hours of dawn, people of all hues and cultures, from countless regions and nations, eagerly stepped into the galleries and the ground of the impressive Vidyagiri Stadium in Prasanthi Nilayam, India. As the Sun slowly rose, spreading its gentle rays, everybody knew they were about to witness another Sunrise that morning – one that would be a million times brighter and beautiful, heartening and enlightening. Yes, it was the ultimate day of the grand celebration – *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam Yagnam*, being performed to mark the 83rd Birthday of their beloved Lord, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. And everyone was aware, that morning the 'light of their lives' was due to ride the alluring Golden Chariot, and arrive amidst them regally, in all splendour, to fill the cups of their hearts with unalloyed joy. And so it happened.

Words Could Not Match the Magnificence of the Moment

When the seven-horse driven, golden and glistening divine vehicle glided into the large concourse of thirsting devotees, the sublime euphoria that

enveloped the entire assembly was hard to describe. The moment was spellbinding and magical. Every face in the crowd spoke a volume, in silence. There were tears streaming down copiously on some; a few others seemed transfixed as if temporarily transported to some other realm; some were so much in awe that they just gazed with big eyes and open mouths, their palms pressed on their cheeks; there were others who were just ecstatic, big smiles sported their lips - they only wanted to savour every second to the maximum; a few others, who were probably new to Baba, were amazed and seemed to try to fathom the enigma of this divine occurrence; some had become statues of humility with folded hands and heads bowed in deep reverence, they had no clue how else to accept this remarkable blessing; there were hundreds who were simply jubilant, they waved their hands in overflowing joy and embraced themselves as if enveloping their being with the sanctifying air of divine benevolence; there were yet others who were just motionless, in bliss... at times you could see a tear or two slowly coursing down their cheeks.... How can anyone translate in letters an experience that is so overpowering, intense and deeply moving, and is experienced by each one in their own unique way!

Brighter than a Million Splendid Suns

As the Lord, adorned in sublime yellow and enthroned on the luminous limousine, smiled generously and blessed copiously, His hand often raised in loving benediction, there was not a single soul in the stadium whose heart was not stirred by the splendour of Sai! To add to the grandeur and excitement of the occasion, the chariot was led by the elegant and agile Sathya Geeta, Baba’s tiny pet elephant. She was followed by the University Brass Band adding scintillating music to the sacred morning. Behind this, was the elaborate procession of students, attired in red, and vociferously chanting *vedic* hymns. At the same time, the huge speakers stacked at various strategic points in the ground, sprung into action belting out lovely compositions, specially created for the event. Music and poetry have it in them to express the deep emotions of the heart with more ease and clarity than prose. One of the songs, written in Telugu, captured the beauty of the event wonderfully, and now we wish to share with you the English translation of this soulful rendering, as that is perhaps a better way to communicate what transpired between the divine and His devotees that unforgettable morning.

“Swarna Ratham Pai Pai Ninche...”

Delectably Enthroned, the Divine Sai...

Oh the timeless, most mysterious and the magnificent One!
Oh King of Kings! The Supreme Lord of *Kali*!
Oh Brilliant Being, superlatively illustrious,
And adored in all the three worlds of this Universe!
Oh the highly resplendent One,
Whose radiance spans this entire creation, spares none!

Behold! Delight in this scintillating sacred sight!
Enthroned on the Golden Chariot is the celestial Lord - Sai!
Every speck of Nature around is as if rejuvenated...
One glimpse of His glorious aura
And each being on earth feels so liberated!

Truly, you are the ever-shining Sun,
The thousand-petaled, illumining light of our lives...
You are our most beautiful Moon too...
So pure, so serene, so soothing, so moving,
Ever-new and so full of bliss, eternal!

In scores and thousands, from every corner of the globe,
We have gathered, with thrill, eager expectation and joy,
To savour You with our eyes, dear Lord, our heartthrob!
How long have we pined for this momentous morning!
How much have we prayed and penanced for this purifying present!

Springs of ecstasy, welling from within, have enveloped our entire being,
Witnessing this divine spectacle, unprecedented and absolutely outstanding...
Our lives have found fulfillment, our existence has found meaning!

Purely for our sake, You have descended on this planet,
To regale us and redeem us, You have come again...
But with this, one stupefying manifestation of Your glory,
The cups of our souls are now overflowing...

O Lord, the Caring Caretaker of this entire creation,
By this one splendid gift,
You have blessed us with the utmost joy of divine communion,
Elevating us to ethereal heights
Of divine excitement and delectable delight.
You have sanctified us; we have seen paradise!

A Sight that Transmuted the Spiritual Heart of the Beholder

Words can only do so much to recreate that divinely riveting moment. But what this event did to everyone's heart, who witnessed this, is something truly fantastic. Zivco Galic, a devotee from Croatia, who watched this event from the gents gallery, says, "I do not know why, but the moment I saw Swami that morning, I just began to cry profusely. My heart just opened up completely...the entire stadium was so suffused with God energy. He is definitely the King! The Divine come again! In His resplendent Yellow, He was truly Lord Krishna; there was so much love around, I was completely drowned in that sea of divine love... For me, the Lord arriving on the Golden Chariot is definitely the holy harbinger of the golden age that is soon to come...I did not have a good childhood, but now Swami is my 'better than the best friend', my father, mother, my life, my God; He has made me anew. He is so sweet and soft, apparently so much like any of us, but within Him is the infinite reservoir of divine love and powerful energy. I feel so charged, so much in bliss...I do

not know how to express...” Zivco now closed his eyes and for the next few seconds just relived those soul-filling moments again. When he was out of his reverie, he was still speechless.

Divine Vision that Unlocked the Reservoir of Inner Strength

John Reed, another devotee from Sydney, Australia, was simply a picture of delight in his flowing blond hair. “I felt as if the wings of my heart were fluttering to glory just like a happy butterfly, as soon as I stepped into the stadium. It was incredible to be there, how happy I am that I was present that day!... When I saw Swami for the first time in 1991, I just knew He is God; it was a message straight from within my heart. It is He who brought me to Him, and how He has transformed me and taken care of my every joy and sorrow is truly touching. Actually, I came to Puttaparthi in July this year (2008), and in August I received the devastating news of my wife passing away. If I was in Sydney when this happened, I would have probably never survived this tragedy because I was very close to her. But Swami has now given me so much strength and filled me with peace. I went briefly to Sydney for the funeral and I am back again. Just remembering Him revitalizes me. I feel Him in my heart all the time, and now physically being here for this grand event is just bliss, that’s it! I do not know much about the significance of this celebration, and the idea of Swami witnessing thousand moons, but what I do know is that He does not need these ceremonies. This beautiful celebration, in reality, is His gift to us, so that we can rejoice, beholding Him in this glorious form.”

The Grand Significance of the Grand Sacrifice

Many devotees from overseas, and for that matter, even from India, may not have completely understood the purpose and the philosophy behind the grand *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam* celebration conducted in the divine presence, but that did not stop them from deriving the maximum benefit of the occasion by suffusing themselves with the divine vibrations that filled the air. But those who knew the importance and intent of this great sacrifice, relished it more. Over one hundred and fifty priests from different parts of India and abroad participated in this mega ritual, and it was a historic event for a multitude of reasons. Let’s start with its simple facts and significance.

Explaining this clearly, Brahmasri K. V. N. Krishna Prasad, the distinguished priest from TTD (Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam), said,

[Tirupati, located in the state of Andhra Pradesh, is most the visited place of worship in the world. Here Lord Vishnu is worshipped as Sri Venkateswara.]

“According to our ancient Indian tradition, any individual who lives up to the ripe age of 83 is honoured with this sacred ceremony of *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam*. It means, that senior individual, is a distinguished elder by the virtue of living long enough to witness a thousand full moons. Now, how did this figure arrive? The simple arithmetic here is this: Thanks to the waxing and waning of the moon, we see a full moon once every month.

Therefore, in a year one could watch 12 full moons, and if one lives for 83 years, consequently, he/she would witness (12 x 83) 996 full moons. This obviously, is four short of 1000. However, in reality, it is not so. That is because the lunar month consists of 28 days and not the usual 30 or 31 days, that we generally associate with a month. We all know the Moon takes 28 days to complete one cycle of revolution around earth [as a result of which we have the sequence of new moons and full moons]. Therefore, according to the lunar calendar, we actually have more than 12 months ($360/28=13$) in a year, and so, the number of full moons too, in reality, are more than a 1000 in 83 years. That is why a person who has lived through 83 summers and winters has actually been through over a 1000 full moons.”

Lunar Calendar Common to Many Traditions

So, that explains the association between the 83rd birthday and a thousand full moons, but what also should be added here is that most of the rituals in ancient Indian tradition are completely based on the lunar calendar. Even today, this method is widely followed in every house in India that observes even a little of the ancient tradition. It is precisely for this reason that the dates for most of the major festivals in India like Diwali, Dasara, Holi, and so on, vary from year to year. Not only Hindus, people from other faiths too, strictly follow a lunar calendar for observing their rituals and celebrations. For instance, Muslims all over the world depend on the movement of the moon for every religious activity, be it the observance of Ramzan once a year, or their daily worship at dawn and dusk or the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Similarly, the Jews too follow the lunar timetable to establish their days of festivity. Therefore, the lunar calendar is neither specific to Hinduism nor to celebrations in India; it is rather another universal and widely adhered to way of following time, just like the solar calendar.

Now, one may say, “That’s alright, you may follow the lunar calendar and calculate a thousand moons, but why should a person, who has completed 83 years, be honoured simply because he has lived so long? What if he has seen or not seen 1000 moons?” To this, Sri Krishna Prasad again explained, “In the Indian tradition, there are celebrations and rituals prescribed for individuals who cross important milestones in their lifespan for significant reasons; these are not to be taken lightly or observed in a carefree manner. For example, when a father completes 60 years, his children perform *shashti poorti* wherein their parents are symbolically remarried signaling the dawn of another stage of their life where spirituality should take precedence over anything else. Similarly, when an individual completes 70 years, *Bheema Ratha Shanthi* is organized by his children and grandchildren to offer gratitude and prayers to Lord Shiva (who is also called as ‘Bheema Ratha’ as He is the God of time) for the future good health and happiness of their parents or grandparents. Again, when the individual crosses 83 years, it is time for a grand worship. Not only because the person has been a witness to over a thousand full moons, but also because at this stage, the elder is considered holy. It is believed that the octogenarian has seen enough of life to carry out all the adverse effects of his *karma* (actions done in this life and before), and is therefore, now pure, wise and worthy to be honoured. It is also an unique

opportunity for the family to collectively pray to God to bless their revered elder with sound body and mind. The traditional practice also has it that on this occasion, the distinguished senior is enthroned on a chariot and taken in an elaborate procession so that everyone can wish him well.”

Family of Humanity Honours Divine Father

Now, this is the practice that is observed for any mortal since ancient times in India. And this celebration, like many others, is organized by the family, especially the children, grand children and great grand children of the senior. But why should it done for Bhagavan Baba, who is truly beyond space and time? What is the significance of celebrating the sighting of thousand moons of One who is the very light of the Moon? And then, who are His family and children, and who are not? Again, and more importantly, what to pray for? And to whom? What is the true meaning behind the grand celebration of *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam* in the Divine presence? Is there a message for humanity in this lovely divine drama?

The distinguished *vedic* scholar who conducted this grand sacrifice to perfection, Sri Krishna Sastry, clarified these points and said, “The purpose and performance of this holy ceremony attains a completely novel, divine and elevating dimension when it is conducted to celebrate the earthly life of incarnations of God. The objective now is lofty – it is for the comprehensive welfare of this cosmos; for, God is embedded in every speck of this Universe. And who performs this sacrifice? The entire humanity; every being is part of God’s family. It is a glorious opportunity to express our gratitude to the One who has guided our lives through joys and sorrows; who has protected us and provided us with all our needs; who has transformed us and trained us to take to the path of permanent bliss, tenaciously; and who continues to shower His unconditional love on every single dawn.”

Specific Intent of the Sacrifice

Elaborating further on this grand objective of *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam* performed in the Divine presence between November 15-17, 2008, Sri Krishna Sastry, said, “Whenever a sacrifice is performed, the first thing that has to be declared, at the start of the ritual, is the intention behind the sacred spiritual exercise. This process is called ‘Sankalpam’, and generally, this ritual is done by the individual who is the initiator and chief organiser of the sacrifice, so that he can spell out his goals unambiguously before the commencement of the ritual. But in the case of *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam* in Prasanthi Nilayam, Bhagavan Baba did not do the *sankalpam*. How could He? Isn’t He the One who ultimately receives all the offerings made to the holy fire and confers boons? **Therefore, the *sankalpam* was done by us, His devotees, and the declared mission of the sacrifice was – “May all the eighty-four lakhs of species on this earth be relieved of their suffering and sorrows; may every individual be free from the adverse effects of their negative actions; may every being rise to higher levels of consciousness and march towards the ultimate goal of heavenly bliss and liberation.”**

Ultimate Blessings Pronounced in Silence

When this sacred ritual of *sankalpam* was being done, Sri Krishna Sastry, had a memorable experience. "On that afternoon, I was sitting right in front of Bhagavan Baba in the Sai Kulwant Hall. When I, along with another senior priest, rose to go near Bhagavan to request Him to perform the *sankalpam*, He motioned us to be seated. Then, we intuitively understood that Bhagavan would not be performing the *sankalpam* Himself. But the Lord looked at me very keenly. And that evening, suddenly, I felt a very cool breeze caressing my whole body. I kept looking behind to see if there was an AC behind or beside me, but there was none. For me, it was quite a mysterious experience. The soothing coolness enveloped me completely, and it was there for quite a while. I kept looking at Bhagavan, and only later I realized that Baba was actually blessing me by granting me this moon-like cool experience even before the start of this sacrifice, which bears the name of the Moon."

Unprecedented and Historic, Grandest Event Ever in the History of Avatars

Not only was the objective of this grand sacrifice exceptional, but also the elaborate manner in which it was conducted was unprecedented. Probably never before in history was such a splendid ritual performed for the welfare of humanity in the Divine presence of the Avatar Himself. "I do not know of any other occasion when *sarva veda parayana* (the chanting of all Vedas) was done so magnificently," said the acclaimed *vedic* scholar from Tirupati, Sri Venkatappayya Sastry. "Of the 1130 *shakhas* (branches) of the *Vedas*, there are only 11 that are still alive and in vogue in the modern times; the rest are most likely lost. These precious eleven belong to one of the four main *Vedas* (Rig, Yajur, Sama, Antharva) or the other. And during this ceremony in Prasanthi Nilayam, we had *vedic* scholars who recited all of these valuable hymns meticulously. Besides this, we performed a variety of *homams* like *Maha Ganapathi Homam*, *Sudarshana Homam* and *Maha Mruthyunjaya Homam* and so on. There was also the sacred *Linga* to which we performed *satha rudra abhishekam*, *maha rudra abhishekam* and so on. Also, in one corner of stage, there were *pandits* engaged in the *parayanam* (holy reading) of the *Sundara Kanda* ('Sundara' chapter) of *Ramayana*; while at another end, a few priests performed the sacred *suryanamaskar* on one leg continuously. Such a holy and charged atmosphere is certainly historic and unmatched. Frankly, it was purely because of Bhagavan's Grace that this function could be organised in such an elaborate manner. For me, to be present on this occasion was surely the result of accrued merit of many life times."

"The Walking Srinivas (God) is in Puttaparthi" - Tirupati Priest

This distinguished scholar, who has served in the holy abode of Tirupati for decades teaching *Vedas* and serving at the sanctum sanctorum at Tirumala, further said, "I have enjoyed divine proximity of the Lord of Tirupati. My being has pulsed with unspeakable vibrations when I was near the idol of Lord Venkateswara on many occasions. But do you know how I got that divine blessing? It is because of the grace of this Lord in human form, Bhagavan Sri

Sathya Sai Baba. The ideal of offering continuous and dedicated service to the pilgrims who come to Tirupati was instilled in me by Bhagavan Baba Himself. In Tirupati we say ‘The walking Srinivasa (God) is in Puttaparthi.’”

Glory of Sai is Indescribable: Rig Veda Pandit

Another distinguished scholar, Sri K. Srinivasa Sarma, who serves as the Rig Veda Pandit in Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple in the Nalgoda district of Andhra Pradesh, said, “Just like the Moon which dissipates heat and confers coolness, or the sacred river Ganga which purifies one who takes a holy dip, Sathya Sai too confers boons unasked. I remember an incident that happened almost thirty years ago. My friend, who is currently in the USA, had come to Puttaparthi in need of help. He was in dire need of money to fulfill an important family obligation. When Swami came for *darshan*, He handed him a cover and told him not to open it till he reached home. When he finally saw the envelope, he found in it one lakh rupees, the exact amount he needed desperately. Therefore, the glory of Sai is indescribable. Having participated in this grand occasion, I feel as if my life has found fulfillment.” There were dozens of senior priests who had come eagerly to be a part of this occasion and each one had a touching tale to narrate.

Not-to-be Missed Event for the Vedic priest from New York

Sri K. Hanumantha Rao, who had come all the way from New York, USA, said, “The moment I heard about this event, I wanted to be here, come what may. If today I am serving as the temple priest in the Ganesha Vedic Centre in New York, it is clearly Swami’s will. In fact, after finishing my education in the *Vedas*, I came to Bhagavan to seek His blessings before embarking on priesthood. I have come to His lotus feet 16 times till now, and wherever I am or to whomever I may offer prayers, I know, in my heart of hearts, I am always worshipping Sai. In fact, the Ganesha temple in New York came into being only because of the active support of Sai devotees, and we do have a beautiful picture of Baba in that temple. It is really because of the merits of my noble father and ancestors that I was able to participate in this grand ceremony in His direct divine presence.”

Despite Metaphysical Experiences, Vedic Pandit Craves For His Physical Attention

Sri Venkatappayya Sastry, the TTD Vedic *pandit* again added, “Though I have had any number of metaphysical experiences of Baba’s presence, I longed for His physical proximity. And I was absolutely thrilled to see Bhagavan so close. The Lord actually looked at me a couple of times very intently as if saying ‘See, I have not forgotten you.’”

Though the priests, who were part of this *Yagna*, had the best of views and the closest of *darshans* of the Lord, it was not only them who benefited the most.

The Sublime Dimensions of the Sacrifice

The Yagna – A Purifying Experience for a South African devotee

Sadasivan Naiker, a devotee from South Africa, who was sitting in the gents' gallery, hundreds of metres away from the main stage, reliving those defining moments, he said, "It was an absolutely purifying experience for me. As the *yagnam* was going on, I felt as if all of my evil habits and tendencies are been burnt in that sacred fire. When I left the stadium that day, I felt so cleansed, light and revitalized. From then till now, my life has indeed undergone a great transformation. All my vices and cravings do not bother me any more; I feel so calm and composed. I am definitely a much better person, and my relationship with Swami has become deeper."

Cleansing Occurred at Multiple Levels

Like every act of Bhagavan, in the performance of this sacrifice too, what was apparent to the eye was probably only a millionth of what actually transpired in many different planes during this entire three-day festival. No wonder, people from every continent and in every stage of human life, gladly braved the chill weather and intermittent rain, just to be physically present in the stadium on that occasion. One youngster from the state of Maharashtra, Mr. Amolrao Barwade, who was a member of a band of youth who had come for the first time to Prasanthi Nilayam, was absolutely impressed. Expressing his feelings candidly, he said, "Earlier, though I had heard about Baba, I never believed in His divinity. But now, I am convinced; He is God indeed. Apart from the marvelous institutions of selfless service – the University, Hospitals, Water Projects, and so on – what really touched me the most was the scene in the stadium when it rained the other day as the *yagnam* was going on. None of the devotees moved from their places; there was no pell-mell whatsoever. They tried to cover themselves with whatever was available and continued to watch the proceedings, as if nothing had happened! In my hometown too, there are big gatherings on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi or a cricket match. But if it started pouring, the place would be empty in no time. But here, the love of the devotees for Bhagavan is so moving."

Yagna Conferred Divine Zest to the Elderly

Yes, it is this deep love for Him that propelled Dalip Singh, a man in the ripe age of nineties, to walk to the stadium in the early hours of the morning. "What gave you so much energy to traverse all the way on foot to the stadium?" we asked him, and in a voice that reverberated with passion and vigour, he said, "Baba is with me all the time; He is there on my left, right and front. God is now and here; one has to live in Prasanthi to experience this supreme peace." Mr. Chunnilal Sharma, another nonagenarian, in ashen attire and a neat white cap, who was sitting blissfully in the stands, said, "Over the years, I have been to many pilgrim centres like Kedarnath, Badrinath, and so on, but the bliss that I derive in Prasanthi is absolutely unique. In spite of the huge crowd here, the joy that I experience in my heart is indescribable; to me it feels like seeing Lord Krishna in Mathura!"

Reflecting the same sentiment, but in her own sweet way, Kantamma, an old lady from the city of Vizianagaram, jubilantly said, “I have visited many holy places, be it Kashi or Tirupati, Kanyakumari or Madurai, but nowhere have I experienced what I am blessed with here. In Prasanthi, we are just immersed in Swami’s love! In this place, all you need is love; no one asks you money for anything. His *darshan* fills us completely; actually this time I was a bit apprehensive about being able to see Swami clearly because of the huge crowd that had gathered, but our sweet Lord is so kind! He not only gave me good *darshan*, but also looked at me and smiled! Frankly, even though the big event is over, I do not feel like moving from this place....Actually, it was entirely His will that I could come for this event along with my husband.

Every Yagna Participant had a Personalized Tale to Tell

Of late, life has not been easy for us. My husband has not been keeping well and so, has been out of employment for four months. To support our family, I recently took up the job of a peon in a college. I was concerned if I would get leave to come to Puttaparthi for this grand occasion. Fortunately they readily granted me a few days off. But, in any case, I had made up my mind to come to Prasanthi; and I would have come anyway, even at the cost of my new service! Such was my conviction.”

No Discomfort Deterred Devotees’ Dedication

Just to see and speak to these devotees was an elevating experience. In spite of the huge numbers, temporary accommodations, long queues to deal with, and bare minimum physical comforts, genuine smiles danced on their lips; they had absolutely no complaints. We asked T. S. Venkatesh, a techie youngster from Bangalore, “Does it not bother you to stay in this camp accommodation where you have to sleep virtually on the floor?” “Oh no!” he replied immediately, and continued, “Swami has given us a wonderful place to sleep; this is more than enough for us. The very fact that I am here is itself a miracle. Actually, my bus from Bangalore broke down when we were mid-way. It was an ordinary bus, but soon an AC bus came along to take us through the rest of the journey with no extra charges! So, it is Swami who has brought me here and I am so delighted to be part of this glorious event. When I saw the Lord this evening in the richly adorned Sai Kulwant Hall, I felt as if heaven had descended on earth. My trip is made!”

Perfect Place and Time for Blessing Every Devotee

Another very happy devotee, of the many that we met, was Mr. Satya Kumar. He hails from the southern Indian state of Kerala, and gladdened us when he said, “I came to know of this auspicious event from Radio Sai Global Harmony. After hearing about this announcement, I went to the Radio Sai website and downloaded the information page. Later, since I work in the newspaper industry, I circulated this good news to as many people as possible. For me, it is a golden opportunity just to be in the divine atmosphere of this celebration. When I started my journey to Puttaparthi, given that it was

going to be a mega event, I was anxious about my accommodation and food arrangements. But once I reached here, I was impressed with the facilities and amenities made for the devotees.

However, we did have a problem one night when it began to rain and water seeped into our area of stay. Therefore, hurriedly we had to move to another location, and in the process it became very late by the time I started to walk towards the Vidya Giri stadium in the next morning. I knew Swami was already there and was sad that I was missing everything. Nevertheless, I kept moving fast, and just when I was about to cross Swami's residence, I saw a lot of movement there. Swami was actually returning from the ground; it was already ten in the morning. I quickly took a position beside the road, and the Lord did look into my eyes. I had never anticipated that I would be blessed with such a close *darshan*! The Lord knows when and how to fill us with His love."

The Stirring Seva and Sacrifice Behind the Ceremony

Divine Multitasks: One Can be Many

Such stories of devotees are innumerable. That is the beauty of God. He can be One and Many at the same time. Every devotee who had come for this grand event had with him/her their own Sai – guiding them, guarding them and filling them with Godly love. In fact, that is exactly what each of the hundreds of sevadal (Sai Volunteers), who worked tirelessly day and night behind the scenes to make this event happen, expressed. Scores of volunteers worked to clean 1,20,000 square feet of ground to create additional accommodation for 10,000 people.

Inner Gratification is the Ultimate Reward, Volunteers Testify

We were moved to see an elderly lady volunteer sweeping the muddy earth along with many other others much younger than her, on a sunny morning. We found out she was Mrs. Bindu Das, and then asked her, "Don't you find it tiring doing this difficult work?" "Absolutely not," she replied, and continued, "I have been serving as a sevadal since 1972. When we do His work, all our problems get solved automatically. Only Swami knows how much better we feel when we are engaged in service. Even though we are not able to go for His *darshan*, we feel His presence very strongly in our work. He is with us and knows everything that we are doing, for sure!"

A few metres away from her, we found a Sai youth, possibly in his late twenties, digging the earth enthusiastically with a spade; his body sweating profusely. "Don't you feel any pain?" we asked him. He smiled and said, "You may find this funny, but I really find it comfortable doing this job. I have been digging for the last three consecutive days, and believe me, I have experienced no pain, except for a little on the first day. Surely, I could not have done this elsewhere."

The bliss of selfless service is something that can only be experienced, and during this grand event of *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam*, for thousands of Sai volunteers who were actively engaged behind the curtain in multifarious activities, right from helping the devotees in carrying their luggage to their areas of accommodation, to preparing and transporting their food, to looking into their medical needs, to sprucing up and decorating the Vidya Giri Stadium for the glorious event, to ensuring that there is order and discipline everywhere and no devotee is put to any inconvenience – this service to the thousands of devotees assembled for this occasion was a great privilege.

Divine Energy Guided the Massive Kitchen Team

Mr. Bhaskar Rao, who managed the entire operations in the kitchen, said, "While the *mahayagnam* was going on in the Vidyagiri Stadium, we were busy too with another grand spiritual exercise. We worked 20 hours a day to provide food to the thousands that poured in everyday from November 14 onwards for the next 4 days. **At least 2000 kilograms of breakfast items, 5000-6000 kilograms of curd rice and fried rice for lunch, and similar quantity for dinner, was, in brief, the quantum of the work involved. More than 200 sevadals along with 120 cooks worked tirelessly to supply the right amount of food at the right location and at the right time.** It was challenging, no doubt, but we felt His presence throughout the entire episode."

Yagna Work, the Best Team Work Experience Ever: GE Employee

A committed group of young volunteers from Hyderabad did the actual work of distributing these huge vessels of food to various locations inside as well as outside the ashram. "Our day typically began at 3.30 a.m. in the morning," described Mr. Ravi Kiran, who, outside of being an active Sai youth, works as a manager in GE. "By 5.15 a.m. we started our activity of delivering the vessels at the respective locations, so that by 6 a.m. breakfast serving could start simultaneously in every spot. After an hour or two, all the vessels returned, and we were now loaded them with items for lunch. At 11 a.m. the counters everywhere opened with quick meals, which continued for two hours. Similarly, the arrangements for dinner started at 4 p.m., and by 7.30-8 p.m. we were done with the distribution duty for the day."

We saw the soiled clothes of Ravi Kiran and asked, "How does it feel working in an environment like this, which is so different from the ambience you see in your professional life?"

Without batting an eyelid, he replied, "This is probably the best experience I ever had! In software companies, you go to resorts to have meetings and learn teamwork, but here I find the ultimate example of working together. Our group consists of youngsters from diverse backgrounds – some very distinguished in their careers and others engaged in blue-colour jobs. But we work beautifully as one cohesive unit; there is love everywhere. It is just amazing! At home, I probably would not lift a container that is more than 10 Kilograms, but here we are

shifting vessels that weigh 100-150 kilograms. Is this less than a miracle? Bhagavan keeps sending us His signs of grace and presence in so many mysterious ways. I just enjoy being here!"

Silent and Massive Preparations

While this was one of the principal activities that went on in the background after the celebrations began on November 15, there was plenty that happened in the last week of October and first two weeks of November to set the stage for this event to unfold on that momentous day in the Vidya Giri stadium. While the storeroom in the kitchen was being filled up with adequate quantities of every conceivable item that would be needed to serve the thousands who would throng during the three days, on another corner of Puttaparthi, the Vidya Giri stadium was getting a complete makeover. One of the major modifications was the extension of the "Shanthi Vedika" stage by an additional 56 feet. And Swami started visiting the site to see the progress of this work from October 6 itself!

Sai's Priority Number One - His Devotees

Mr. Satish Nayak, who supervised the entire operation of refurbishing the stadium for this grand event, said, "During the 40 days of our work, Swami visited the stadium 15 times! And the very first question He asked when He saw the stage being extended is 'Will the devotees be able to see the *yagnam*?' In fact, this was His last question too. He was the One most concerned about the visibility to devotees than anybody else."

Once Bhagavan was satisfied with the explanation, the work progressed and many innovations were done too. Since the stage-extension was to be a temporary structure, everything was planned in such a way that the materials used could be reclaimed after the event to be utilized in some other project. For example, instead of making the additional stage in cement and bricks, thick granite slabs and sand was used, which worked perfectly. "But the most interesting part of the whole exercise was Swami's deep involvement in every activity. He would ask about every little detail, right from the dimensions of the new stage to the colour of the decorating material being used on the stage," recalled Mr. Satish Nayak, and then added, "But there are two very interesting anecdotes connected with this preparation. One day, during His visit to the stadium in the last week of October, Swami mentioned that a false ceiling over the additional stage would be appropriate. Till then, this was not in our plan at all. But on the final day, it is the beautiful art work on this false ceiling which added a lot of grandeur and colour to the new stage."

Divine Supervisor Missed No Detail

"Similarly, when Swami visited the stadium on the morning of November 13, using a temporary lift He came onto the new stage. As He moved on the new structure, He stopped at one point and looked at the ceiling for a few seconds. Just then, a piece of therma coal fell from above right in front of Him. We thought we are in trouble. But the Lord just smiled and made a casual remark

saying maybe a screw is loose somewhere. But in reality, I know that He had probably saved us from a great embarrassment which could have occurred later. After this event, we ensured that all the therna coal frills and other decorations that were tied above were securely fixed.

Elements Cooperated for Divine Work to Complete to Perfection

“There were so many other ways Swami blessed us and ensured that the work was completed on time. To quote just one instance, Swami was very particular about re-laying the road, and we were unable to do this because we needed three continuous dry days, but at that time there were short showers every now and then. Finally, we did pray to Swami to give us three sunny days and He did! We not only re-laid the road using the mechanical pavers for greater consistency and quality, but also widened it a small stretch by 3 feet as per His directions. While all this was going on, Swami's deep concern also was for the hundreds of priests who were scheduled to arrive for the function. Every now and then He would enquire about the additional accommodation and food arrangements being done for these distinguished guests. The perfect host that He is, He wanted no stone to be left unturned for their comfortable stay.”

Umbrella of Care Included Overall Convenience and Comfort of Mammoth Gathering

Thus, it was virtually under the Lord's eye that the Vidya Giri Stadium was being transformed into an amazing atrium for the divine drama. At any point in time, before the celebration began, there were at least a dozen activities being done simultaneously which included repainting all the huge statues in the Vidya Giri Stadium and barricading the entire ground into separate blocks for easy entry and exit of devotees. Once the *yagnam* began, there were various other activities that had to be done by the sevadals apart from crowd management and supplying water. One of the silent but significant activities that went on in one end of the stadium was the running of a medical station for the pilgrims.

On-site Medical Care Provided at Yagna Venue

Explaining its principal objective, Dr. Ram Manohar Rao, the chief organizer of this initiative, said, “Our goal was to take care of any devotee who needs emergency treatment, which could be because of various reasons, from sleeplessness, to sudden injury, to severe diabetes, or hypertension. For instance, the other day one devotee came with excruciating pain because of a wound on his feet; a small nail had pierced his sole. We immediately removed the foreign body and he walked away smiling to enjoy the celebration. There was another who had forgotten to take his diabetes medicines, a third complained of stomach ache...we offered instantaneous relief to the extent possible to such people in distress.”

Divine Love Suffused 45 doctors who treated 3000 patients

The team of 45 doctors worked for at least 14 hours per day treated minor and major ailments of nearly 3000 patients. “The best moments for us are when the patients joyfully watch the proceedings of the grand celebration, free from any physical malady,” added Dr. Ram Manohar Rao.

One of the doctors, Dr. Chetan Mehta, who had come from the state of Gujarat, specially to serve during this occasion, said, “I came here for the first time only in 2005, but before that I used to work in many social service organisations. And I must tell you this: **there is a world of difference working in the Sai Organisation and elsewhere; and the differentiating factor is Love.** Here, there is lot of charity and a lot of love too. For me, every trip to Puttaparthi is a cleansing experience; I return recharged and long to come to serve here again.”

Doctors Driven by Desire to Serve Selflessly

When we asked Dr. (Prof.) Rangaih, a senior general surgeon from Andhra Pradesh, “Does it not bother you that just beside this medical camp a grand celebration is in progress, but you are missing every moment of that historic happening?” The distinguished doctor instantly replied, “We have come for service and that’s my only objective. Swami showers His blessings in so many ways; I have no regrets. Actually, I am very happy to be serving the patients rather than seeing the function. Swami, in fact, is in my heart; He is always with me.”

The Global Glory of the Grand Event

Yagna Draws Virtual Participants from 146 countries

This spirit of service, inspired by Sai, that shone in the hearts of hundreds of Sai volunteers was truly another spectacle of *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam*, which was as glorious as the grand proceedings of the event in the Vidya Giri Stadium. And we, at Radio Sai Global Harmony, did our bit too, by not only capturing this landmark event on video tapes and digital stills, but also offering an edited video stream of the highlights of each day of the event on the same day on our website **radiosai.org**. And the response we received to this service absolutely stunned us! **Devotees in 146 countries, from the North Pole to the South Pole, watched this video webstream, and flooded us with emails sending us tons of love and expressing wholehearted gratitude. Our website received 70,000 hits during those three days and people saw these videos in countries as familiar as the USA and the UK to as obscure as Guam and Aruba, Serbia and Suriname.** Take a look at these maps to realize the extent of reach of His glory through our tiny initiative.

We took one baby step and the Lord blessed us bountifully by taking a million. Swami always says, where there is purity, there is Divinity. It was one pure intention to share the joy of His glory to as many as possible and in the best

medium available. And the Lord did the rest! In fact, this profound formula of unity and purity leading to divinity was apparent in every single facet of this glorious celebration. It is because multitudes of devotees converged and collectively prayed for His glorious *darshan*, that the Lord decided to ride the Golden Chariot.

The Deeper Implication of the Important Event

Yagna – The Divine Rescue Plan for Humanity

The fact that Swami allowed the *Yagna* to take place at such a momentous time when the world is experiencing a seismic shift in human consciousness, is not lost on many devotees. They see it as divine intervention to prevent humanity from total self-destruction. When the world’s leading economies are crippled, terrorism is on the rise, and war, disease and hatred fill media headlines, the massive sacrifice for the sake of world peace was timely, much-needed and life saving in more ways that can be gauged at the present moment. History will unfold for us the many deeper rescue mechanisms that the *yagna* put in place to save the planet and its inhabitants from imminent catastrophes.

Eternal Sai, the Witness to Millions of Moons, Not Just Thousand

The Lord always works in multiple dimensions but Bhagavan is always His understated self. Whether one understands this aspect of Divinity or not, what was obvious to everybody is that the grand celebration of *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam* was only an excuse for Bhagavan to confer a lifetime joy to His devotees. Otherwise, how does the appearance of a 1000 moons really matter to the Lord who has the whole world in His Hands! As Swami Himself said in His New Year discourse on January 1, 2009, “I have seen not just one thousand but crores of full moons. The *Veda* declares, *Chandrama manaso jathah*, which means, the Moon is the presiding deity of our mind. Each one of you has a mind. I have been seeing all your minds. I have been observing the minds of crores of people all over the world. Therefore, to say I have seen a thousand Moons is inappropriate, I have seen crores of moons.”

Sai - The Sun and the Moon of Devotees’ Hearts

When we have a mind as pure, and a heart as calm and serene as the Moon, the Lord is always ready to go to any length to fill our beings with bliss. He will confer on us the rarest of *darshans* and choicest of blessings, when our thoughts, actions and deeds are tuned completely to Him, intensely and incessantly. That is perhaps the subtle and sublime message of the sacred and soul-filling *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Mahotsavam* in the Divine presence of the Eternal Director of this cosmos!

FEATURES ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – 23

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. We have reached an important milestone in our wanderings that have stretched almost two years now! Amazing is it not? Perhaps you are wondering how much longer it would be; my guess is that may be it might be a few more months before we get a distant glimpse of INFINITY, and after that, you would have to explore on your own; that is because I would be leaving you all alone, having done my job as a guide!

OK, where do we stand now? To refresh your memory, I have given you a broad-brush introduction to Quantum Mechanics [QM], and also to Born’s probabilistic interpretation of the wave function – this I did in the last couple of issues. I am sure when Born first gave his interpretation, few understood what on earth he was talking about. That of course did not prevent many from commenting extensively on Born and his ideas – you know, it is always easy to talk nonsense about everything on earth, pretending to be very knowledgeable about it all. People do it all the time about everything, from politics and economics to science and spirituality [I hope you do not have that impression about this series!]. Anyway, the point I want to make is that a few people did reflect **deeply** about the implications of Born’s interpretations and spent a lot of time worrying about it. In this issue, I wish to tell you a bit of that story.

Theories Reflecting Reality

Before I do that, some preliminaries are necessary. Firstly, let us ask what exactly a theory in Physics is supposed to do. I mean I talked a lot about Classical Mechanics that got a kick-start from Galileo and Newton and all that, and was subsequently honed to a fine art by many, including giants like Lagrange in France and Hamilton in England. What was the big deal about all that they did? Sure they gave a lot of formulae and methods to do complicated calculations that help us even today, especially in engineering. But that apart, was there anything basic about what they did?

Yes there was, and that is what I wish to discuss in this issue. Let me start with what a theory in Physics is supposed to do. Basically, it is supposed to give some kind of a picture of “physical reality”. OK, but what is this “physical reality” one is talking about? It turns out that the answer to this question is not so simple. For centuries, physicists believed that physical reality underlying their complicated equations, like the rainbow, the Sun, the Moon, etc., related to how we perceive them. That seemed OK, and why not? But if you think about it for a moment, you would realise that entities like the rainbow, the cloud, snake, frog etc., are entities that the senses perceive, after which a certain impression related to these entities is created in the human brain.

Thereafter, every time we think of say, a stone, some kind of an image pops up before our mental screen and we feel perfectly fine.

Let us say that a teacher says to his students, “Boys, today I am going to teach you how to calculate the trajectory of a stone that is thrown in a particular direction and with a particular velocity.” When the teacher says that, all the students immediately form some kind of a picture in their minds, and thereafter, when the teacher writes equations on the board, and draws sketches of the trajectory, it all seems to fit and hang together. At the end of the class, the students walk away feeling they have understood it all, that is if they were not sleeping! This is the way, a contact was made between what we all believed was physical reality and the equations discovered by the giants of Classical Physics.

I should mention here that Classical Physics dealt with matter on a macro scale and that too when it was not moving very fast, meaning that the speeds involved were a tiny fraction of the velocity of light. As you might recall from some of the earlier issues in this series, the extension to the case when the speed approached that of light was made in 1905 by Einstein, via his famous *Special Theory of Relativity*.

So what was the reality that stood revealed thanks to all this work up to say the beginning of the 20th century? As far as the founders of Classical Mechanics was concerned, starting from Newton all the way to the great masters like Hamilton in the 19th century, matter was a continuum that could be compressed as well as stretched. When heated, solid matter could melt and become a liquid. If heated still further, it could become a gas; in all these three states, matter was held to be a continuum. However, when issues related to heat were considered, it seemed that the continuum hypothesis had to be given up and matter treated as if it was made up of atoms.

Atomic Discovery

Maxwell did this in order to develop his kinetic theory of heat. He did not know what atoms were like but that did not stop him. For him, atoms were like tiny billiard balls that moved fast, that could collide and get scattered, etc. The collision could be treated very much like billiard ball collisions via Newton’s equations, and this was how Maxwell linked his work on heat to mechanics. Maxwell still retained contact with Classical Physics, except that he abandoned the continuum picture of matter.

Maxwell’s work was extended and given a much firmer footing by Boltzmann of Austria. So complete was his theory that it is used even to this day in certain situations. For Boltzmann, matter HAD to be made up of atoms, even though he did not know what atoms were made up of. Strangely, even though it was as late as the turn of the 19th century, many physicists of those days objected to atoms, although chemists were not only quite comfortable with the idea of atoms but had done a tremendous job of classifying them and organising their family tree in terms of the famous Periodic Table. At a scientific gathering where Boltzmann presented his findings, he was ridiculed

by some, including a prominent man of those times named Oswald. Boltzmann felt so humiliated that he committed suicide, a great tragedy because even as he gave up his life, the concept of atoms was not only getting firmly established in Physics but was in fact opening the door to a whole new universe one might say – but then, that is life!

I have no doubt gone over all this before but there is a reason why I am repeating some of it now. You see, starting from around 1900 or so, scientists were not only beginning to learn more about the atom but also its internal constitution, that is to say what it was made up of. They learnt that the atom had a tiny nucleus where all the positive charge was concentrated, and that around this nucleus were distributed in some manner the electrons, also very tiny.

Bohr then came along and gave a picture of the atom and also a mathematical model for describing the atom and some of its properties. The maths was quite elementary but the concepts Bohr invoked were far reaching. Thanks to him, physicists realised that the atom could NOT be described using the equations of Classical Physics, that is to say the equations of Newton etc., that had till then ruled so powerfully for centuries in fact. As Americans would say, the atomic world seemed to be a whole new ball game.

Bohr understood it was indeed a new game, but did not uncover the rules of that game; he merely discovered the key to the lock. As I described earlier, the lock was opened by the trio Schroedinger, Heisenberg and Dirac, after de Broglie had pointed out where the lock was! All that might be a rather colloquial way of stating crucial historical facts, but the fact is that it was de Broglie who first suggested that like light, matter too might have a dual aspect.

Then came the trio I mentioned, and at the end of it all, say by 1927 or so, one had all the equations for dealing with matter on a microscopic scale, provided the velocity was small compared to that of light [technically, this is called the non-relativistic limit]. The extension to the relativistic domain came soon after [by the way that extension was due to Dirac], but that detail is not important for us presently.

What did the Discoveries Point To?

OK, one had equations using which one could now make good and reliable calculations but ***what did they mean?*** The answer to that was far from clear. By the way, during those early days, many important discoveries were made simply working these new equations; as someone said, those were days when second-rate physicists could do first-rate work! But what was the nature of the “physical reality” hiding behind these equations? That was the question bugging many top minds.

To give you a flavour of the concerns people had in those days, let me mention a few points. Consider for a moment, the duality of light and matter. Experiments seemed to show that light seemed to behave like waves in certain experiments while in other experiments it manifested as a particle.

Matter too showed the same kind of duality. Naturally, people were puzzled. In the case of light, for example, they asked: “Is light a wave or a particle? Or is it both? Or is it one thing at one time and another thing at a different time?” No one knew. So frustrating it was that it used to be said that light behaved like a wave on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, as a particle on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and observed the Sabbath on Sunday!

Then came the wave function Ψ of Schroedinger, a complex quantity with an imaginary part, adding to the confusion. As I described in the last issue, Max Born no doubt clarified matters to some extent with his probabilistic interpretation, but by and large, even though most people could work the equations and get results that could be compared with various experiments, where understanding “physical reality” was concerned, they were no wiser than school kids!

The Mysteries of Quantum Life

It was really a very strange situation that very much bothered the masters. The mood is fully reflected in the following quote from David Bohm, who came later and devoted a lot of his time to understanding the philosophical implications of quantum mechanics. He says:

Quantum mechanics says that Nature is unintelligible except as a calculus, that all you can do is to compute with the equations and operate your apparatus and compare the results.

I am sure all this might leave a you a bit bewildered, but that is to be expected. After all, even the pundits were foxed when they first had to deal with QM (quantum mechanics), and the funny thing is that even today, not many really understand what exactly are the philosophical implications underlying QM. This being the case, I obviously cannot quite enlighten you. However, there are a few things I could do and they are the following:

1. I shall give you a glimpse of debate that raged during the early days, focussing in particular on the arguments that raged between Einstein and Bohr. It was almost like a gun fight in a Western movie! But no violence; only vehemence in the arguments!!
2. I shall then fast-forward and tell you about a terrific surprise that emerged in the seventies.
3. And wrap it all up with some words where does all this leave us.

[I might not be able to do all that in this issue, but at any rate, that would form the theme of the next couple of issues.]

All the above might leave you a bit confused – but you should not worry about that. What would happen at the end of it all is that we would slowly be able to step out of the physical world [that seems so real to us!] and enter the world of meta-Physics, from where one could glide to the realm of *Vedanta* without even being aware of it! In short, the journey ahead is exciting and heady, even

if we pass through territory we cannot quite comprehend. With that preamble, let me move on.

I shall start with some remarks by Max Born, who, if you remember, actually started all this business of probabilistic interpretation of QM. Soon after he gave his view, Born said that while Schroedinger gave a method of calculating the stationary states of a quantum system, he did not say in which state the system would be found if an observation is made. The wave function associated with the stationary states could be computed using Schroedinger’s method, and let us designate them say as, $\Psi_1, \Psi_2, \Psi_3, \Psi_4, \Psi_5, \Psi_6$, etc. In German terminology, these are also called *eigenstates*.

OK, let us say there is a hydrogen atom. If one solves the Schroedinger equation for the hydrogen atom [I said something about this type of exercise in an earlier issue], then one would be able to obtain the eigenstates of the hydrogen atom. These were earlier called by Bohr as allowed states. Suppose there is a hydrogen atom in the lab. The question could be asked: “In which of the allowed states is this particular atom? Can QM give an answer to that?” The short answer to that question would be: “You cannot give any answer to that question, except to say that in general, the atom would be in a state Ψ say, which is some kind of a mixture of all the allowed states.” This can be formally expressed by writing:

$$\Psi = a\Psi_1 + b\Psi_2 + c\Psi_3 + d\Psi_4 + e\Psi_5, \dots\dots$$

where a, b, c, d, e, etc., are numerical coefficients. As you can see, the state Ψ is a mixed state, that is, it is some specific mixture of the *eigenstates* of the hydrogen atom. That is all that can be said, nothing more nothing less.

Suppose one now says: “OK, let me find out what exactly this Ψ is. How do I do it? By making an observation of course.” So you make an observation. You know what you would find? Something you would not expect at all. You would find that the atom is not in the state Ψ , but in some other state, which could well be one of the *eigenstates* mentioned earlier. That is, the process of making the observation disturbs the atom, causing it to jump from the state Ψ to may be Ψ_1, Ψ_2, Ψ_3 , or something like that, or may be even some other mixture – who knows!

This was a totally new experience in the world of Physics. In Classical Physics, when a system made a transition from one state to another, one could observe what state the system was in to start with, and, based on the equations of Classical Physics, predict precisely to what state it would go. In QM it was totally different. One could *a priori* not say what [quantum] state the system is in to start with. If we try to determine that state via an observation, the system fools us by jumping to some other state! It seems as if quantum states do not want to be observed! Suppose we insist on making an observation; the system jumps to some state; which one? We cannot say for sure; all we can do is to make some kind of a probabilistic forecast. That was the discovery Born made. By way of stressing all this, Born once commented on what would happen if two particles collided, like say two [quantum] billiard

balls. Prior to the collision, the two-particle system would be in a particular state, and after the collision it would go to another state; which one? Responding to that question, Born says:

One obtains the answer to the question, not “what state after the collision” but “how probable is a given effect after the collision” I myself tend to give up determinism in the atomic world.

The exit of determinism - that is the crucial point about QM. You see, in Classical Physics, there was determinism. If you applied a force on a system that is well defined etc., then you could predict precisely what would happen as a result of the application of the force. Let me put it this way. Suppose one were to fire a classical cannon ball, in a particular direction and with a specific velocity, one could then, using the equations of Classical Physics, calculate precisely where the cannon ball would hit the ground. There was only one unique answer, because the entire process was governed by laws whose underlying principle was determinism. If there was a cause, then the nature of the effect produced was precisely predictable [assuming one has complete information about all the relevant parameters].

Einstein Rejects QM: ‘God does not play dice’

In QM, it seemed that was not the case. When a quantum cannon ball is fired by say a quantum gun into a world ruled by QM, then one cannot say for sure where the ball would hit the ground. One could only talk of probabilities, and this probabilistic nature is built into the very fabric of QM. It was, as Einstein put it, that God was playing dice; and that was a notion he intensely disliked. In short, it all started with Einstein saying that he did not trust QM because there was something about it that was intensely distasteful to him. His attitude was: ***“How can Nature be non-deterministic? That is inconceivable and I totally reject that idea. I don’t care what you fellows say but to me, God does not play dice! I don’t know about you but I am very clear about it!”*** That is not an exact quote but basically that summarises Einstein’s reaction to QM, at least in the early stages.

However, it did not end there, with Einstein simply rejecting the notion of QM and others murmuring, “The man has lost his touch, you know!” Einstein was too important a figure and one could not have him objecting to the new and revolutionary physics that was strongly emerging. Such a deep division on so crucial a matter would be tremendously damaging to the progress of Physics – so thought many, and they began to think of ways of convincing Einstein that QM was not a lot of hocus-pocus but a mechanics that did deliver the goods. If it did that, clearly Nature was sending a message; it was the duty of all Physicists to try and decode that message. Taking that view, Bohr decided to engage in a public debate with Einstein. That story forms a fascinating and an important chapter in the history of QM, and that is what we shall turn to next.

Epistemology and Ontology and the Throw of a Coin

Before I get to the folklore part of the historical Bohr-Einstein debate, there are a few technical points I should maybe get across. To start with, there are two words I should introduce you to. They occur frequently in discussions on philosophy, and they are: *Epistemology* and *Ontology*. The former word means the theory of knowledge; in our context, it simply means **OUR** knowledge or conception about a physical system. Notice the stress on the word "OUR". The emphasis is laid because our knowledge about the system might in fact be quite different from what the system actually is – but that is an altogether different matter.

Turning to the other word, the dictionary meaning of ontology is: the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of being. In our context, it refers to the nature of the system, ***as it actually exists***. Roughly speaking, epistemology deals with knowledge built up from observations, whereas ontology refers to ***the attributes the system has, independent of whether one observes it or not***.

Perhaps a simple example would illustrate the difference. Suppose you toss a coin. Everyone would say that whether the outcome is heads or tails is a matter of probability. From a practical point that is indeed the case. However, the question can be asked: "Is it not possible to calculate, using the full machinery of classical mechanics, what the outcome would be?" Yes one can do that, but for making such a deterministic calculation, one must have all kinds of details about the coin, including its weight, shape, distortions to the shape due to handling, dust accumulated on it, full details about the impact made by every molecule of air colliding with the coin as it is tossed up and falls down, the breeze blowing and so on. Obviously there is just ***too much detail***; and even if we know them all, the calculations would be horrendous; simply not worth wasting time on doing it. So, ***one prefers to remain ignorant about the details, and when we lack full knowledge of the circumstances and the parameters involved, we can only make a guess about the outcome***; and that is how we end up saying there is a 50-50 chance it would be heads and things like that.

To put it in nutshell, ***the system is intrinsically deterministic, but thanks to our ignorance, OUR knowledge of the system ends up being probabilistic***. We thus have here a case of ontic determinism but epistemic indeterminism! I hope you are able to follow that. Barring such cases, Classical Physics is all about determinism, where outcomes can be calculated in a deterministic rather than probabilistic manner. Got that?

Following the Rules of Classical Physics

A few more moments on certain aspects of Classical Physics, in order to appreciate how Quantum Physics differs drastically. The first thing we note is that determinism is an important feature of Classical Physics. Thus it is that we have what is called Causality – there is a cause, which produces an effect. In other words, determinism and causality are two sides of the same coin.

Having grown up with Classical Physics, Einstein was a strong believer in determinism and causality; QM rocked that boat, and he naturally became very disturbed – that is the story we now are preparing for.

To continue, measurement forms an important aspect of QM. It is useful therefore to understand first what exactly making a measurement means in Classical Physics; that would help us to appreciate better how different things become, once we enter the quantum world. Two important assumptions made in Classical Physics in connection with measurements are:

1. The system on which a measurement is made has a definite value for the property being measured, ***even before the measurement is made.***
2. The instrument used for making the measurement does **not** affect the system; that is to say, it does not change the value of the property that is being measured.

Let us say we have a beaker full of water, and that we want to measure the temperature of the water. The system in this case is water, the property we want to measure is the temperature and the instrument we would use would of course be the thermometer. What the assumptions stated above imply are that firstly, the water in the beaker had a definite temperature before the thermometer was inserted into the water, and secondly, the thermometer when inserted into the water does not alter the temperature.

Thus, ***in Classical Physics, the physical properties of a system are attributes of the system that exist on their own, whether or not someone takes the trouble of measuring them.***

The 'Rules' are Different in Quantum Mechanics

The point made above is extremely important because in QM the ball game changes drastically. Firstly, it is **not** possible to make definitive statements about the attributes of the system **before** any observation is made. Further, whenever one makes a measurement or an observation [as one says sometimes], it invariably disturbs the system. It is important to note that ***it is not possible even in principle to reduce to zero the disturbance caused to the system observed, by the measurement process.*** If this disturbance could be reduced to zero, then it would mean that the measured quantity has a value independent of the measurement. QM rejects this view!

I hope you are able to appreciate the change in perspective that the advent of QM brought about. In Classical Physics, it was reasonable to suppose that a system had specific properties/attributes, whether or not it was observed. In QM, on the other hand, the attributes of a system made sense only when a measurement was made. In turn, this implied the existence of a measuring apparatus and an observer who carried out the measurement. Reality was thus related to the perception the observer had, based on the measurement he had carried out.

In the language used earlier, Classical Physics took an ontological view of reality, while QM took an epistemological view of reality. And as you can readily see, these are two **fundamentally opposite** points of view. As I mentioned before, though Einstein was responsible for pointing out for the first time that light had a wave-particle duality, that is it was quantum in nature, yet when QM flowered and took on a respectable mathematical shape, he did not like what seemed to be the underlying philosophy.

People who were pro-QM, said, "Look Prof, this thing works, it gives results, it gives a very good method of calculating quantities that we simply cannot calculate using Classical Physics. So this thing **has got** to be correct. How can you dismiss it?" Einstein's reply was in effect, "Maybe you are able to do some calculations and get correct results. However, I am not at all comfortable. How can one be sure that this mechanics would always deliver the goods? I personally believe one day or the other you would hit a road block and be forced to look for a new theory to replace what you call QM. You know why I distrust this QM? I shall tell you. It completely negates the picture of reality that Classical Physics gave us. You are telling me that reality is based on what one observes. Do you mean to tell me that the Moon does not exist if I do not observe it? That is pure nonsense!"

You get some idea of the tensions and the passions? What came out of it all was high drama, more thrilling than what you might expect in a Bollywood movie. All that, in the next instalment! Meanwhile, do not bite off all your nails please!

(To be continued)

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 15

Living Up to the Challenge of Conscience in Daily Life

Dear Readers, in this series, we offer you real life stories from contemporary heroes who have demonstrated the courage to follow their conscience when confronted with difficult dilemmas or challenging circumstances in their daily lives. This segment is an ode to the strength of the brave-hearts who chose to listen to the voice of their conscience, thereby abiding by the values of Right Conduct, Truth, Love, Peace and Non-violence, even though the choice had appeared tough.

In our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories from around the globe. These included the experiences of Mrs. Priya K-Aldis, Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani, Mr. Karthik Ramesh, Mr. Amar Vivek, Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam, Mr. Hiten Morarji, Mr. N. Prabhakar, Mr. Sathya Jambunathan, Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi, A courageous woman executive (Part 11), Mr. Shalabh Mittal, Mr. P. S. Kannan and Mr. Sai Mudigonda.

After working in a particular field for more than thirty years, the writer, who wishes to remain anonymous, was assigned a responsibility in an entirely new area. With little business experience, he found himself co-directing a multi-million dollar charitable foundation. His co-director also had virtually no previous business experience. The writer and his partner found themselves in an entirely new world wherein they had to supervise two highly experienced investment managers of a large stock portfolio, oversee generous grants made to charities, monitor the programs funded by the foundation, review the charities' adherence to the provisions of the grants awarded, direct the legal team putting together the foundation, ensure compliance with all relevant laws, oversee the accountant, and run the day-to-day operations of the foundation. Alongside these newly-assumed roles, they both had to maintain their respective professions.

Now, the author shares with us how he coped with the multi-tasking, rode the volatile financial markets while trying to hold firmly to the spiritual values that goaded him from within.

Could someone possibly succeed in today's financial markets without making a moral compromise? Can business and altruism be managed against the touchstone of a same set of values? Is the very thought of spiritually sustainable financial viability an oxymoron?

While shedding light on some of these sensitive questions, the author is quick to point out that he doesn't see himself as a "hero of conscience" but rather someone who is but struggling to do his best to live the Values put forth by Swami in all aspects of his life. He wants to make it clear that there have been many failures along the way as well as successes, but feels all of it is a learning process put in place by Swami. Accordingly, he shares two stories here, one which could be considered an example of values in action and a

second which could be considered an example of shortcoming in living up to the values.

The author first heard about Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in 1969 but did not come to His feet until 27 years later in 1996.

THE 'VALUE'D INVESTMENT

Leading a Values-driven Foundation

With my appointment as co-director of this large charitable foundation, I quickly realized that I had a great deal to learn about subjects which I had virtually no understanding of or experience with. It became apparent that I needed to become not only familiar with the topics but that I needed to do so very, very quickly. One of the first areas that needed to be tackled was learning about stocks, bonds and investments in general. As a novice, I decided that I needed to read and study the best material available. Also, following Swami's suggestions given to the MBA students of His University recorded in *Man Management*, I decided that I should go to learn directly from those who were in this business. Fortunately, the investment team that our founder had used for many years made themselves available and were happy to teach me. I spent long hours on the phone with them and, even though their office was in another city, I traveled there to meet with them to see the site of the transactions and have more of a "face to face" education. They also came to the foundation offices for further training.

Part of the learning involved being able to determine what constituted a safe and sound investment that also promised a good rate of return so that we could distribute more to the charities we support. Because I felt that this was really Swami's foundation, I wanted to make sure that all of our investments were in line with the values He teaches. Accordingly, I not only focused on each investments potential for long term growth but also evaluated each with those values in mind. I asked questions such as:

- Was the product or service provided of the highest quality?
- Was it of benefit to others?
- Was there any negative impact on the environment?
- Were the employees treated fairly?
- Were the companies financially responsible and fiscally sound?
- Were they adhering to good ethical practices?
- Did they demonstrate good business morals, ethics and practices?

Taking Stock of Real Value

I decided to review each of the companies we held stock in and was pleased to find that most of them did meet the values-based criteria. This was due in large part to our investment managers who are also highly ethical and moral individuals. There were a few problems though and the stocks that did not meet the criteria were removed from our portfolio. There was one situation of note that I would like to share. It involved a company that was growing

quickly and giving us a very high rate of return on our investment that on the surface seemed to meet all the criteria put forth.

Bridging Disconnect Between Values and Business Practices

This particular company had as a division, a large dairy farm in South America. In reviewing the company information the cows seemed to be treated well and they were not injected with hormones to force unnatural levels of milk production, a practice used by many dairies. However, as I continued to read the "small print", there was a short statement about recycling the cows. I had no idea what that meant so I contacted our investment advisor and asked him to check with the company. It turned out that the company also had part ownership of a slaughterhouse and that when the cows no longer produced milk, they were taken there and "recycled". While I don't feel I have the right to tell anyone not to eat meat (in fact my co-director and all members of the investment team are non-vegetarians), I had a strong reaction to being involved in a business that partially owned a slaughter house.

Rising Stock Maximized Returns

I talked to my co-director and told him of my feelings and he agreed to let me do what I wanted in this situation. I contacted our investment team and told them I wanted to sell. While they are good people, they did not support this decision and pointed out that this stock was a real money maker with a huge potential for growth and return. They strongly advised me to not sell or at least wait until it stopped its current sharp incline in value (this was at a point when the stock market was doing quite well and this stock was increasing in value significantly each day.) While I understood their points, and it was their job to maximize our return, I could not accept their advice and directed them to sell the stock immediately which they did. We invested the money in another company which met all requirements and also showed good potential (though it was believed that it would not be as quickly realized as the first stock.)

Value-based Portfolio Outperforms Market

As an after word on this experience, the advisors were right, short term. The stock we sold did rise for a while but then for a reason I still don't understand declined sharply (this was long before the general decline of the market.) Parenthetically, the second stock continued its slow growth and then suddenly, again for some unknown reason, sharply increased in value. It continues to do well even in the current market. In fact, our entire value based portfolio continues to outperform the market significantly, even in the current down-turn. Another interesting point is that both my co-director and one of the investment advisors are now interested in Swami and plan on visiting Prashanthi Nilayam in the near future.

Prioritizing Between Goals and Values

I certainly do not want to leave anyone with the impression that I am always successful in following Swami's teachings. In fact, I seem to notice my failures much more than my successes. At times, I slip and my ego tries to run the show. It becomes more about my plans and what I want as a goal rather than sticking to the values. I want to share an example of how I failed to keep hold of the values and became too goal focused.

Bridging Two Charities

This experience involves two charities that the foundation supports. The first is a well-established charitable clinic which provides medical, dental and psychiatric services to the low-income and homeless population in a large metropolitan area. They provide examinations, testing, treatment and medication all at very low cost, or free of cost. Their one rule is that they will not treat anyone with insurance as those people can receive the same treatment at other facilities.

The second charity provides services to homeless youth aged 13-22. They have a center where the kids can come and receive food, clothing, counseling and other helpful services. This charity is not as well-established and the foundation I work with is their main source of funding. I personally had been involved with this charity for many years and introduced it to the founder of the foundation.

To understand what happened the reader needs to know that the foundation has certain legal restrictions on how much we can give to each charity. Due to a happy set of circumstances, we could increase the grants awarded in 2009 by a factor of 2 ½ times over those given in 2008.

For the charity involved with the homeless teens, this meant that their current programs would be completely funded and there could be an increase in some of the needed services for this population. The clinic would actually wind up in a surplus situation. I thought it would be a great opportunity to connect the two and see if the clinic would expand their services to include dealing with the homeless teen population even though there was a great deal of separation geographically which would make it much harder on the clinic. I felt that this would be an important program as the teens aged 13-17 were in a particular "no-mans" land. To receive treatment from any other clinic they needed to have parental consent for treatment. As these kids lived on the street without parents it was virtually impossible for them to get treatment except in emergencies and even then the local child welfare services would need to be contacted - this was something these kids would avoid at all costs as most of them had already had bad experiences with the foster care system and did not want to return to it. The proposed program seemed to be a perfect solution to a serious problem.

I asked the director of the clinic what the cost would be to put such a program in place. After she did some research, she came back with a figure that seemed quite reasonable.

Making a Conditional Offer of Help?

I told her that we were going to increase our grant to the clinic and that we wanted them to take on this project (which came to about 33% of the increase and about 20% of the total grant). She readily agreed. I then talked to the director of the teen project and asked her if she liked the idea. She was thrilled and excited as she had often felt helpless in dealing with the teens' medical needs. We set up a meeting with the two directors and started the planning process so that we could get everything going in early 2009.

Honesty and Transparency Necessary Even at Subconscious Levels

To this point everything seemed fine. Enter my co-director who is a very fine, ethical and honest man. He took interest in this program and as he looked over the plans he asked an important question; "had I told the director of the free clinic that she would get the same amount of funding whether she took on the new program or not?" I hadn't.

To be honest, part of the reason could be written off as excitement and oversight but part of the reason, somewhat unconscious, was that I wanted to get this program going and had some fears as to whether the clinic would be willing to use our funding to do so if given the option. In reviewing the discussions I had with the clinic director it became apparent that I had inferred that the additional money was dependent on the acceptance of the program. I had been dishonest.

I knew that this was not ethical nor did it fit the values Swami teaches and expects His devotees to follow. Not only had I not lived up to the standards I had set for myself and expected from others, I had let Swami down.

Coming Out Clean with the Whole Truth

With the support of my partner, I immediately set up a meeting with the director of the clinic. I apologized to her directly for my dishonesty and told her that the funding was not based on her acceptance of the new program with the teens, the clinic's funding would not be affected now, or in the future by her decision. Her response was truly heartwarming. While she readily admitted that the program would take some extra effort on her part, she said she was committed to following it through, not just for one year but for two if we would continue to fund at the same level. She wanted to work with the director of the teen program and felt that there would be much mutual benefit. She also had met some of the kids and knew how important the program was. In fact, she hoped to do a similar program in the metropolitan area where the clinic is located. She accepted my apology graciously and the working relationship between us has continued to grow stronger and stronger.

I then met with the other program director and told her of my dishonesty and asked for her forgiveness. I told her of the clinic director's response and gracious support. She also accepted the apology and we are currently exploring other ways of funding the medical part of the program after the two year term is up.

Being Accountable to the Real Boss

In reflecting on this incident I feel more than a bit embarrassed at how I let the goal become more important than the values. Swami has time and time again told us that how we do something is more important than the result. As taught in the Gita, it is up to us to do our best and leave the rest. And doing our best means working from a values orientation as opposed to a goal orientation.

In the end it is all up to Swami. While I know I may fail again, I feel a renewed commitment to being honest in all aspects of my life. **Situational ethics is not something a devotee of Swami can live with and call themselves a devotee.**

We want the foundation's basis to be one of character and values. It helps to have such an impeccable model as Swami and His work with all the business He conducts such as the hospitals, schools, water projects, etc. Swami had originally blessed and approved the formation of the foundation.

Seeking Performance Appraisal from Bhagavan Baba

Now, I have a new way of seeing my position; a new way of reflecting and evaluating my job performance. I work for Baba - He is the director, the chairman and CEO of the foundation. Baba is The Boss. This truly helps as I reflect on how "The Boss" would want me to handle situations I encounter; how would "The Boss" feel about how I conducted the business of the foundation today; in short, did I live up to what "The Boss" expected of me today?

SERIAL ARTICLES

SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PART 4

(Continued from the previous issue)

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

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

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

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

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prasanthi Nilayam. Here, we are once again, dealing with spiritual questions from our readers/listeners. This is the fourth session and I do hope that from your point of view, you are finding this series to be satisfactory. As you would have realised by now, the questions we deal with often overlap. Hence, there would be a certain amount of repetition in our answers too, which, I hope, you would bear with. Also, you might sometimes feel that the answers are not exhaustive enough. Well, that is deliberate. We have to make a choice between reasonably short answers that would convey the essence, or long and rambling answers that would lose the listeners and readers totally. What we are attempting to do is to strike a balance; we try and give the essence first time, and in later sessions, reiterate the basic points in different ways and in different contexts, so that the lessons sink in and get registered permanently. This is a standard trick in teaching, the outward spiral approach as it is called, and I am merely following that tactic.

Let me now see what is in the bag this time for us. There are four questions, all related as usual, and they are as follows:

Question 1: How can we realise our innate Divinity?

Question 2: When will modern man be fit to tread the spiritual path? Why does he not follow it?

Question 3: How can we realise our true Self by looking within?

Question 4: How and why is the bliss given by Self-realisation true and permanent?

The four questions that I just read out and which I hope to deal with in this talk are, as expected not only interlinked but also quite interesting. Let me start with the first question, which deals with how one can realise his or her intrinsic Divinity. Here, devotees of Bhagavan have a big head start, because time and again, Swami has reminded us that we all are Sparks of the Divine, the Embodiments of the *Atma*, and so on. The question now becomes, "If He tells us that ever so often, then why does not that fact register with us?"

The answer to that is simple. Most of us do know in our head that we are God or have at least come from God, and therefore have some Divine genes within us. But merely knowing a fact is not enough. The big question is: "Is that knowledge in any way influencing our actions and our lifestyle?"

Let me give a simple example to illustrate my point. Everyone knows that while the demand for water is rapidly increasing, its supply is at the same time tending to shrink. It follows immediately that we ought not to waste even a drop of water; instead, we should do everything to conserve water as much as possible and also share it equitably with all, so that there are no conflicts due to some people acquiring a sort of monopoly over water resources. But does that happen? Hardly; why? That is the question we now must address.

Knowing a fact of life becomes meaningful only under the following circumstances: Firstly, that fact must get imprinted in the heart and not merely in the head. Thereafter, the heart must regularly influence all actions based on that particular fact – that is, when knowing something would produce any impact. To use Swami's words, this is how bookish knowledge is converted into practical knowledge. If that conversion does not take place, then all the knowledge in the world is of little use.

We have thus reduced the problem to: "What prevents people from doing something, when they know it is good?" The short answer to that is ignorance, and so, I shall now turn to a discussion of ignorance, spiritual ignorance to be more precise. The question now becomes how to remove this spiritual ignorance. Every day in our life, all of us use some object or the other made of steel, sometimes many objects, and often more than once. I am sure you would agree with that. Now is steel found as steel on earth? No; what God has provided us with is iron, and that too in the form of ore. Usually, this ore is in the form of some oxide of iron, mixed with mud and rock. Now what does man do to make steel? He first mines the iron ore, then refines it to make iron of some sort – this is done in huge steel plants – after which metallic iron is suitably alloyed to produce a variety of specialised steels needed for surgical instruments, ultra-high vacuum systems, nuclear reactors and so on. What I am leading up to is the fact that one does not get the kind of steel one wants for making the objects one needs unless one first refines the ore and further processes it as required – that is the point I wish to make.

Let us now go back to our question; it asks how we can realise our innate Divinity. The first point is that we must at least believe that we are intrinsically Divine. People ask: "How can that be?" Well, the answer to that is very simple. Everyone knows that his or her biological genes come from parents and indeed ancestors; not merely that, modern science has revealed that some genes are very similar to what fish, rats and other such species have; which means that our genes have a long history going back far in time.

Let me push that a little bit further. Our bodies are made up of atoms and these go back literally to the creation of our Universe. And who created our Universe? God, of course. So I first argue that whether we like it or not, there are Divine genes in all of us – that fact must be accepted. Next, we must allow these Divine genes to make their presence evident. It is like saying, "There is a lot of good iron here in this place; so let us mine it and make steel out of this ore." In the same way, the starting point must be, "I accept the fact that I am Divine in origin and that there are Divine genes within me. All I must do is to make them manifest." The question now becomes: "Why do they not manifest right now and what must I do to make that happen?"

This precisely is where the iron-ore cum steel making analogy enters the picture, that is to say while the 'raw material' is there, some refinement is needed. To get down to brass tacks, let us ask, "When can we say a person has recognised the Divinity within and that Divinity now shines in that person?" To answer this question, we must first know when we would describe a person as having Divine qualities or a Divine aura? Luckily, Krishna Himself has answered that question and He says that wherever Pure Love, Selflessness, Compassion, *Sathya*, *Dharma*, etc. shine, there one can see the effulgence of Divinity.

So, it all boils down to this: If the effulgence of Divinity is already latent within, thanks to our innate Divinity, then why does it not show up? Imagine a lamp with a powerful bulb within but which is covered with muck on the outside. Then, no matter how powerful the bulb is, the light that emerges would be at best rather dull. Remember, even the light from the all-powerful and ever so bright Sun can be diminished by a cloud. Thus, what eclipses our innate Divinity is the cloud of spiritual ignorance that covers the core of our being. If somehow we are able to blow away that cloud, then our innate Divinity would automatically shine.

So, if we are keen to realise our innate Divinity, then:

- (1) We must believe that we are indeed Sparks of the Divine,
- (2) Recognise that there is a cloud of spiritual ignorance covering this latent Divinity, and
- (3) Take steps to generate a strong wind that would blow away this cloud.

If we did all that, the latent Divinity would shine forth in full measure. So how do we generate that wind? That is a big question in itself that maybe we shall come to later, but if you want the answer in one word, it is *Sadhana*. If you are in hurry to know what *Sadhana* is all about and cannot wait for a future article,

then I urge you to straight away seek the answer in Sai literature – you would find plenty to keep you busy! Good luck!

With this, let me now move on to the second question, which is:

When will modern man be fit to tread the spiritual path? Why does he not follow it?

There are two questions here and I think I shall start with the second one, for reasons that would become obvious soon. Modern man is driven by one primary instinct: “If I do such and such a thing, what’s in it for me? If indeed there is something, then how soon would I get that benefit?” In other words, it is all about large and quick returns on investment, or short-term results, to put it differently. If someone were to tell him, “This is very good for you but you know it would take a long time before you start seeing benefits,” his reply would be, “Oh yeah? Thanks for the information but I prefer to make my investment elsewhere.”

In spirituality, there are no short cuts. If you want very high-quality steel for deep space applications, bazaar (low-quality) steel would not do; such steel would have to be specially made and very carefully. So to get back to the second part of the question, my answer would be: Man today is not bothered about following the spiritual path because he does not see any immediate or practical advantages in that for him. If he wants to take to spirituality on the basis of a mundane cost-benefit analysis, then he is going to miss out for sure, no doubt about it.

This takes us automatically to the first part of the question, which is: “When would modern man be fit to tread the spiritual path?” I would say, first there must be a keen desire to go on that path; without that desire, without that hunger for God, without that passion to become one with God somehow, man is not even going to be aware that there is a spiritual path and that it can lead to eternal bliss or *ananda*, as opposed to transient pleasures that drinking or gambling or even chasing corporate success can give.

Now how does one develop that hunger? Well, it is like asking: “When does a potato couch want to stop eating chips by the ton and develop the desire to be a strong and healthy person with a passion for outdoor life?” Such transformations can and do happen when there is a deep yearning from within. Where spiritual transformations are concerned, God in human form is here precisely to help us change, but how to bring about such a change, what must one do to facilitate it and so on are matters that I shall take up later when dealing with questions relating specifically to those issues. Right now, the two points that emerge from the question discussed thus far are: 1) Where spirituality is concerned, we must not approach it from a cost-benefit perspective, and 2) we had better develop a hunger for God before we start thinking of getting on the spiritual path.

Before I get on to the next question, I would like to suggest that those of you who are reading this article as a group, might perhaps discuss and debate the

points made by me. This would not only help you to gain better clarity but might also throw up other important questions and points not considered by me. So dear readers please do be pro-active and write to us the way readers of newspapers flood the editors of the papers they read, with all kinds of comments.

Moving on, the next question is:

How can we realise our true Self by looking within?

As a prelude to answering this question, I must first comment upon two important words that occur in this question. The first is the word “within”, while the second such word is “Self”. When we look at the wide world around us, we always speak of it as being external to us, meaning that the world surrounds the body. As for what is within, by that we usually mean that which lies beneath the skin of the body. What lies beneath the skin? When asked this question, we usually respond in terms of organs, bones and so on. However, we also often talk of a subtle entity called the mind.

Ask anyone where the mind is, and he or she would say it is within. And yet, no one has ever seen this mind! We simply say it is within because each mind is intrinsic to that person. Similarly, there is “within” each person the “Divine Spirit” that earlier I referred to as the *atma*. Now of course you might ask, “If the *Atma* is in every person, does that mean that each individual has his or her own *Atma*?” No way! It is the same *atma* that is present in all. How can that be, you might wonder. Well, consider air; it covers the entire earth like an onionskin. And in the process, a bit of this air is also present in the lungs of every living being. Thus the air is within each being and at the same time it is also everywhere.

Let us now focus on that “portion” shall I say, of the Universal *Atma* that is associated to a particular person. Just as we say the mind of a person is within, we also say that the associated *atmic* aspect is also within. This *atmic* aspect is called variously as the Real Self, the True Self or simply the Self, with a capital S. Now the word “self” is often used in *Vedanta* and one must be very careful when discussing the self-business using the English language. *Vedanta* makes a clear distinction between two types of Self that might be associated with a given person; however, when translating, we often tend to use the same word “self” for both the contexts, and this has created enormous confusion in the minds of those who are not fully conversant with *Vedanta*.

From the spiritual point of view, there are actually two “selves” within; one, a Real one and the other, a bogus one. The latter, a phoney, is sometimes called the Lower Self and is really an aspect of the ego. The former, on the other hand, is what I earlier referred to as the Higher Self or the Real Self, and is nothing but our friend, the *atma*. So the question we are trying to answer could be restated as follows: “How can we realise that we are not the false Lower Self or the Ego Self - but the Higher Self?”

Obviously, the first thing is to know that there is an entity called the Real Self, which is distinct and separate from the Ego Self or the Lower Self. Most of us do not know this important truth, and indeed, it is in order to make this clear, that almost the very first thing that Krishna teaches Arjuna in the *Gita* is: "Arjuna, you are not just the body but the *atma*!"

So, we must be conscious of the fact that there are actually two entities within that answer to the name "self"; one of them is real and the other phoney. Often, we are totally ignorant about the Real Self; and if we are aware it exists, we do not bother one bit about it. Why is that? Because we are deluded and misled by our ego. We all the time pay attention to the ego and pamper and massage it in every way possible, fattening it to mountainous proportions. The question thus becomes: "How do we decrease our ego?" The question is important because when we start doing that, automatically, the Real Self within us begins to manifest more and more. I am sure this may not be quite clear to most and maybe I should offer a few words of explanation.

What are the characteristics of a person who is very egoistic? He would be mostly conscious of himself, his success, his ambitions, his achievements and so on. All this would likely make him rather selfish, sometimes cunning and scheming, and prone to get jealous when he does not succeed but his competitor does.

Consider now a person who is the very opposite, that is to say, such a person is always very kind, eager to share without any expectation of anything in return, hardly focussed on rewards and achievements, generous to a fault, ready to forgive, compassionate and so on. Believe it or not, there are such people. In the case of such a person, it is the Higher Self or the *Atma* that is reflected in the personality, that is to say, in what the person thinks, says and does. Indeed, in the *Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna that wherever virtues like I have just mentioned shine, there one may find the effulgence of Divinity.

So, if we want to realise our True Nature, that is realise that we are indeed the *Atma* and not the bogus entity called ego that masquerades as the Self, then we must spiritually cleanse ourselves in every possible way – this is what Swami means by *sadhana*. By practicing *sadhana* systematically and with real passion, one can slowly get on to the path of Self-realisation.

Now to the last question of today's session, which is:

How and why is the bliss given by Self-realisation true and permanent?

You would have noticed I ended my response to the previous question by using the word Self-realisation; that is because that very word occurs in this question. The question posed is an interesting one, because it alludes to bliss that is permanent, implying thereby, there could also be happiness that is transient. Indeed there is and it is the confusion that humans have between these two that is almost always the cause of suffering and misery.

Let me explain. The first thing we have to note is that *ananda*, which means permanent happiness, and which in English is usually referred to as 'bliss', is the very nature of the *atma*. That is why when a Yogi goes into a trance he is in a blissful state, because in that state, he is not aware of anything and experiences an amazing sense of Oneness, that is to say, all apparently different entities fuse into one single Cosmic entity, namely the *atma*. In other words, when the Yogi achieves a union with the *atma* he is filled with bliss. That is why Yogis often like to go into a trance.

What about ordinary people like you and me? We too want to be happy, in fact, happy all the time if that is possible. So what do we do to seek happiness? We try everything possible from playing golf, watching TV, going out to dinner or gambling, travelling and so on. Oh yes, we do get excited - but bliss, *Ananda* or permanent happiness? Never. Why? Because what we get is pleasure, which, as Swami often reminds us is nothing but an interval between two pains.

Why is that? Swami gives the answer; He says, "O man, don't you know this world is transient? How can you ever get permanent happiness in a world that is transient? It is stupid to try for it. By its very nature, this world is a dual world, meaning it is a package in which pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness, joy and misery come in alternation; no escape from that."

So, what must one do in order to achieve *ananda*? Swami gives the answer to that also; He says: "Happiness is union with God!" To put it simply, if we master the art of going through life thinking of God all the time and in the firm belief that God is the doer and would take care of us, then we would hardly be bothered even if some inconvenience comes our way. That is why Swami often says: 'Start the day with Love, spend the day with Love and end the day with Love.' If you want a hot tip from me, I would say that an easy way of doing that is to tune in to Radio Sai the very first thing in the morning, and stay tuned all day!

And I shall end on that advertising note. I do hope you are getting something out of it. As you would certainly have noticed if you are a regular reader, many of the things I mentioned today have been said before. That is right, the formulae are neither new nor all that complicated; the problem is that we easily forget them. The trick then is to develop a good memory and keep these facts in mind always. That is just another way of saying, always stay tuned to God and never forget Him. Krishna assures that if we do that, then while we have a body, we would have long spells of happiness, and when we give up the body we would merge with Him and thus enter into a state of permanent bliss.

With that, I would like to close. Thanks for taking the trouble to read this part of the series and hope you would join me again next month.

Jai Sai Ram.

THE DRAMAS OF LIFE DIVINE

Dear readers, till the December 2008 issue, in this section we serialized for you “Shirdi Sai Parthi Sai”, the glorious saga of Shirdi Sai and the divine life of Sathya Sai till His early childhood. This series continued for 48 episodes, and we received very positive responses to this serial. In fact, now that the script is available, this television serial has been re-enacted as a play in many Sai centres. Encouraged with this, we decided to continue this section and offer something in a similar format. And now, after the Divine Life story of Bhagavan Baba, it is the innumerable dramas presented in the Divine Presence by the students of Bhagavan’s Schools and University, as well as by the Bal Vikas students and Sai devotees from all corners of the world. We hope the current series, which is accompanied with lots of pictures and video stills/clips, will not only make an enriching and edifying reading experience, but also will help devotees everywhere to redo these inspiring plays in their own settings with little effort. So, enjoy these divine dramas where the Divine was a keen spectator and the hidden director!

In the previous issue, we had the first half of the drama “Divya Premaashrayam” presented by the students of the Sri Sathya Sai University on the Convocation Day, November 22, 2008. We now have the second and final part, along with a pdf download of the entire script.

“Divya Premaashrayam” – Part 2

Convocation Drama, November 22, 2008

(Continued from the last issue)

This drama depicted the subtle difference between ‘good work’ and ‘God’s work’, and enunciated the golden formula that transforms ‘good work’ into ‘God’s work’ through the life of Anand Vardhan, an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, and a young idealist.

In the first four scenes we saw how Anand Vardhan, after completing his MBA from the Sri Sathya Sai University, decided not to engage himself in a career in the corporate world and instead serve in the villages. To achieve this goal, he chose Ramanthapuram, a small hamlet, as his site of activity. Soon he emerged as a lovable and admired leader, and in a short while, transformed the state of the village from infighting and poverty to harmony and prosperity. Just when everything was unfolding as per Anand’s dream of converting the disorganised and desolate hamlet into a model village, a terrible crisis in the form of a devastating flood and cyclone ravaged the area. All that Anand had achieved disappeared overnight; and worse, now the people were again hostile to each other, even Anand was not welcome anymore. Utterly dispirited, Anand returned home and then...

Scene 5: The Crisis Deepens

Father: Anand, are you alright? Thank God, you are safe. What if something had happened to you?

Anand: I am fine, but all that I had built is gone!

Father: We know.... Chowdary Garu told us everything. But what is important is that you are fine.

Brother: Anand, at least now come back! There is nothing left for you there.

Uncle: Sometimes life could be harsh while teaching lessons. Look at what it has done to you. It has left you penniless, helpless - crushed under the burden of a problem much larger than what you can handle.

Father: That's why you must listen...Elders advise you on the basis of their experience in life.

Brother: You wanted to tread an untrodden path; and after all these years ask yourself, 'Did all your sweat make any difference to you or to the village, except leaving you with nothing but tears?'

Uncle: Under the spell of a youthful euphoria, you envisioned a utopian world. It was a mirage that you mistook for a dream. Wake up Anand, to the realities of life.

Brother: Anand, your past has been erased by this calamity and your future is uncertain. I am not asking you to give up your ideals. I am just asking you to be more practical.

Anand: So you want me to give up all this and come home...

Uncle: We are not asking you to give up your dreams. We just want you to stabilise yourself before you plunge into service. Come home, and take up a job.

Father: Yes Anand, what uncle says is absolutely right. Take up a job now; after some years, you can come back here and pursue your dreams.

Anand: What you say seems to be right, but I need more time to think.

Father: Anand, don't worry, take your own time. Whatever be your decision, I will always support you. Take care.

[Father, Uncle and Brother leave]

[Anand's soliloquy]

Anand: Swami, how do I deserve this? Did I commit any folly to have my dreams shattered? I did everything I could to follow Your footsteps and now...

Lord, where do I go from here? Swami, please show me the way Swami, please!

(Songs Begins... Socha Tha Kya hoga)

Towards end of song lights go dim and bright. He falls on the altar, a swish of wind comes and there is thunder...

[light goes off, and the focus light is on the altar and Anand.]

A few books fall from the top shelf of the altar and as Anand picks up one of them and opens it, a background voice begins)

Embodiments of Love!

As long as you consider that you are the doer, problems will haunt you. Relinquish this feeling of doership and all problems will vanish in a trice. God is the only doer. You are merely an instrument. Here is a little story which demonstrates this truth. Once Chatrapati Shivaji faced a crisis...

Lights on

Scene 5b – Shivaji and Ramdas

Baji- Maharaj! You seem to be lost in thought. What is it that troubles your mind? Please disclose to us your worries and we shall spare no effort to decimate their cause.

Shivaji- To have Baji Prabhu and Tanaji by the side is like wearing impregnable armour. I have complete faith in your capabilities; but some kind of despondency overpowers me.

Tanaji- If it is the impudence of the Mughals, we can give them a befitting reply. If it is our own kingdom... well, only a skin-deep order prevails, hiding beneath it the embers of chaos.

Shivaji- While our external enemy grows stronger; our inner enemies thrive to make us weaker! Even as we take pride in our victories, doom seems not too far off. If I cannot establish the reign of flourishing prosperity and enduring principles, what would I have achieved after all these conquests, Tanaji?

Tanaji- Maharaj, we have no answers to your question. Your predicament baffles us!

Shivaji- Only the Lord can provide the answer... I hope and pray that He does it now!

Disciple (enters) – Greetings Raje, Sadhumaharaj Samartha Ramdas is on his way, and he conveys his blessings to you.

[Samartha Ramdas enters...]

Shivaji – Gurudev! You come as a spring of nectar for the parched throat. I seek your counsel... Master, please salvage me from the whirlpool of despondence.

Ramdas: It is the Lord’s will that has brought me to your doorstep at this hour of despair. Tell me, what is the problem?

Shivaji- Master! I have taken upon myself the task of unifying the country. The kingdom, which I built brick by brick, has grown in stature but, has shrunk in morals. All the hard work that I did has only led me to despair!

Ramdas- Hahaha... Nation-building is not an easy task, O, king! Why are you so anxious about the results? You have done a splendid job thus far and by the grace of the Mother Almighty, you shall continue to do so in the future too. Shivaji, a true winner is not overwhelmed by problems; he overcomes them.

Shivaji- But, Gurudev, my ability and wisdom seem to be too weak to protect me from the enemies within. Every time I raise my sword against my own countrymen, I feel an unbearable anguish gnawing at my soul. Please allow me to rest at your lotus-feet throwing away the burden of this empire. I cannot bear it anymore, Gurudev, I cannot bear it anymore.

Ramdas- Ah! I see your problem; it is not within your kingdom, but it is within you! You are right... you cannot rule a kingdom this way. Hand over your kingdom to me, and I shall rule it from now on.

Shivaji- Merciful Gurudev, you are truly the *Kalpa-vriksha*. You have taken the entire burden off my frail shoulders in a trice.

[Shivaji immediately removes the crown and sword and places them at the feet of his Guru. Ramdas covers him with an ochre robe. Shivaji then turns to his bewildered chief minister and commander-in-chief]

Shivaji- Gurudev is the ruler of this kingdom from this very moment. I shall live the life of a hermit as his humble disciple.

Lights Off

[Bereft of the burden of kingship, Shivaji finds solace and joy in leading an ascetic life. Two days later Samartha Ramdas brings him back to his palace.]

Lights on

Ramdas- So Shivaji, how do you feel now?

Shivaji- I feel so relieved, Master. Service to your lotus-feet has brought me joy supreme.

Ramdas- You are now a disciple committed to obeying my command. I hereby, command you to rule the kingdom as my representative. The kingdom continues to be mine!

[Ramdas returns the sword back to Shivaji. Shivaji receives the sword with reverence and rises with a confused expression]

Shivaji- Gurudev! I fail to fathom this act of yours. My happiness lies solely in this ochre robe and no more in this golden crown!

Ramdas- Your happiness is neither in the ochre robe nor in the golden crown! It is within you and you realise it when you overcome this feeling of ‘I and mine’! *Ahamkara* and *Mamakara*! Nothing belongs to you, my son. Every act of yours bears my signature. Rule your people not as a king but as a trustee.

Shivaji- Master, I see the light now! Gurudev, I have no cares now since both the burden of guilt and the crown of glory belong to you!

Tanaji- My wisdom refuses to understand this logic! Has anything changed?

Baji prabhu – Perhaps everything has changed! Shivaji raje rules the kingdom that doesn’t belong to him! Hence, its problems too do not belong to him.

Ramdas [smiles at Baji]- My dear son, you are right! *Atma Nivedanam* (Self-surrender) is the royal path to victory. May the Divine lead you the ultimate victory! *Vijayi Bhava*.

Lights Off

As long as you have the feeling of I and mine, even good activities will bring you sorrows at some point. Dear students! Realise that I am always with you. I am like your shadow... nay, not shadow, I am your Indweller! Surrender to Me and see what I can do for you.

Lights on

Scene 5c – Crisis Ends

[After the Shivaji scene...]

Song

Anand: Swami, now I have realised my folly! All the while, I thought it was I who was doing all this, being blinded to the truth that everything and everyone belongs to You. I am but a hollow reed and it is Your breath that works through me. Lord, Thy will be done!

(There is a knock)

Ramaiah: Anand, Chowdary garu has called you to the temple. He is gathering all the villagers. It seems some important person has come.

Lights Off

A voice from the background says:

Anand has overcome the inner crisis but does it solve his problems in the external world? Anand has received his succour but what about the people of Ramanathapuram? Anand follows Ramaiah to the temple wondering what is in store for the village.

Lights on

Scene 6 – Grand Finale

Chowdary: Sir, this is Anand, he is Sai Baba’s student who has dedicated his life for the welfare of this community. Anand, this is...

Shashidhar: Oh you are Anand?

Anand: Yes sir.

Shashidhar: Now I understand what Swami meant when He said, ‘I’ve given My Anand to them, assure them that my Anand will continue to be with them.’ Anand, Swami gave me this prasadam to be given to all villagers. I think you should do it.

Anand: O Swami! You have taken over. You always remember us; we are the ones who forget You.

Shashidhar: And Anand, I have an important message for you all. Dear residents of Ramnathpuram, Bhagawan Baba has willed that your broken houses be replaced with strong homes. Thousands of houses made of concrete will be built, for each and every family of Ramnathpuram and the villages around. Not only that, your entire village will be restored to its original grandeur. All that is required for achieving it will be provided by the Ultimate Provider – Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba!

[Anand shouts, ‘Jai bolo Bhagawan Sri Satya Sai Baba Ji ki... Jai’]

[A voice is heard] Bhaiyya bhaiyya... [It is Srinath, Krishna’s brother...]

[Everyone is stunned and so is Krishna]

Krishna: Srinath! My dear brother! *[They hug each other]* Where were you?

Srinath: A powerful current of water swept me far far away from here. When I opened my eyes, I was holding this Baba’s picture which Anand *bhaiyya* had

given us. A few Sevalal uncles found me hugging it close to my heart and brought me here.

Krishna: Oh Swami! How can I express my gratitude to you? You are *Sarvantaryami*. You are *Sarva-shakta*. You are God. You have gifted us our lives back. My dear brothers and sisters, these lives must be dedicated to His mission.

Chowdary: Dear residents, He is our mother and father! Why else would His heart melt for us? We may be physically far from Him, but His love knows no boundaries. It is all powerful and infinite. Baba, our *koti koti* pranams to You.

Anand: As long as we think we are the doers, the dualities of life haunt us. When we realise that You are the only doer, we experience the real joy of life. Even as He builds these material homes for us, let us build and decorate our hearts with noble virtues for Him, for that is His home. Our lives must become His message.

[Final song begins]

Jai Sai Ram

PRASHANTI DIARY

December 26, 2008, Children's Choir

After a beautiful and profound Christmas celebrations yesterday where Swami graciously delivered His Divine discourse, everything today seemed so pleasant and wonderful. The mood in Prashanthi Nilayam was one of joy, serenity and excitement. All the devotees, especially those from overseas, seemed to have a spring in their steps. As a befitting finale to the celebratory mood of Christmas in this holy and hallowed hamlet, Swami had permitted the children's choir to sing their heart out today evening.

It was about 4:30 PM when Swami arrived for His darshan rounds. Participating children from various countries sat neatly in rows in the marbled blocks. Swami took a complete round in the 'filled-to-capacity' Sai Kulwant hall. Swami moved around, granting *Abhayahastas*, collecting letters and spreading gentle waves of love to calm the excitement of every longing heart. By the time He went into the interview room and finally moved towards the stage for the program to begin, it was about 5:10 p.m.

A few children came up on the stage and offered roses and cards. Swami saw through each card and asked the names of the children too. Then the conductor offered the "notes" to Swami and taking padanamaskar, moved down the stage to begin the programme. The children's choir was dramatic in the sense that there was the story of Jesus depicted behind as the choir sang. And reciprocally, the drama was very musical in content! The synergy was beautiful as the scenes of Jesus making Peter, multiply the loaves of bread, awakening Lazarus from his deathly slumber and resurrecting on that good Friday were depicted by the children..

Swami moved down the stage and into the area where the children were seated. He began to personally distribute white cloth pieces to the boys who had participated in the drama. He called them out separately too saying, "All boys, come on" He then called the girls and gave them sarees. This was all topped by a group photograph with the actors. The flow of Grace did not stop there as Swami moved to the choir singers among the girls side and began to distribute the photo frames to them. He opened up one of the covers and taking the photo frame showed how on pressing a button, a blue light lit up the whole frame. This act lit up the girls' faces with joy. He also advised, "Put batteries and then all will function like this." Overwhelmed by His love, many broke down and Swami lovingly said, "Don't cry. Always smile and be happy."

Swami then shifted to the gents' side and distributed the same to the choir boys. He gifted the conductor and trainer with sarees. He then called Mrs. Behner, the wife of the main organiser and gave her a saree. Pointing to her husband seated on the stage, Swami said, "He will feel jealous." All laughed heartily. Swami moved up the stage and then as the Aarthi was going on, Swami gifted Mr. Behner with a cloth piece for a safari suit. Then He called out to his wife and said, "See, I gave him." Again there was a hearty laughter.

It was in this joyous atmosphere that Swami blessed all with *Abhayahastha* and retired at about 6:50 pm.

December 31, 2008 – A Poorna Chandra Session with Swami for SSSU Alumni

Prashanti Nilayam suddenly seemed to be filling up with former students of the Sri Sathya Sai University on the last day of 2008. The alumni of Bhagavan Baba's schools and colleges have decided to make a beginning at His lotus feet on the first day of the New Year, every year, and hence they congregate in increasing numbers each passing year on Dec 31-Jan1. Around 500 former students had assembled in the Divine presence of Bhagawan this time around to bid adieu to December 31 and welcome 2009.

And what's more heartening is that Swami too looks forward to His children's homecoming as He ensures that all arrangements are in place for their comfortable stay. But this time, He had decided to bestow a greater boon upon them as He had sent word that He would interact with all of them in the Poornachandra Auditorium after the morning *bhajans*. By 8:30 a.m., all the students had assembled in the auditorium. At about 9:00 a.m. Swami arrived for *darshan*. The time scheduled for the interaction with the alumni was only 10:00 a.m. But, while Swami took a complete round of the Sai Kulwant Hall, He seemed to be in a great hurry. Yes, no prizes for guessing why! His beloved children awaited Him in the auditorium and He seemed to eager to get there as soon as possible! Twenty minutes later, at 9:20 a.m. Swami received *aarathi* and moved into the Poornachandra auditorium.

A small stage had been arranged for Swami so that He could be seen by one and all assembled. Swami was welcomed by a small contingent of 'Veda chanting boys' and soon He took His place on the stage, and also in the thirsting eyes of every alumnus sitting there. There were also many elders whom Swami brought along with Him – Mr. Chakravarthy, Secretary of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust; Prof. Vishwanath Pandit, the current Vice Chancellor; Mr. V. Srinivasan, the All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation; Prof. G. Venkataraman, eminent scientist and former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University and currently the Director of the Radio Sai studios; and Mr. S. V. Giri, IAS and another former Vice Chancellor of His University. Mr. Chakravarthy introduced the speakers for the day.

First, Mr. S. V. Giri spoke on the responsibilities that rest on the strong shoulders of the alumni. As he spoke, an interesting incident took place. One of the members of the alumni, a senior, maybe above 50 years of age, kept moving to and fro right at the back, possibly to get a good view of the proceedings. Swami noticed that and seemed a bit uncomfortable. And sure enough, in less than two minutes, the student next to Swami came walking all the way to the back asking, "Who was walking over here?" At first everyone felt that Swami was disturbed. But soon it came to light that Swami was disturbed not because somebody was distracting Him but because He was concerned about that student's problem. The student whom Swami had sent

managed to locate this alumnus and asked, "Sir, would you like a chair to sit on? Swami sees that you are not able to sit on the floor." That senior alumnus answered with a nod saying, "No" and tears started streaming down his cheeks. He then got up and moved towards the front, and finally sat in the corner but in the first row! Swami saw that and seemed very satisfied!

The second speaker was Mr. V. Srinivasan. He spoke very inspiringly on the growth and spread of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations in India. Many facts little known to most of the devotees and students were revealed and the students applauded many times during his speech. After his presentation, Swami told him to announce with great pride that he was the All India President of Sai Organisations. An overwhelmed Srinivasan concluded his speech expressing that more than anything else he just wished to be a humble devotee. The alumni coordinator then went forward to request Swami for the divine discourse. Swami materialized vibhuti and gave it to him, and also agreed to address the students.

Now, another poignant scene took place. Swami noticed a student, Raghuram, who currently works in Radio Sai Global Harmony. For the past 4-5 years, he has been confined to a wheel chair because of a tragic accident. Swami asked him to come over to the dais. As the boy reached there, Swami waved His hand and materialized a gold ring. Amidst the cheer that ran about the hall, Swami enquired into the well being of the boy's mother and sister. Swami also promised him that he would very soon speak to them as a family and then put the ring onto his right hand. The boy then asked Swami for *padanamaskar*. Swami agreed and knowing that it was very difficult for the boy to bend down, Swami did something that no one could ever have imagined. He slowly lifted His right leg and placed it near the knee of the boy. After he touched it, Swami now raised His left leg too and placed it there! The boy was thrilled at this special *padanamaskar*. As he returned to His place, Swami began His divine discourse.

Swami emphasized the message of *Advaita*, stressing the point that there is nothing in this world which is not divine, and that we should conduct ourselves bearing this in mind. He stressed on the need for one and all to realise the inherent divinity. He also gave a few personalised instructions to the students. But the most interesting part was when towards the end, Swami asked, "Does anyone have doubts? Ask and I shall answer them now in a perfect manner." And a few questions were raised -

Question 1 – Swami, we know that we are truth and that truth is everywhere. So we must be everywhere right?.....

Swami seemed unable to follow the question, and hence the boy tried to explain (!) "Swami, I'm everywhere but I don't realize it...!"

Swami: You are not everywhere, you are right now here! (*everyone laughs*)...If you are in path of Truth then you will know you are the Truth.....(Swami conveyed to boy that if he believes he is the Eternal *Atma*,

then he is everywhere and if he restricts himself to the body then he is now here!)

Question 2: Swami, we don't have time available for spiritual activities and service as we are bogged by daily responsibilities. What shall we do (there were tears in his eyes out of helplessness)?

Swami: Don't feel bad about it; do as much as you can in the little time available. Do little service but offer it to the Lord. If you can't do even that, then just do your job or activity as a service to the Lord; that'll make Him happy.

Question 3: (In Kannada) Swami as we (boys) plan to do activities and projects in larger scale, how do we go about doing the same. Do we need to form organized groups and start off?

Swami: (In Kannada) Yes, form proper groups and go about it in a systematic way. I've already told this (Swami has mentioned the same in His discourses to management students).

Question 4: (one student who was a Teacher) Swami, we all have only one prayer in our hearts, you should walk like you used to earlier.

Swami: (without a pause) Yes, I will! I used to walk earlier properly, only recently I had a fall and doctors told me not to walk and take rest. I'm just abiding by their words. I have organized a Yagnam in Puttaparthi (the Athi Rudra Yagnam) and one in Chennai (The Athi Rudra Yagnam in Jan 2007). I'm managing quite a lot like this too, but I'll surely walk (Swami lifted both His legs and played them in the air as He spoke).

Question 5: Swami, what should we do to become closer to Swami?

Swami: (without any delay) Swami should (will) take you closer! (Swami conveyed it is His grace that matters not any amount of penance one does and added that...) If you want to become closer, keep Swami in your heart. Then you need not come to Swami and He will come closer to you.

Question 6: Swami, how do we get *Atmanandam* (perennial bliss)?

Swami: You should carry less luggage. Less luggage is more comfort, reduce your desires and put a ceiling on it.

Question 7: Swami, how do we take care of our kids in countries where there are not even Indian families, let alone Sai centers?

Swami: Where are you right now?

Boy: I've returned to India....

Swami: I'm very happy. Congratulations! (He became emotional...) America is not good at the moment, all our people should return to native land. One lakh in USA is equal to 10,000 in India.

Question 8: Swami, how do we achieve total surrender?

Swami: *Bangaru!* Surrender is not so easy; so many after they surrender would still carry the burden of doubt in their minds. So just follow how much you can and stop doubting.

It was already nearing 11:30 a.m. and Swami said that He would speak to all the next day too. Then Swami received *aarthi* and blessed those who took a flower and the holy grains up to Him. As He moved back towards His residence, Swami collected letters from all the students who lined up the entire pathway. He retired leaving behind cherished memories and wonderful feelings.

January 1, 2009 – New Year Day in the Divine Presence

The beginning of a New Year is something that everyone looks forward to, for that is a time when life seems to begin afresh in right earnest. Resolutions are made after the victories and defeats of the past year are analysed. A sense of euphoria fills the air and optimistic energy seems prevalent everywhere. Hope is rekindled and faith reaffirmed. Puttaparthi is no exception to these things. In the place where every moment seems new and fresh, and every day is a celebration as everyone lives in the physical presence of Divinity, New Years Day has been gifted to the alumni of Sri Sathya Sai University, for it seems as if Swami wishes to begin His New Year with His beloved children. And with each passing year, the alumni too have been assembling in ever increasing numbers. The first day of the year 2009 saw more than 700 former students of His schools and colleges gathering in the Sai Sai Kulwant Hall waiting for Him in eager readiness.

A Veda chanting contingent and a squadron of flag bearers waited at the Yajur Mandir to escort Swami into the Sai Kulwant Hall. It was after 10 a.m. that the doors of His residence opened. And what a sweet surprise Swami had in store for all! He has often said, "I am a man among men, woman among women and a child among children." It was as if He was saying, "I am a student among students" as He too, like all of them, came dressed in sparkling white! He was seated on a special movable throne and there could have been no better way to start the New Year. There is a prevalent belief that what happens on the first day of the year continues throughout, and another variant of this is the famous saying "Well begun is half done". If these ideas are true, 2009 is going to be sublimely special, and well, it is going to be so even if that belief is not true because when one lives always in His presence, life can only get better.

The chanting began as soon as Swami came out. First, the *Poorna kumbham* was blessed by Him, and then the flag bearers neatly filed past Him and saluted Him as they did so. After this was done, Swami too joined the procession that made its way towards the Sai Kulwant Hall. The procession hid Swami from the eager eyes that were waiting to see Him. But like the full moon appearing from behind the clouds, Swami emerged as He fell behind in the procession and soon there was a resoundingly cheerful applause that spread through the hall. The "Lord in white" is a glorious sight! He looks as if He is wearing His purity and innocence on His person.

Swami took a detour after the ladies side, and all the alumni gathered in the marble blocks seemed just a bit disappointed that Swami would not be coming near them. But Swami had another little surprise as He took another detour, and moved back towards the old students' area. Completing His round and filling everyone with Joy supreme, Swami moved onto the stage. His path to the stage was paved with those former students who had chanted the Vedas as part of the procession.

On the dais, the first thing He did was light the lamp. Thus, formally began the New Year celebrations for 2009! A cheer ran through the happy crowd and Swami sat facing all of them, a smile dancing on his luminous face. The first presentation was by the former members of the University brass band. Offering cards, the songs list and roses to Swami, they sought His blessings to begin their programme. Three pieces were played in all and they were interspersed with introductions to each of them by different members of the band. As they played, it was such a wonderful feeling, for here was the band constituted by members through the quarter century of the existence of the University, and they played like one big family.

Once the band finished its performance, the singers from among the alumni came forward to Swami and sought His permission to begin their presentation. Swami blessed them, and then started melodious songs specially composed for the occasion by the alumni. As the songs were going on, three huge cakes were brought up to Swami, and with a gentle smile, He cut each of them and lit a candle too. Before every song, there was a short introduction. One of them narrated in graphic detail as to how Swami was splashed with water from a faulty hot water tap that He had come to inaugurate in the Primary School. On that occasion, with a smile Swami had said, "I not only inaugurated the tap but also had the first bath!"

Many such instances were recounted and as each song began, students with roses and cards bearing the lyrics of the songs moved to Swami and presented them to Him seeking His blessings. Swami also released a few booklets and a newsletter that the alumni presented. He released the next volume of the audio CD, "A Bridge Across Time" which is a collection of *bhajans* sung by the alumni. After four songs a few members requested Swami for permission to dance and Swami approved. And so a *bhajan* medley formed the score for the short dance programme too. The dance turned out to be the item that made a huge smile blossom on His face which later erupted as a hearty laugh too! The dance was followed by more songs.

The highlight of the morning, as far as the participants were concerned, was the avalanche of *padanamaskars* that Swami showered. It began with the "head" of the Veda contingent moving up to Swami and requesting Him as to whether all could get the opportunity of touching His feet. Swami agreed and so almost 60-70 students came up on stage and took *padanamaskar*. While this was going on, all that transpired between the Lord and His children cannot be captured. Students, ranging from batches as old as 1980 to those from 2006-07, went to Him and thrilled themselves with His touch. It was a homecoming in the truest sense, and once all the members of the Veda group were through, Swami agreed to bless all the band boys too in the similar fashion. Finally, He blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all.

At this time, the members of the music group also sought His blessings and Swami promised them He would bless later as it was already late in the morning. It was 11:30 when Swami retired to Yajur Mandir.

In the evening, when Swami arrived, a surge of delight moved through the entire hall - the Lord looked magnificent in the maroon-red robe that He wore! White robe followed by the Red Robe – that was the colourful opening for the New Year! Swami took a complete round and as He came on stage, He blessed the University band boys to begin their performance. They played two pieces, the first one was a masterpiece from Yanni entitled "Santorini" and the second one was a tribute to the Divine Mother, it was the rendition of the bhajan *Eashwaramba Priya Tanaya*. As they completed, Swami blessed them all and then the current students began to sing songs.

Swami's ways are so wonderful and amazing. As two songs neared completion, He called out for the alumni and asked them to sing. They were taken in by surprise. They had not planned for this but then, as they say, when the head fails, heart takes over. And that is how memorable moments get etched into ones memories. They began to sing the famous songs of the mid 90s and it was a beautiful and nostalgic journey with music. Swami too was fully involved while the songs were presented. When the famous, "*Humko Tumse Pyaar Kitna*" began, Swami jokingly showed the tip of His nail and said, "*Only itna!* (only this much!)" There were smiles on every face as they reminisced the Swami of bygone years.

As the songs continued, suddenly two students from the *bhajan* group went up to Swami on the dais. They prayed to Him, "Swami, the day will not be complete without your sweet voice flowing into all of us. All of us are eager to listen to you. Please speak to us." Swami seemed to be refusing their request and He sent them back to their places. However, as the next song concluded, He signaled for the microphones and there was an explosive applause. And the next minute, Swami began His New Year Discourse. Here is a summary of what He said.

Swami began His discourse with the popular verse on the arrival of the *Sankranthi* (pongal) festival. He followed it with a vivid description of the season. It is a time when people are busy in agriculture and household activities; when the food grains and pulses are available in plenty and all the

farmers gather and sing in joy. The men visit their in-laws and all the members of the family join in with good humour and spend time in fun. Swami's description put everyone to perfect ease and with the mere power of His words, He brought alive the feelings and joy associated with the festival. He also beautifully narrated the tradition where the bull and cow are married off. The cow is named 'Sita' and the bull as 'Rama'. The people entreat and request 'Sita' to accept the handsome and virtuous 'Rama' as her husband!

He brought new meaning to the phrase, "Naa Deham" (literally meaning in Telugu – "My body") when He stated, "Naa means 'not' in Sanskrit. So when you say, *Naa Deham* or *Naa Manas*, it means, 'I am not the body, I am not the mind.'" And so, all our complaints and problems are due to our body attachment and our inability to control the mind. All the six vices are a result of our thoughts alone and there is nothing wrong with the creation. God gives neither joy nor sorrows. He is the eternal witness. It is the mind that does everything. It is responsible for our bondage and our liberation too. So, realise that you are God, Swami emphasized. The Christian message too is the same – To cut the 'i' across and achieve the 'Cross' which is God. The message was loud and clear – give up your identification with all that you are not - the body, mind, intellect - and identify with your Self - the true 'I'.

Swami exhorted that realising our true selves was the only thing to be done in life. "All the wealth, fame and relatives you acquire will add up to nothing. When the body dies, not even a fistful of dust can be taken along." He illustrated this with the story from the life of emperor Alexander where while on the death bed, he asks his ministers to parade his body in the towns with outstretched hands to let everyone know that even the great emperor, who conquered the world, is leaving it empty handed. Even the avatars like Rama and Krishna, having lived fulfilled lives, withdrew from their body and do not exist in a physical frame today, Swami said. And so, thoughts of the Self are paramount. Ultimately, the experience of the Self is inevitable for Self is existence and existence is Self. It has many forms. Pray to and worship the form of your choice but remember that ultimately it is all the Self.

All the symbolism has deeper meanings, He said and to elaborate on it, He waved His hand and materialized a gold ring with a diamond studded on it. In the western countries, the marriage is symbolized with the exchange of rings between the bride and groom. This symbolizes the Love which, like the diamond, should be permanent.

Elaborating on the significance of the recently held Sahasra Chandra Darshanam celebrations, Swami said, "The Lord is called *Sahasra Sheersha Purusha*. This does not mean that He has a thousand heads. It means that all the heads are His. So too, when it is said that the Lord had *Sahasra Chandra Darshanam*, it means that He sees all the minds for the mind is symbolized by the moon. If taken literally, it means Swami has seen crores of moons!

Swami went on to say that Love was the most important element of our lives. "You sang that Love is the only bond between us. Keep that always. Do not give up Love even if negative qualities come. Once Love is there, all other

values come. *Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi, Prema* and *Ahimsa* are the only five qualities that exist within and to bring it out is "Educare", Swami explained. This love exists in all like the moon that is reflected in the waters of a thousand pots. There is only one moon and there is only One - that's Love.

He lashed out against foolish enquiries saying that instead of delving into the underlying unity, people enquire into divisive facts like which is Rama's actual birthplace and so on. When that question was posed to Swami, He had said, "Rama's actual birthplace is the womb of Kausalya." Find yourself within and all will be known, Swami said. All that you call as "My" is only Maya. God and Truth are One though known by different names. Do not fall prey to the paintings and photos being sold. Neither the photographer nor the painter has seen the Lord. They do so out of their imagination. Truly speaking, you are God. Have that faith and display God qualities. If you just close your eyes and see inwards, you will find God.

After having explained all this, Swami said that if anyone had still any doubts left, they must be really dull-witted.

After speaking for more than 70 minutes, Bhagavan asked for *Bhajans* to begin at 7.25 p.m. It was at this time that keeping His morning's promise, Swami granted all the members of the alumni music group the coveted chance to touch His feet. They came in a long line and one by one took His blessings and returned to their places beaming with joy. *Prasadam* was distributed, and Swami accepted *aarati* at 7.45 p.m. before returning to His residence. As the *aarathi* concluded, one more beautiful incident happened. Swami called the priest and gifted the diamond ring He had materialised earlier to him. The priest was thrilled to receive the divine gift.

January 2, 2009 – Drama on Subhas Chandra Bose by the Sai Youth of Maharashtra and Goa

As the New Year Day festivities concluded on January 1, Puttaparthi saw an increasing habitation by the Sai Youth from the states of Maharashtra and Goa. Donning their orange scarves, they filled up large areas in the Mandir on January 2nd, the day Swami had blessed them to put up their programmes in front of Him. A huge curtain of the Tricolour (India's national flag) hung from the ceiling to the floor acting as the giant background. It was at about 5:30 p.m. when Swami arrived for *darshan*. The most revered "Orange" wended its way through the orange throngs and the youth rejoiced at the opportunity of close *darshan*. He passed by the massive backdrops of the red fort and the curtain into the gents' side.

After completing the *darshan* rounds, Swami moved into the interview room. Twenty minutes later, He came out and asked for the programme to begin. A train of youth moved up to Swami with various offerings, and Swami patiently blessed each and every one of them. He accepted roses, glanced at cards, observed photos and permitted everyone to take *padanamaskar*. Then, Swami called the coordinator and told him to make the announcement and

begin the programme soon. The introduction for the drama on Netaji Subash Chandra Bose was given, and then the performance began. It started with the lighting of the *Akhanda Jyothi*. 27 lamps of divine light, which were lit from a single flame from the Divine Precincts of Dharmakshetra, and which had traveled through 27 Districts of Maharashtra, were presented at a beautiful ceremony in front of Swami. The 27 Jyotis merged into one in the Divine presence, and that was used to light a candle, which Swami used to light the "Maha Jyothi" as they referred to it. After that ceremony, the drama began.

Subash Chandra Bose also called Netaji was a colossus amongst the brave men of the world. He was born on January 23, 1897 in Cuttack as the ninth child among the fourteen that Janakinath Bose, an advocate, and Prabhavati Devi, a pious and God-fearing lady had. A brilliant student, he topped the matriculation examination of Calcutta province and passed his B.A. in Philosophy from the Presidency College in Calcutta. He was strongly influenced by Swami Vivekananda's teachings and was known for his patriotic zeal as a student. It was his parents' insistence that kept him away from the freedom struggle but not for long, as the passion for true "freedom" had been deeply embedded in him. As he later wrote to his mother, he was not fighting only for independence from British, for, the nation still had to be administered after that; he also desired true freedom in its complete spiritual sense. The drama traced all the major milestones in his life and it was an inspiring enactment. Swami too watched the *drama* very keenly.

As the drama concluded with the final song with Bose marching out with the INA - the Indian National Army, the Tricolour was waved in thousands by all the members of the audience from the organising states. Swami consented and moved down the stage to grant the participants their cherished desire of a group photo with Him. As He did that, He also spoke to many boys and accepted letters. One particular boy almost broke down telling Swami that though he had been studying and trying very hard, he was not getting a call to do MBA in Bhagavan's University. Swami took his application form and gave instructions that the call letter be sent to that boy! When we are with God, the solutions for problems crop up as fast, if not faster, than the rate at which the problems arise!

Then, moving towards the front, Swami called out for the three different-aged 'Boses'! He took a picture with the three and said, "This is young Bose. He is elder and that is the eldest one!" There were smiles all around. *Prasadam* was then distributed as the youth started *bhajans*. Later, on Swami's command, the *bhajan* singing was taken over by the current students of His University. It was quite late in the evening by the time Swami received *aarthi* and retired to His residence.

January 3 and 4, 2009 – Day 2 and 3 of the programme by Maharashtra and Goa Sai Youth

January 3 saw the second chapter of the triad of programmes that the youth from Maharashtra and Goa had come prepared with. On that day, it was to be

a sitar and "zitar" concert by Niladri Kumar, son and disciple of sitar player Pandit Kartick Kumar who was in turn a disciple of Pandit Ravi Shankar. Considered a child prodigy, Niladri Kumar started learning sitar under his father at the age of four and gave his first public performance at the age of six. The "zitar", a creation of his, is an instrument that is a fusion of the sitar and the guitar. Along with his accompanying artistes, he sat ready from 3:30 p.m. awaiting Swami to arrive and bless him with the great privilege of playing in His presence.

It was 5:15 p.m. when Swami arrived for *darshan*. He took the detour after the ladies side and went in straight to the interview room. A few minutes later, He came on stage and blessed the artistes of the day. Bringing the Veda chanting to a halt, He permitted Niladri Kumar to begin his concert.

Starting with paying homage to Swami he said that when he first came to Swami many years ago, his hand was on bandages. Swami had blessed him in the *darshan* lines and told him to play the next day. He did exactly that and from that day on, every note that has issued from him, has been due to the blessings of his guru and Swami! He began with the zitar first and played a piece that was clearly a fusion of the east and west. The "twain had indeed met", with due regards and respects to Rudyard Kipling.

There was accompaniment on the *tabla*, *mridangam*, keyboard and the jazz drum kit. After a sprightly start with the fusion piece, the concert meandered along the more traditional lines with the classical sitar coming into play. The young sitar virtuoso amazed and thrilled all, especially those trained in music, with his superb rendition. There was a piece where He played in pitches unimaginable on the sitar, using the help of a wood piece as a prop. That excited the audience so much that they began to clap even before he had rendered what he had desired to. He, therefore, had to repeatedly appeal for calm so that the beauty of the entire effort could be appreciated.

After his three pieces of rendering, the artiste concluded and Swami seemed very happy. He called him and what a response it was! He rushed straight to His feet and sought His blessings. Swami gifted safari pieces to all the artistes and materialized a gold ring for Niladri Kumar. After giving *padanamaskar* to all, Swami asked them to sing something! The keyboard accompanist also was a good singer, and so all of them went back and began the *bhajan*, "Madhusudhana Hare Madhava". They built into the *bhajan* pieces in which the *tablist*, *mridangam* player and the drummer could display their respective expertise. A *jugabandi* of sorts ensued and the entire piece lasted for about 10 minutes. As that concluded, Swami gifted them a satisfied smile and then received
aarhi.

The last day of the Maharashtra and Goa youth pilgrimage was on January 4 and planned for the day were two songs programmes, one each by the ladies and the gents. Swami came out for *darshan* at about 4:15 p.m. and after the rounds, arrived on stage. He sat listening to the chants for a while and then moved into the interview room. It was about 5:00 p.m. when He emerged again and asked the youth to begin their programme. He blessed both the

ladies who went up to Him by sprinkling the holy grains on their heads. The ladies then started their rendering.

It was a programme based on the great women of Bharat. There was a short narrative in English and Telugu. It must be recorded here that the speakers who spoke in Telugu did it "by heart" in every sense. Though ignorant of the language, their diction and delivery were perfect. There were narratives on the great women like the Rani Laxmibai, Draupadi, Urmila (the wife of Lakshmana) and the wife of Saint Tulsidas. A song specially composed on the woman concerned followed each narrative and there was also a mini-ballet depiction of a major incident in that woman's life. Swami seemed quite absorbed in the presentation, except once in a while He would keep looking at the gents' section and ask, "Why are you all not singing?"

Soon enough, on the conclusion of the ladies programme, the gents came to Swami to seek blessings to begin their part of the presentation. They also got a book released, which Swami personally signed, in His own hand! The songs had all been pre-recorded and the youth sang over the CD track. Clearly, Swami was not too happy. He told the co-coordinator that everything has already been recorded. Swami seems to prefer performances to be "Live" for there is a joy when we do things directly for God in His presence. The end result may not be so fantastic, but God never sees the results - He is interested only in the efforts. After two songs, Swami moved into the interview room and the songs too went on. They could not cease as the tracks played on. The songs were *abhangs* and some were those that Swami Himself had composed.

After the programme concluded, Swami arrived on stage again. He had an enigmatic smile on His face. He came down the stage and went first towards the womens' section and began to distribute sarees to them. Then, He waded right into their midst and posed with them for a group photo. They were a picture of high joy and deep gratitude as Swami sat smiling among them. Then He advised, "Do more work. Do not get into politics. There is so much politics among ladies!"

All this while, the gents side was a picture of doubt - would Swami come to them? Swami smiled and moved towards the gents' side. There was a loud cheer as Swami got safari cloth pieces for them too. Later, He posed for pictures amidst them. He accepted letters from many of them and then moved to the front, where He sat watching the distribution in progress. In the meanwhile, noticing the video cameraman shooting Him He said, "Shoot them! Not me." The cameraman went up to Him and said, "Swami it is you who lends value to all that we shoot." Swami seemed to have no reply for that and rightly so, for of what value is anything that is devoid of Him? Swami then moved up the stage and asked the ladies to lead the *bhajans* for the evening. Two *bhajans* later, Swami received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

January 7, 2009 – Musical Presentation by Devotees from New Zealand

Christmas is a time of massive inflow of Christians and Westerners into Puttaparthi. They come in different ways and by different modes, but arrive only for one reason - what Swami calls as "recharging their spiritual batteries." Traveling from far away countries to India and spending time here takes its toll on the energies and finances of these devotees. Therefore, most of them make a trip once a year. And having done that, they stay on for another 10-15 days and return to their homelands renewed, recharged and refreshed. That was the story of a group of devotees from New Zealand and Swami seemed to have decided that the "recharge" would take place for all of them on January 7. Swami had agreed for their choir programme and had also issued a very interesting command - that all the members of the choir should be seated on either side of the main stage, and not in front of the stage like other groups do.

From 2 p.m. itself, all the members of the choir arranged themselves and tested out their instruments and the mikes. Swami arrived for *darshan* in the evening and took a detour at the ladies side itself and moved towards the stage. On the way, He spoke to some of the ladies who were part of the choir, and then slowly moved to the gents' side of the stage, and then accepted their cards and programme schedule. Finally, He sat in the centre of the stage and sent the two students who were with Him on some errand. As He sat, He saw the ladies group from New Zealand which had spilt into two groups, with one group sitting below the stage on the granite blocks of the hall due to lack of space on the dias. Calling a student, He told him to take Him down towards those seemingly "unlucky" ones who could not make it onto the stage. He took a round around them and also around the entire ladies side!

Finally, He came on stage once again and then blessed the Vedam to a halt so that the programme could begin. He was in for a surprise as the Maoris and the Kiwis began their own Vedic chants. This choir has been comprised of devotees who have been willing and committed enough to attend all practices, and had understood the need for and pledged to follow the 9-point Sadhana programme. There were visible signs of surprise on His face and He blessed the conductor to start the actual choir. Before that, Swami blessed a green stone that the organisers presented Him with. The programme began with the energetic vocal Maori chanting by a Kiwi woman, and clearly Swami was impressed with her voice and delivery. Called the "Karanga", it is the summon calls for the ancestors to the Lotus Feet of Swami. Then they began singing the "*E Nga Iwi*" as they called it. It was a hand action song, which depicted calling people to God. Swami looked at the actions to His left and right, and smiled in loving amusement. Swami was so engrossed that, to the members of the audience, He appeared like a spectator at a tennis match, watching the ball go left and right as He kept turning to both sides to watch the animated devotion of these sweet people from New "Sai" land' as they call it.

"Ti Hore Mai Te Rangi" was another dance performed by the girls and ladies. Involving concentration and dexterity, it made an interesting watch and Swami

seemed very happy seeing it. One song that was sung was composed by one of devotees from amongst them while seeing Swami walking during *darshan* a few years ago. Their programme lasted about 45 minutes. As it concluded, Swami called the New Zealand woman who had chanted the "Karanga". He spoke to her and then moved towards the ladies side. There, He materialised a gold chain for that lady and Himself put it around her neck. There was a loud cheer. Sarees were then brought from inside, and then Swami asked some of the ladies to distribute to all of them. He sat there personally supervising the distribution and also asked a few ladies, "Did you get a saree?" After ensuring that all had received His gift, Swami moved to the gents' side and repeated the same shower of Love and Grace, with white Safari pieces this time. He blessed many of them with a word or two, and accepted their letters.

Then calling the video cameraman Swami asked, "Have you covered everyone?"

"Yes Swami! All have been covered."

"Have you covered the ladies?"

"No, Swami"

"Then? You said you covered all. The women must be covered too."

"Swami, there is another camera covering them. This camera was for gents."

The boy then told Him, "Swami there is a hair that has got into Your eye." He tried to remove it and then Swami shrugged him saying, "It is only hair, right?" Swami then gently took the hair out of His eye and neatly aligned it on His head. Seeing this, everyone burst out in happiness, and Swami looked so handsome and He too seemed to blush. Swami then returned to the centre of the stage and asked for the *bhajans* to begin. *Prasadam* was blessed for distribution and as one *bhajan* neared completion, Swami asked for the *aarathi*. After the *aarathi*, Swami again interacted with the women on His way to the car, and thus ended another memorable day in Prashanti Nilayam.

First week of January – Sports Meet Practice sessions

The biggest event in the first month of any year in Prashanti Nilayam is the annual sports and cultural meet, for it is this event that brings together all the students of Swami from the different campuses to Puttaparthi. In 2009, by January 6, all the students had arrived from Bangalore and Anantapur, and the different time slots had been allotted to various campuses for their practice sessions. And to make matters most beautiful, Swami kept visiting the grounds often to charge all the children.

Generally, when Swami decides to visit the grounds, it is a happy time for all around. The devotees get a scent of it and immediately rush to the streets and wait for Him. The flower mongers have a field day as roses to adorn the roof or bonnet of Swami's car gets sold by the dozens. It is the same story for the coconut sellers too, as many a coconut gets liberated with a "release" in front of the car. The few students in the Mandir rush towards the ground and while the remaining ones are already there. There is often an elaborate escort to

take Swami near the dais. And once Swami reaches the stadium, it's more like an open menu of items from which the Lord chooses.

On the afternoon of January 5, the students from Brindavan and Anantapur had not yet arrived. Swami came to the stadium and a small carpeted-stage had been set up for Him in the D area in front of the Shanti Vedika. The sweet smiling Sai, descended from the car and sitting on the mini dais asked for the programmes to begin. And so, the items of the Prashanti Nilayam campus were on display. There was one item, the gun drill, with the art of defending oneself when one runs out of bullets as its theme. Swami appreciated the disciplined manner and straight rows, which were formed. As they displayed it more, however, Swami asked, "Are these terrorists? Why is there so much violence?" The message, though subtle, was very clear. Time and again we have seen how Swami, the epitome of everything positive, doesn't like the slightest thought or show of negativity. Swami clearly didn't want this item. However, after that comment, Swami continued to interact with the coordinator of that item and told him about the discipline and order prevalent there. The wonderful aspect of this anecdote is that despite the fact that these students had trained diligently for more than a fortnight, the item was dropped and later the boys enthusiastically picked up another drill termed as the "log drill" which was done using long pieces of wood.

Swami watched the other items such as the "wheels of death" and the motorbike formations. He called one of the bikers and asked, "How many people will be sleeping when you jump?" There was a look of anxiety on His face. "Swami, there will be none sleeping. The jump will be done without that." Swami seemed very happy at this. The gymnasts were not yet ready but they too got their chance in front of Swami two days later on another visit by Him to the ground. On that occasion, after the Anantapur campus had finished its presentation, Swami asked for the boys' items. Everyone thought that He was referring to Brindavan. But when they came, Swami said, "I have already seen yours. Prashanthi Nilayam now." That was the gymnastic item that He had not seen. The boys were touched that He remembered! On January 7, which happened to be the Vaikuntha Ekadasi Day, the warden of the Senior Boys Hostel requested Swami to visit the hostel and have a look at the magnificently decked Ranganatha statue. Swami said that He knew it and He would visit at a more appropriate time.

Swami chose and blessed the torch vehicle, which was a lion in 2009. In this manner, He had a look at all the items. There was a mass electric-scooter event done by the school students, which brought a smile on all faces, and there were also some stunts on ladders that impressed Bhagavan. The Brindavan campus and Anantapur campus too got their chance in front of Him and they displayed all that they had prepared. The entire Anantapur sequence was a series of dances based on the creation of the Universe by the Lord, and topping all these were tough yoga exercise on moving auto rickshaws. The Brindavan campus put up its presentation too one of His visits. The lion dance, dragon dance and the martial arts items were all crisp and impressive. Swami saw the Primary school programme too in two separate parts - the skating and other related events in the Primary school campus itself and the

other mass items in the ground. As He saw the skating, Swami made enquiries into the safety of the children. All the little ones also had the privilege of going up to His car window and chanting the Veda mantras even as He blessed them. The mass items by the girls, especially, were marvels of synchronisation and grace. At the end of the Primary sessions, Swami remarked that He was very happy and the children did exceedingly well.

On two separate occasions, Swami witnessed the march past too and once He saw the entire morning ceremony. What was so touching and wonderful was that, Swami Himself puts in so much effort during the practice sessions. Having perfected all items, He becomes the recipient on the actual Sports day. Swami also had a look at the stage decorations and the ground preparations. He noticed that the lamp posts lining the road had not been decorated with the flower bouquets and that took everyone by surprise for He had noticed such a small detail! But the prize was taken by another lovely episode. Swami said that the steps leading to the Shanti Vedika dais were very steep on the sides and so the primary school children, when they come up to gift Him the bouquets, should come from the gentler steps in front of the stage. Thus, the practice that had been on from so many years changed this year. Swami also said that the children should be waiting near the stage itself and mustn't come running all the way from the middle of the ground! Such is the concern of the Lord for His children!

And thus were filled the days with Swami being omnipresent even literally on the grounds. The lord was taking more pains than anybody else for the grand event on January 11.

January 11, 2009, Annual Sports and Cultural Meet

Vidyagiri stadium stood glorious, bedecked in all finery in anticipation of the Lord's arrival on the fine morning of the 11th of January, 2009 for the Annual Sports and Cultural Meet of the Sri Sathya Sai Educational institutions. The stadium had been filling from as early as 5:45 a.m. with devotees, especially the parents and relatives of the students involved in the various events. It was a few minutes before 8:30 a.m. when Swami arrived in His wonderful white robe, seated in the front of the Porte car. He entered the stadium from the Primary school entrance. There was a welcome applause as the Anantapur Brass band struck up a lively tune.

Bhagawan was escorted by representative students from all the campuses of the University on powerful, 160cc motorbikes. The road had been lined with decorative lamps on either sides and the lamp posts were embellished with bouquets. As the entourage reached the approximate midway point, the Anantapur band moved to either sides making a way through them for Swami and handing over the baton for leading Him to the Brass band of the Prashanthi Nilayam campus. A contingent of colourful flag bearers marched to the slow beat provided by the band and almost all the people on the stands were standing to catch a glimpse of their sweet, beloved Lord. Moving through

the canopy of flags near the Shanti Vedika, Swami entered the D area of the Vedika where He was welcomed by the Vice-Chancellor, Principals and Wardens of the various campuses with roses. He ascended the stage through the gentle lift and as soon as He came on stage, He lit the lamp to mark an auspicious beginning for the Annual Sports & Cultural Meet. Once He settled at the centre of the stage, everyone awaited for the lovely day to unfold.

As always, the opening ceremony is the parade in which Swami takes much pride. The band began the march beat and the different squads from all the campuses came marching by the stage, saluting the Chancellor as they moved in harmony and synergy. And so it was that the colourful companies from the Primary school, the dainty divisions of the Anantapur campus, the regal regiments from the Higher Secondary School and the brisk battalions of the Institute. Each group put up a delightful display for the Divine to behold. It was indeed an awe-inspiring sight to see all the squads arranged in the ground and taking a pledge of love and loyalty to Sports, the Motherland and above all to dear Swami. The flame was then brought on stage and Swami used it to light the torch which was carried by athletes on its journey towards its resting place. The final leg of the journey was done by the majestic lion figure that Swami had chosen as the torch vehicle a few days back. All eyes were on the figure of the king of the jungle as he ascended the hill slowly with the beautiful song, "*Tera Hi Pyaar*" in the background. And then there was an applause as the flame was lit. On stage, doves and balloons were released and finally the Brass bands came marching to a brisk tempo to conclude the opening ceremony.

It was the turn of the Prashanti Nilayam campus to put up their show first. Beginning with the display of the magnificent golden eagle, that was the campus mascot of sorts, the students brought it right up to the stage and sought Swami's blessings. The sight of the golden eagle against the backdrop of a lovely blue sky spotted with puffy white clouds was indeed a heavenly experience. And then began the actual sports starting with the *yoga asanas* on the floor and a tower in honour of the brilliant Sun god. That was quickly followed by gymnasts and acrobats using trampolines and beds as props. After a few warm up jumps, they quickly progressed to leaps and somersaults over two cars at first and finally over two cars and a bike in a row! As that was being appreciated, battery powered TVS teen scootys, several dozens of them, populated the field. Making colourful formations and moving so aptly with the music that had been composed for the event, they filled splashes and dashes (dots actually; just that "dashes" rhymes with "splashes") of the primary colours. They ended their event with all 60 of them waving yellow and green flags after a "human countdown clock" flagged them away!

What followed next was stunts on what is commercially known as the rings of death. These are structures which end with rings on either ends of an arm and students walk and jump in the rings as the entire structure rotates along a centre pivot. This item drew a lot of applause which built into a crescendo as the rigs swirled on faster and faster. The next item was a very unique and interesting orchestra constituted of bamboo rods, canes, kettles, drums, saucers, pans, pots, vessels and plates along with spoons and ladles. It was

lively and induced feet tapping among all present nearby. Those on the stage were specially delighted at this creative and rhythmic item.

The "Ascenders" then descended onto the main foreground. They were acrobats on ladders and the entire item was about how to reach the top when there seems to be no wall to prop your ladder against. It was all about independence of the spirit and it climaxed with a higher secondary school student ascending 12 feet of sheer ladder! As a final formation, huge ladders and humans formed a lovely swing structure on which a costumed Lord Krishna swung merrily. From the sides then rolled in the Prashanti wheels, the local variant of the famous "German wheels." The students exhibited great skill, technique and strength as they moved in and along the metal wheels. All kind of feats were performed the most wonderful ones being those in which the students formed the spokes of these wheels in various poses. It concluded with three students making a concentric circle within the wheel as they rolled past the divine Chancellor.

A drill with 3 metre long logs of wood followed after which the 160 cc bikes thundered into the ground. These bikers displayed some spectacular ramp jumps, the best one being the synchronised jump involving 8 bikes. Mr.Venu Srinivasan of TVS motors was thanked for providing bikes and Scootys for the event. Swami lovingly called him and blessed him. An overwhelmed Srinivasan almost had tears rolling own his eyes as Swami posed for a photograph with him. The final formation with campus song came into place and the students of Prashanti Nilayam offered their pranaams to Swami.

It was the turn of the Anantapur campus next. Their whole presentation was themed along the lines of the creation and the five elements. They carried an impressive Shiva Linga at the start and that formed their backdrop throughout. The first was a classic Shiva Tandavam dance. Lord Shiva and Parvati, considered as the parents of the world were in centre and the ganas or demigods were grouped in front of them. The dance was very well choreographed and executed with finesse. After that, there was a depiction of the elements: space, air, water, fire and earth. It ended with a powerful message to save earth and save life. The campus presentation was rounded off with some yogic postures and other difficult exercises on auto rickshaws. Then all the girls gathered in front of their dear Lord and sang their hearts out in gratitude.

Brindavan campus was the last to put up its show. And they began energetically with a grand opening. Out strode dragons and lions majestically heralding warriors of the Samurai and the Kalari clans. The beginning was the dragons, on the eternal quest for the pearl of wisdom. There were three dragons which were handled skillfully and energetically by the students. Overwhelming that surge were the lions. Two students constituted each lion, working in perfect synchronisation and harmony. The high point of the item was when two of the lions climbed on specially placed bar steps and performed some jaw dropping feats. This was topped with display of skill and strength by the martial artists as they broke pots.

Another interesting demonstration was a fight that showed how a 90 year old could fend off 3-4 youths with proper techniques. The clangs and crashes of the sword and shields and the cracks of sticks as the battles were followed by the claps of the audience. Amidst all this group activity was what we prefer to call the "human rubber band". A student performed amazingly elastic feats, the best being his unsupported bend backward to pick up a handkerchief with his mouth. The final formation brought the Brindavan campus to a close and Swami left the stadium blessing all.

It should be put on record that students from their respective campuses went up to Swami, both, before and after their respective presentations to offer pranaams and gratitude.

The afternoon session was all about the primary school. Swami arrived after 4:20 p.m. and sat on the stage. He was welcomed to the stage by a special escort party of cart wheeling children! As the tiny tots came to offer bouquets to Him, Swami said that they too should come up by the lift He used as the steps were quite steep! That was so touching and the whole stadium applauded as the children went up the stage and offered Him the card and flowers. Then their programme began. As always, the Primary school programme was a melting pot of music, athleticism, grace and grandeur. The dances done by the small children were all simple and elegant but involved wonderful patterns and designs. A view from above, as God would see it, made the patterns visible and they were enthralling to say the least. There was a dance and song about stars and the children made a wonderful star formation. These were visible very well from high places like say the Hanuman statue. Many more dances followed, including a colourful ribbon dance and another in which rings were used.

The boys put up some clever gymnastics and interesting stunts on roller skates. The highlight of the roller skates event was the ramp jump that the boys did over a bike. Like the waters of a perennial river, the students from the Primary school seemed to just flow into the ground from all directions at all times. Swami was so happy and excited like a child. He seemed to enjoy the Primary school the best. It was as if the morning programme was like the official one and the evening was for Swami to sit back and relax!

The undoubted high point of the day was when the children came forward for the finale. Oh God! What a wonderful colour fest it was. It was as if several rainbows had descended at the same time at a spot. Balloons flying high and colour bombs spewing various coloured powders into the air created the atmosphere of great festivity and joy. All the children came forward and swung rhythmically to the song that was on. But children that they were, they swung in different directions and their chaotic, yet beautiful pattern thrilled everyone. Swami granted blessings galore as He raised His hands again and again to bless the children. He spoke to some of the guests on stage as He moved towards the lift. Granting a final blessing and benediction with both raised hands, Swami moved into the car and retired for the day.

January 13, 2009 Drama by Brindavan Campus

The cultural component in this year's Annual Sports and Cultural Meet was pretty prominent, with the Brindavan and Prashanti Nilayam campuses of the University putting up dramas. The themes selected were devotional and surcharged with the students' love for their beloved Swami.

On the 13th, the students of the Brindavan campus got permission to put up their drama and so from 12 noon itself, work began in right earnest to erect the sets. It was complete only by 4:40 PM after which at about 4:50 PM, Swami arrived for darshan in the car. As Swami completed the ladies side darshan round and moved into the stage area, the entire set and backdrop lay hidden behind a huge veil. Completing the darshan round, Swami moved into the interview room. Slowly the sets were put in place and everyone waited eagerly. Huge television screens had been put up in various parts of the hall to facilitate comfortable viewing for all. Swami moved into the bhajan hall where all the participants of the drama were seated. He interacted with them for about 10 minutes and enquired into the roles and costumes of many of the actors. It was about 5:20 PM when Swami came out and sat onstage and asked for the programme to begin.

Along with the veil, jaws dropped upon beholding the magnificence and splendour of the intricate sets. Towering till the roof and standing about 30 feet across, just admiring all different facets would have taken an hour! The drama to be staged was entitled, "Bhakta Potana." Four students playing major roles in the drama came up to Swami and presented Him the card and flowers of dedication. The drama opened with the scene at the magnificent temple that had been set. The inspiring story of the devotee-poet Pothana was threaded as a discussion between Lord Vishnu and Garuda, His divine eagle-mount. Pothana firmly believes in the truth that only that is worthwhile which is dedicated to the Lord. His relative, the poet Srinatha (literally meaning, "the Lord of Wealth") tries to persuade him to get salvation for himself through riches and fame. But Pothana becomes the true "Sri-Natha" by making the Lord his treasure. He works miracles through his sheer love for the Lord and cures a rich atheistic and cynical landlord, Gajendra of his paralysis. The high point in Pothana's life occurs when Lord Rama appears in person in his presence and commands him to write the Bhagavatham in Telugu. Implicit obedience to His Lord has made Pothana a household name in Andhra Pradesh today where his Bhagavatham is revered and adored.

The Padma Nayaka king of Warangal, Sarvajana Singha Bhoopaala, wanted Pothana to dedicate 'Andhra Maha Bhagavatamu' to him. The king was himself a scholar and wrote many works including Rasdrnavasudhdhaka-a well known Sanskrit drama. But, Pothana refused to obey the king's orders and dedicated the Bhagavatham to Lord Rama, whom he worshiped with great devotion. He believed poetry was a divine gift and it should be utilized for salvation by devoting it to the God. The king got infuriated and commanded his troops to destroy the work saying that if it was truly Rama's property, He would protect it. The whole village decided to stand as a shield but were soon crushed by the brutal force of the soldiers. Finally when all was

seemingly lost, an invisible force blew away all the soldiers. The true devotees at the scene see the great devotee Hanuman protecting his Lord's work! The king begs pardon and all celebrate the glory, grandeur and Love of the Lord.

Threaded into the drama were beautiful songs, dances and stories of the mischievous Lord Krishna from the Bhagavatham. The devotion filled evening came to a close with the massive final formation. What a unique idea it was! All the participants of the drama came forward and offered aarthi to Swami. A simultaneous 100 aarthi performance was indeed a sight to behold. As they concluded, Swami was so very happy and proud. He seemed to get quite emotional as the final song spoke the Truth of how He was the ultimate redeemer and support. Once the song and dance concluded, in a spontaneous gesture, Swami beckoned the student playing the role of Pothana and created a gold chain for him. What followed next was a series of group photographs wherein all the participants of the drama - those on stage and those off it too- came to Swami in small groups and had a memorable picture taken. When Swami gives, which is something He does so very often, He gives completely. Everyone was so joyous and dozens of letters and cards exchanged hands. Swami spoke to many of the students fulfilling many dreams in that one quick moment.

After the whole session, Swami told all the students to sit against the magnificent backdrop and asked the photographer to take pictures of that beautiful sight. Then, calling the warden of the Brindavan campus, Swami expressed appreciation for the drama. He also promised, "After I visit Muddenahalli, I will come and stay in Brindavan. That time put up a full 3 hour drama on the Bhagavatham and I will see it." Needless to say there was a rapturous applause at this joyous news. Receiving aarthi and having the announcement made prize distribution for the students would take place the following day on the holy occasion of Sankranthi, Swami retired for the day.

January 14 2009, Sankranthi Celebrations. Prize distribution and Drama by Prashanthi Nilayam Campus

Sankranthi is a festival that signifies the beginning of the harvest season for farmers in the Indian Sub-Continent. This is a harvest festival celebrated not only all over India but in other South East Asian countries as well. The day on which the sun begins its journey northwards is referred to as Makara Sankranti. Sankramana means "to commence movement". Hence, the name Makara Sankranti is given to one of the largest, most auspicious, but varied festivals in the Indian subcontinent. As Swami says, the northward movement of the sun, towards the Himalayas where Lord Shiva resides, signifies the culmination of a period spent in intense thoughts of the Lord with the soul finding fulfillment in the Divine. Traditionally, this has been the story at Prashanti Nilayam with the students especially receiving the sweet fruit of their month-long efforts for the Sports and Cultural Meet, from their dearest Lord.

The morning saw Swami being welcomed into the Kulwant hall by the Institute

Brass band followed by a regal regiment of flag bearers. Swami came in the special golden chair. It is a wonderful opportunity and joyous occasion when Swami arrives in that chair for it is a foot higher than the usual one. Swami took a complete round of the Sai Kulwant Hall.

It was quite a sight to behold when the flag bearers formed a canopy of flags under which Swami passed, with a sweet smile on His face.

Completing the rounds on the gents side, Swami moved up the stage. All the different trophies and prizes adorned the stage. Swami seemed to be having something to convey to all. Calling Professor Anil Kumar, Swami asked him to make an announcement. And then came the joyous news that Kumari Chaparala Sohini from the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Prashanthi Nilayam had achieved the **rank #1** in the highly competitive all India CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) examination for the year 2008. She would be honoured in the Prime Minister's gallery on Republic Day. The student was called onstage and felicitated. Swami presented her a silk saree and a trophy. She took padanamaskar and expressed her gratitude to Him.

This was followed by Swami blessing all the medals and certificates before bestowing them upon the students. Swami enquired into the details of the medals won by the different campuses and had it announced. After that, Swami presented the cups to different campuses. Swami kept stressing that all the prizes were being given by the 'government' to honour all the prize winners. The representatives from the Prashanthi Nilayam, Brindavan, Anantapur and Music college came up and received the cups from Swami. This time, there were two cups for each campus- one golden and one silver. For the Primary school, two kids came up along with the warden and the headmistress. It was a beautiful sight as Swami had the cups neatly rearranged and posed with them for pictures. And when everyone else seemed to have forgotten, Swami reminded that the Higher Secondary school had not received its trophies. Everyone applauded and smiles spread as the students went up and collected their cup. This minor incident portrayed the greatest Truths of life. Only God will remain and never forget you. Everyone is lost in their own hurry and businesses. The Lord alone has time for all and He has come for all. After the distribution, Swami delivered the following divine discourse available at :

http://sssbpt.org/Pages/Prashanthi_Nilayam/MakaraSankranthiDiscourse2009.html

Just for the record, it is reproduced here:

Bharat is the motherland of many noble souls who earned great name and fame in all the continents of the world. This is the land of valorous people who vanquished the foreign rulers in the battlefield and attained independence. This is the land that excelled in music, literature, and other fine arts. Having been born in this great land of Bharat, oh boys and girls! It is your sacred duty

to protect its rich cultural heritage.
(Telugu poem)

Dear students! Be prepared to uphold the honour and glory of this country of Bharat! You are sure to come out victorious in this effort.

Today, people are able to achieve great progress in secular and scientific fields, but they are unable to march forward in the field of spirituality. One has to progress in spirituality more than in other fields. People used to give great importance to progress in the spiritual arena in the ancient times. In fact, it used to be the goal of their life. However, there is a decline in the spiritual outlook of people in recent times.

In these days a lot of effort is made to achieve progress in secular, physical, and worldly matters. Whatever achievements made in these areas are only temporary and transitory; they are not permanent. While people are able to make giant strides in secular areas all over the world, there is decline in the importance given to spiritual and moral progress. This tendency is in sharp contrast to the culture of Bharat in ancient times.

*This land of Bharat has given birth to many noble women like Savitri, who brought her dead husband back to life; Chandramati, who extinguished wild fire with the power of truth; Sita, who proved her chastity by coming out of blazing fire unscathed; and Damayanti, who reduced an evil-minded hunter to ashes with the power of her chastity. This land of piety and nobility attained plenty and prosperity and became the teacher of all the nations of the world because of such women of chastity.
(Telugu poem)*

Savitri, a great woman of chastity, brought her deceased husband back to life by the power of her chastity. Such women brought great name and fame to the country of Bharat. Can you find parallels to her anywhere in this world? No doubt, whoever is born must die, but is there a woman in any country in the world who could bring her dead husband back to life, except in Bharat? The whole world is falling to abysmal depth due to transgression of the righteous path, lack of character, and bad behaviour.

Once Arjuna was narrating to King Dharmaraja a few strange incidents he observed while going on a tour of the Kingdom. A farmer reported to Arjuna, "Swami! Yesterday I left the implements in the field itself after ploughing, since it was getting dark. Today when I went to the field to pick up those implements, they were not to be found there."

On another occasion, he noticed some ladies locking their houses and going out. On enquiry they informed him, "Swami! We wanted to go out on some work, and unless we lock our houses, our belongings won't be safe."

This was stunning news to Arjuna, since no house in the kingdom used to be locked in those days, unlike in present times, and people were able to move very freely without any worry. Later, when King Dharmaraja himself went on a

stroll, he observed a lady talking to a man in public standing in the middle of the road. Such type of behaviour went against the custom prevailing in the country.

Dharmaraja was taken aback at these developments and felt that the age of Kali had begun. He therefore decided that it was time that the Pandavas leave for their heavenly abode. Ladies and gents engaging themselves in conversation in full view of the public was a taboo in those days.

Bharat is a land where noble thoughts and feelings are cultivated right from childhood. In fact, Bharat is the spiritual teacher for the entire world. Even now, you will find that Bharatiyas do not go astray in their behaviour, as it is happening in some other countries in the world. They are decent and courteous in their behaviour, at least in public. Even an aged son dare not talk to his mother standing in front of her.

In the earlier days of Swami's Avatarhood, the Raja of Venkatagiri used to visit Puttapparthi. He used to bring the heir apparent and his other son along with him. Before their departure, the sons used to take the blessings of their mother, who used to sit behind a screen and stretch her legs for her sons to offer their obeisance to her. Such were their noble feelings and exemplary character.

Today, you will find boys and girls moving together even in public places. If someone makes enquiries, they reply that so and so was their classmate. Such acts in the old days were considered as highly improper. In fact, the term "classmate" itself is a wrong expression. Do not use the word "classmate". Say, "a fellow student in the class".

The rules of conduct in the earlier times were very strict. The situation has changed now. Boys and girls visit each other's houses without any inhibition and even dine together. This is highly improper. Before doing such things, one has to ask oneself, "Am I a human being or an animal or a beast?" Animals have animal qualities, but you are a human being. Hence, you should possess human qualities. You say you are a human being. Therefore you have to ask yourself, "Do I possess human qualities?"

What are those human qualities? Never hurt anyone. Do not speak harsh words against any individual. Have compassion and a charitable disposition. Only such a person can be said to be a human being.

Sathya (truth), Dharma (righteousness), Shanthi (peace), Prema (love), and Ahimsa (nonviolence) are the five qualities a human being should possess. Bidding good-bye to Sathya and Dharma, people pray for Shanthi. Is it possible? Can anyone get peace outside? Peace is a state of mind that is very much inside one's own self. It emanates from one's heart. People are now searching for peace in the outside world.

There is reaction, reflection, and resound for everything in the world. Only when you develop the quality of hatred in yourself will you see hatred in

others. Even when no one causes any harm to you, you try to hurt others. Whatever you do to others, surely you will experience the result of that action. Whatever you hear or experience is all due to the reaction, reflection, and resound of your own actions and feelings. Others are not responsible for it.

You forget this simple truth and lament, "so and so is accusing me; so and so is causing pain to me; so and so is hurting me", etc. No one is responsible for either your good or your bad actions. Neither is it God's creation, for God is nirgunam, niranjanam, sanathana nikanam, nitya, shuddha, buddha, mukta, nirmala swarupinam (God is attributeless, unsullied, final abode, eternal, pure, enlightened, free, and embodiment of sacredness).

You go on fighting with others and try to hurt them. Then you are not a human being at all! Always help others, never hurt anyone. "Help Ever, Hurt Never." It is said, Paropakara punyaya, papaya parapeedanam (one attains merit by serving others and commits sin by hurting them), Sarva jiva namaskaram Kesavam pratigachchhati (whomever you salute, it reaches God), and Sarva jiva tiraskaram Kesavam pratigachchhati (whomever you criticise, it reaches God).

You think you are accusing someone or making fun of someone. It is all your illusion. In fact, you are accusing yourself and making fun of yourself in the process. Everything has reaction, reflection, and resound. You yourself are responsible for either good or bad. If you wish to enjoy good things in life, do good to others in the first instance.

Today's education is information-oriented. It is bookish knowledge. It is not real education. It is not this type of education that you should pursue. You have to pursue "Educare".

Educare manifests in one's own heart. Education relates to gathering information by reading several books and storing them in your brain. Whatever you remember out of that knowledge, you will reproduce in your examinations and acquire degrees; that you call education. That is not real education.

You have to follow your inner voice. That is real education. In the recent sports day, you played many games, displayed beautiful gymnastic skills, and sang several songs. All these activities relate to the body, which is the result of your past karmas (actions). However, do not repose absolute confidence in the physical body. The body is given to you for discharging your duty as a human being. Do not misuse your body.

It is the responsibility of teachers, headmistress, principals, vice chancellors, and chancellors to teach the students the value and purpose of human birth.

Your duty is to follow your conscience. Your conscience helps you manifest noble qualities. But you do not pay heed to the voice of your conscience and go against the human values. Hence, never ignore your conscience. Your conscience is your most valuable property.

You do not have to do japa (soft repetition of the name of God), tapa (penance, severe austerities), dhyana (meditation), or yoga. You will achieve a lot of progress in your sadhana (spiritual practices) if only you listen to your inner voice. Whatever comes from the depth of your heart will do good for you. Whatever goes against the dictates of your conscience is worldly, whereas inner voice or conscience is spiritual. "Help Ever; Hurt Never," is the cardinal principle of spirituality. Whoever follows the inner voice will always be safe. Never go against that inner voice. That is true spirituality.

Spirituality does not mean just conforming to worship and meditation. These practices have degenerated into several undesirable activities these days. The underlying principle and the purpose of these sadhanas are totally forgotten.

It is said, Manasyekam vachasyekam, karmanyekam mahatmanam (Those whose thoughts, words, and deeds are in perfect harmony are noble ones). Unless there is perfect accord between your thoughts, words, and deeds, you are not a human being at all!

You get very angry against someone and slap them. But think for a moment; it is a great sin to hurt others. In the process, you are hurting not your enemy but God, verily! All are divine. Hence, never hurt anyone. It is natural to help those who help you, but you should be able to help even those who harm you.

There is nothing great in helping those who have helped you. The noble ones are those who help even those who have harmed them. (Telugu poem)

It is only Sai in this world who helps even those who try to harm Him, ignoring their faults. I never mind the harm done to Me by others. We must always be calm, serene, and peaceful under all circumstances. If only you maintain the quality of peace, you can achieve anything in life. Wherever you see in the outside world, it is only pieces and pieces! Do not hurt the feelings of others, come what may.

Always treat your parents with love and respect. In fact, your parents are your first teachers. Respect them. Any amount of your good work that inconveniences your parents is of no avail. That cannot be considered good work at all. Though it may appear to be yielding some benefits temporarily, the end result of all this work will turn out to be very bad. Hence, ensure that you do not cause any inconvenience or suffering to your parents. The more you inconvenience them, the more you will suffer.

With regard to charity, the more you give in charity to others, the more benefit you will receive later. Therefore, try to help others, always. Do any kind of seva (selfless service) that you are capable of. When you thus go on helping others, you will be progressing in the path of truth.

As you travel in the path of truth, dharma will automatically follow. Where sathya (truth) and dharma (righteousness) go together, santhi (peace) will reign there. Then prema (love) will follow. Where there is love, there hatred

cannot be. You will not have enemies then. It is only when the spring of love gets dried up in your heart that you will try to cause suffering to others. Hence, develop love for all. Sathya, dharma, santhi, prema, and ahimsa are human qualities.

Today, there is rampant violence everywhere in the world. People are afraid to stay alone even in their houses. Several changes are taking place all over the world. Earlier, the United States of America was considered to be a super power and a wealthy country, but now, all that glory is gone. As a result, people who were going to their workplaces in cars earlier are now walking.

We think money and wealth can do anything. But money is not important; your mind is important. If only you can control your mind, everything will turn out to be good for you.

Dear students!

Whatever work you undertake, do it with a sense of dedication to God. Sarva karma Bhagavad preetyartham (do all actions to please God). Always remind yourself that God is the doer and you are just an instrument in the hands of God. You can achieve anything in life only when there is the Will of God. Perform your duty and remain a witness to all that goes in the world.

It is said, "Paropakarah punyaya papaya parapeedanam". Always follow the principles of "be good, do good, and see good." Let your tongue speak only the truth. Let all your deeds be helpful to others. Whoever undertakes service in society with such a motto will always be happy.

Pride, jealousy, etc, are all bad qualities. They drive away good qualities. They do harm to you as well as to society. Hence, be good and do good to others. If someone is in a difficult situation, go all out to help them even at the cost of your own work. This is the foremost duty of a human being. "Help Ever, Hurt Never" should be your motto. It is enough if you remember these two commands always.

Do not cause harm even to your enemy. Hurt never. Do not cause even the slightest inconvenience to others. This is true education.

You make your parents suffer in the house, come to the office and show your egoistic power on your subordinates, and draw a huge salary for your so-called work and responsibility. This is a great mistake. As you go up in your career and life, your ego and jealousy must come down. Then only will you earn respect from one and all.

Always remember society and its welfare. You are a member of the society and therefore you have a social responsibility. You owe your very existence to society. Similarly, society is not separate from you. Individuals make a society. You and society are inseparable and mutually dependent. Only when fellow members of the society prosper will you also prosper.

Dear students!

You all have done well in your studies, getting good marks and securing ranks. You brought good name to the Institution in the fields of education, sports, and cultural activities. Yesterday, you witnessed a play on Bhakta Potana. He did not feel bad, in spite of criticism and belittling from his brother-in-law Srinatha, also a great poet. Since Potana was a great devotee of Rama and surrendered himself totally to the Lord, Rama Himself composed the great epic Bhagavatam on his behalf. Potana always believed that his poetry, his life, and even his very existence were all the gift of Lord Rama. He was a true devotee.

When Potana was suffering from acute poverty and finding it very difficult to make both ends meet, his brother-in-law advised him to dedicate his works to the King and make a comfortable living with the money and jewellery gifted by the King. Potana refused to do, so saying that he would take refuge only in Lord Rama. Instead, he decided to live by cultivating his small piece of land.

One day, while Srinatha was going by the side of the fields in a palanquin, he saw his brother-in-law Potana working in his field. He derisively passed a comment on Potana, addressing him as "haalika!", meaning, "Oh farmer! Are you Ok?"

Potana gave an apt reply saying, "how does it matter if I am a farmer? I feel it is better and nobler to make a living by farming than dedicating my poetry to earthly kings and living upon their charity. That gives me great satisfaction!"

The earth is the basis for all objects and activities in the world. Whoever reposes his faith in the land will never undergo any difficulties. Hence, I advise students to develop faith in their motherland and pursue their vocations in this great land of Bharat itself, instead of dreaming to go to other countries like America and earn lakhs and lakhs of rupees. Earn name and fame in your motherland itself.

Earning money is not something great. Even a beggar can earn a lot of money. "Money comes and goes, but morality comes and grows." Cultivate that morality. Whoever has morality will never undergo any difficulty.

Swami sang Hari Bhajana Bina in conclusion. After that there were a couple of bhajans by the boys. Following that, the Institute Brass band struck up lively tunes and Swami sat listening to them. It was 11:30 a.m. when Swami received aarthi and retired for the morning. Before that, it was announced that in the evening there would be a drama by the students of the Puttaparthi campus of the University.

A drama entitled 'Sri Krishna Tatwa Darsanam' had been planned and once again the Sai Kulwant hall was a hub of great activity as make up and settings started from 1:00 pm itself. Swami arrived for darshan at 5:15 p.m. and completing His darshan round, Swami went into the bhajan hall where the

entire cast had assembled. He enquired into the characters assembled there. He was very interested in "Draupadi". She carried with her a doll that was to 'act' as the baby Pareekshith. Swami seemed to gently tap the 'baby' on its head and everyone smiled in amusement. Duryodhana, Shakuni, Krishna, Bheeshma, the Pandavas and Durvasa were all 'introduced' to Swami. Last but not the least, the dancers too had their share of the Avatar's time! Swami blessed them all and they all wended their way out to the backstage to wait for Him to come out to the stage area. Soon after, Swami arrived and the initial offerings were made to Him.

The drama began with the wise Vidura seeking peace and joy. For that, he wishes to attain the Brahmajnana. At that time, he is advised that there is no greater Brahmajnana than listening to the glories of the Lord. And so, if yesterday was the story of the composition of a Bhagavatham, today's drama lived through it. A graceful dance ensued narrating the glories of the Lord Krishna. Three main events from the pages of Mahabharatam were depicted. The first one was about the predicament the Pandavas face when the easily angered sage Durvasa visits them for food with all his disciples and there is absolutely no food to offer. Lord Krishna accepts a leaf from Draupadi and is satiated. That fills up all the visitors and the Pandavas are saved from their wrath. What's more is that the sage apologises for not fulfilling his obligations and blesses them. It went on to show how when one is able to please the Lord, the whole world is satiated.

The other episode was how Krishna elicits a counter promise from the grandsire Bheesma who has vowed to annihilate all the Pandavas in battle. He sends Draupadi to him seeking the blessing of "Dheerga Sumangali Bhava" -May you have a rich and fulfilled married life! Thus, he is forced not to harm any of her husbands! To ensure that the knocking of Draupadi's sandals do not give her away in the enemy camp, Lord Krishna carries them for her in His shawl! This brought tears to Bheeshma (and everyone in the audience too) seeing the extent the Lord goes to help His devotee.

The final episode is when the Pandavas' grandson and Abhimanyu's son, Pareekshith, is born a stillborn. When there is sorrow and wailing everywhere, Krishna resurrects him with a mere touch. Arjuna, in all gratitude, calls Him a "Vamsharakshaka"(protector of one's clan). Krishna then reminds him as to how the very same Arjuna had called Him a "Vamshanashaka" (destroyer of one's clan) when Abhimanyu had fallen on the battle field. The Lord is not affected by our praise or blame. He is ever the same and unaffected. These episodes were portrayed with excellent acting and very powerful dialogues. At the end of the drama, the final formation was made and the song proclaimed joyously that the very same Lord Krishna has arrived as dear Swami. Swami was very moved with the song and as it concluded, Swami moved down for a photo session with the students. The session continued as Swami moved back up on the stage. And everyone who had participated in the drama in any way got a picture with Swami. Many letters were accepted and many words exchanged between the Lord and His students. Swami said, "Today the boys have shown what Swami truly is!" Swami then received aarthi and returned to Yajur Mandir at 7:10pm.

25th January 2009, Krishna Tarangaalu, by the Devotees of the Krishna district

This Sunday, the Sai Kulwant hall was packed to capacity as usual and the adjoining pathways welled with people eager to catch a glimpse of the sunshine of their lives. Swami arrived at 9:05 AM and moved slowly in the chair. Completing the darshan rounds, Swami moved to the portico. He enquired from Prof. Anil Kumar about his recordings at the Radio Sai Global Harmony studios. Swami refers to it as the "Bangalore Radio" for He first heard it at Bangalore. Today, He has His personal digital radio set at His residence, the Yajur Mandir and is a keen listener of Radio Sai. The only channel to which the Lord subscribes is the one that carries His message round the clock, in its pure and unsullied form.

Swami then began a second darshan round! He went through the entire ladies side and via the central marble block into the gents' side too. Swami went about collecting letters and blessing all. He sat outside listening to the bhajans and this bonus darshan only brought more joy. Then He moved into the bhajan hall for the conclusion of the bhajans and aarthi. After the bhajans, Swami began speaking with the students there. He asked a person whether he was listening to the "Bangalore radio" and also whether he had one! He said, "They air all my old discourses on it. I don't know from where they get it, but they put it. Bhajans also come always." Looking at one of the students who is a singer, Swami said mischievously, "Your wife sings songs there. Both of you can sing and give discourses. But what you talk between each other on the phone will not come there! That is a secret!" To Swami all of us are open books. The word "secret" loses its meaning when we are with Him.

In the evening, there was a programme entitled "Krishna Tarangaalu" scheduled by the devotees of the Krishna district. Swami arrived for darshan and as He moved through the ladies side, He noticed the large number of children seated there. He spoke to some of the ladies' coordinators and then He moved into the gents' side. However, something seemed to be 'bothering' Him if we may say so. He turned back and then asked for all the children to be seated in the path through which He arrives so that they would all be able to see the play well. He personally supervised the movement of the children into the path 'reserved for Him'. After being assured that all the children were seated properly, Swami moved to the stage and asked for the programme to begin.

It began with the usual queues of florals, cards and offerings. The first part was a speech and this speech was rendered by a 4-5 year old! He flawlessly chanted a poem composed by Swami and then went on to speak with a professional flair with a sweet innocent accent and diction. When he said, "All the five elements reside in your hand", Swami raised His hand and showed it to him with a smile. Naturally people clapped in joy. The boy received Swami's blessings and offered a rose also.

The drama centred on a "worldly-foolish" person who stays back in his native village in Krishna district instead of going abroad and earning crores like his

classmates. He opens an orphanage and spends his life and time in educating young minds about the glorious heritage of the land and inspiring them to be good people. A complex sequence of events take place wherein the mother of the concerned son also meets with an accident and the father with his other millionaire friends realizes that there are things in life more important than money. As the son speaks powerful dialogues replete with the wisdom that Swami has showered over the years, Swami was so moved and happy. In between the play itself, He called the good son and materialized a gold chain for him.

There is something so powerful in virtues and goodness - be it good thoughts or good words. These never become cliched and how many ever times they are delivered or rendered, just witnessing them is an inspiring experience. There were tears in the eyes of people as the nobility in the drama was witnessed. Goodness always moves. Good words and noble thoughts never become repetitive and that's why every discourse that Swami gives, people listen to with renewed enthusiasm and new interest. And Swami encourages us to do that always - think good, speak good and do good.

As all the children came together for the final formation, Swami blessed them and moved down to pose for photographs with them. He asked the little boy in front, his name. He made the photographers move to the left and right to ensure that everyone was covered. A shower of gifts followed next with Swami gifting sarees for the girls and white T shirts for the boys. The devotees started bhajans. After a while, Swami gifted two huge photographs that had been taken minutes before to the delighted group. Then receiving aarthi and blessing all with a two handed *abhayahastha*, Swami retired.

SWAMI AND ME

POWERFUL REMINISCENCES OF HIS PRESENCE

By Mrs. Asha Pai

Asha Pai was born in a Sai family in Bangalore. She was blessed to be a Sai student from Grade 9 till she completed her Bachelor’s degree from the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1991. Currently, she lives in Malawi, in Central Africa, where she spends a lot of her time and energy in social service initiatives of non-governmental organisations, especially the Sai Organisation. In her spare time, she also enjoys fabric painting, specialising in African themes.

Isn’t it so uncanny that each one of the millions of Sai devotees has a personalised account of how Swami drew them to Him, like a bird with a string tied to the foot? What is even more extraordinary is that each of these experiences is special and unique, and includes the blissful recall of His constant guidance in the devotee’s life, in matters both spiritual and mundane.

Going down the memory lane, I see my family’s experiences with Swami as a testimony to this fact, for He has been our omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent guardian angel, forever giving us proof of His love and concern.

In early 1967, even before I was born, my father lived in Bangalore where he worked for a multinational firm. Despite the physical proximity to both Brindavan and Prasanthi Nilayam, my parents were not inclined to go and see Swami because they had read a negative media report about Him in a periodical. Finally, three and a half years later, in August 1970, the miraculous cure of my 13 year-old cousin peaked the curiosity of my parents to explore the phenomenon that is our Bhagavan.

Miracle Cure Brings Family To Sai

My father’s elder brother’s son in Mumbai used to suffer from an excruciating backache. My cousin was being treated by the late Dr. Choubal, a leading orthopedic surgeon of Mumbai. During Swami’s visit to that city in 1970, my cousin was taken to Dharmakshetra (Baba’s abode in Mumbai) and made to sit in the enclosure for sick persons. Being a 13-year-old, his mother was allowed to be beside him. During *darshan*, as Swami glided along serenely, without being told about his problem, He came near him and casually put His hand on my cousin’s spine, under his shirt, and lo and behold, in an instant, he was relieved of the excruciating pain of several months!

A week later, when the boy was taken for the follow-up to the orthopedic surgeon, the doctor repeatedly looked at the latest x-ray taken after Swami blessed him at Dharmakshetra and compared it with the one taken about a month prior. Noticing the doctor’s predicament, my uncle asked whether there was anything wrong with the boy. The surgeon replied that there was absolutely nothing wrong; he was just baffled trying to understand from the

two x-rays the incredibly rapid healing process which was nothing short of a miracle. My uncle narrated the happenings at Dharmakshetra to the doctor who then remarked that though he was not Swami's devotee, he had to admit that the remarkable improvement in such a short span of four weeks was indeed inexplicable.

My cousin's experience in 1970 was my family's passport to the sacred journey to Sai. Along with my two older brothers and I, my parents began to frequent Whitefield and Prasanthi Nilayam to be in His most auspicious presence.

He Loosens Our Bonds

It was sometime in October 1970, when I was about 13 months old and could barely walk, that we experienced Him as an active presence in our lives. My mother had to take care of three of us and my cousin who was barely four months old. For the most part, this was not at all a problem as we were staying in a large joint family along with my great-grand mother in a huge house. However, once it so happened that only my mother and I were at home.

Before going for her shower, my mother tied my legs to a piece of cloth which was tied at the other end to the window bar and around me were many toys – the idea was to make sure that I do not drag myself under the furniture or pull things which could injure me while she was busy in the bathroom. Therefore, on that particular day, leaving me in this fashion at one end of the house, my mother went to the restroom which was at the other end.

When my mother finished her shower, she was astonished to see me standing near the bathroom door by leaning against the wall – at that time I had not even started talking. She was surprised all the more because to reach to that end of the house one had to pass through three rooms and two passages. She wondered how I could make it without straying into the other bedrooms, kitchen or the shrine room en route. When she took me near the window where I was tied, my mother asked me who untied me. I am told I had pointed at Swami's photograph which was on our bedroom wall!

On another occasion, during *darshan* at Whitefield, when Swami came and stood before my mother, she urged my brothers and me to seek His blessings by prostrating at His feet. For some reason, my second brother hesitated to touch Swami's feet, and just sat looking down. Swami, on the other hand, waited patiently almost for nearly three minutes till my brother finally took *padanamaskar*.

Finally, upon reaching home, we discovered the reason for my second brother's hesitation. It turned out that my maternal uncle had warned my three-year-old brother not to go anywhere near Swami as there were "serpents in His hair"! While none of us had any clue about the reason behind my brother's mental block, the all knowing Lord knew what had happened the

previous night in our house. Thereafter my father advised my uncle to remain silent even if he did not have faith in Swami.

My two brothers and I were fortunate to be enrolled in the Sai Spiritual Education classes in Bangalore. The values instilled in our hearts by our teacher, Mrs. Geetha Mohan Ram have stood us in good stead. As children, we found ourselves riveted to the wonderful Sai experiences of Geetha Aunty and her mother, Mrs. Kamala Padmanabhan, which they joyfully shared with us.

One unforgettable lesson that I learned from her was the need to play every role life throws at us with self-confidence. Once, when Mrs. Kamala Padmanabhan had to go out of town, Swami asked her daughter, Geetha Aunty, to conduct Balvikas classes.

When Geetha Aunty expressed her reluctance to play the role of a teacher to her own friends, Swami advised her: “If you behave like a teacher, they will listen to you.”

And true to His word, I have come to realise that many students hesitate to teach their own colleagues or harbour reservations regarding their ability to carry out an unexpected task. Yet each of us has it in us to surpass any self-imposed barriers we may have and rise to the occasion, as needed.

Close Conversations with The Lord

March 2, 1981 marked a major milestone in our lives. That day, our house help came late to work. When we asked her to explain her tardiness, she told my mother that it was due to the elaborate cleaning she did at the other house where she was working and added that Swami was visiting that house that evening, which belonged to Dr. Kuchela. Immediately my mother went to that doctor’s house and requested permission for us to be present when Swami came to their house. However, Dr. Kuchela, who was the Professor and Head of the Department of Physics at Bangalore University, told my mother that Swami’s visits are meant strictly for the inmates of the house and it was not proper on his part to agree to her request. On my mother’s perseverance, he reluctantly agreed to allow only my parents to come.

My parents reached Dr. Kuchela’s house before Swami arrived, and when they disclosed to their host the manner in which they had slipped out of the house without any of us knowing anything about their destination, Dr. Kuchela yielded and called the rest of the family including all the children. And so, we were all present for the wonderful *darshan* and discourse of Swami which went on for more than two and a half hours.

On this very same occasion, my mother requested Swami to perform the *Upanayanam* (the traditional thread ceremony) of my two brothers, and He readily agreed. In a private ceremony, that lasted about 45 minutes, Swami performed their *Upanayanam* on May 22, 1981 in the interview room of the

old bungalow at Whitefield. It truly was a never-to-be-forgotten event for our family.

Being the perfect host, Swami had made all arrangements. On arrival at Brindavan, we were seated at the Kalyana Mandapam hall. Swami called me even before physically seeing members of our family and asked me to take out a stool which was under the table and keep it close to His chair. I was left wondering about the reason for this unusual move. Then He asked all the family members to come to the interview room and sit down, and then made my great-grand mother sit on the stool He had made me place near Him.

While holding my great-grand mother’s hand, my father was advising her not to step on the *rangoli*, a decorative flower arrangement laid on the ground, as she walked into the interview room, but Swami immediately remarked “it doesn’t matter”, demonstrating His compassion and consideration, for nothing is too small for the Lord!

After the thread ceremony, Swami also mentioned that my mother had slept very late the previous night preparing the sweets and rinsing in turmeric the new towels to be worn by my brothers, as per the tradition. Those days Swami used to eat *paan* – the betel leaf. When my mother asked my brother whether he had packed “chunnam” in the bag, Swami replied in Konkani (the language we spoke at home) that it is in the bag! Truly, nothing escapes the attention of the all-knowing Lord, who is conversant with the language of the heart.

My father harboured the wish that all three of his children should be blessed to study in Swami’s school and college. With His divine grace, this wish came to fruition.

In 1981, my brother was fortunate to be accepted at Bhagavan’s school in Muddenahalli. Since he wanted to pursue engineering, after Grade 10, he moved to Bhagavan’s college in Whitefield to pursue his pre-university course. My other brother, who was interested in studying Commerce, joined Swami’s college at Prasanthi Nilayam. Thus, both of my siblings were blessed to be His students, just as my father had wanted.

My turn came in the year 1984. On the last day of my Grade 8 final exams, I saw Swami in a dream. We were in my school building at Bangalore, and Swami told me: “Come to Puttaparthi – this school is not fit for you”. Even though I could not accompany my parents, they proceeded to Puttaparthi to request Swami for my admission in the next grade, which was IX class.

Upon reaching Puttaparthi, they learnt that the last day for submitting application for admission was over, and they were perplexed as to what to do next as the school did not accept new students in the next grade which was the X class. This meant that we would have to wait for two years and try to admit me at Anantapur College for my pre-university courses.

‘The school is built for you’ - Baba

At this moment of confusion, by some strange co-incidence or should I say ‘Sai-incidence’, my father got the chance to sit in a good spot at *darshan* and he was able to hand over the letter about the matter to Swami. While the Lord took the letter in His hand, my father requested Him to admit me in the IX grade for which I had missed the deadline. Swami remarked, “*Bangaru* (golden one), the school is built for you – go and talk to them“, and moved forward leaving my father perplexed as to whom he should contact. Coming out after the *darshan*, my father met a friend who enquired about his conversation with Swami. My father explained his dilemma to this gentleman as Swami had not mentioned the name of the person to be contacted. That friend advised that my father should contact the School Administrator, and further explained where and when she would be available. The advice relieved my father’s tension and after two meetings with the concerned official, I was on my way to joining Grade IX, at His school in Puttaparthi, as per Swami’s command in my dream. From there, I moved on to His college at Anantapur, graduating with a B.A. degree in 1991.

Swami’s grace shielded my father even in his professional life. In the year 1983, he was worried about a structural change in his company which would have affected him. Faced with the problem, he was able to pass on a letter to Swami, requesting His blessing. Though the reengineering envisaged by his management was implemented, by Swami’s Grace he was elevated to a higher position. But the interesting part of this is yet to follow.

When the news of his promotion came, Swami was at Whitefield. When my parents entered the Brindavan Campus there, *bhajans* had started and they saw Swami coming out of the Trayee Brindavan gate. The volunteer on duty in the old ‘Sairam Shed’ made my father squeeze by the back of the Krishna statue. My father had a very pleasant surprise to find Swami coming straight to him and saying in Kannada “*Santoshha, Santoshha, Bahala Santoshha*” meaning “Happy, Happy, Very Happy”. My father conveyed the good news to Swami who accepted the letter and granted *padanamaskar*.

If this was not enough, on the ladies’ side, my mother too got *padanamaskar* and Swami accepted a similar letter from her as well.

In 1987, when I was a student at Anantapur Campus, during one particular *darshan*, Swami enquired why I look worried, I replied that my father was being posted at Mumbai. Swami replied, “Happy, very happy“. While Anantapur was close to Bangalore and Mumbai was far off, I felt reassured by the Lord that there is nothing to worry even if it means my parents would not be able to visit me as frequently as they used to from Bangalore.

Today, this message resonates with my life experiences more than ever, as I live in Malawi, in Central Africa, with my husband and son. In every situation I realise that in the end, as long as we remember Him as our constant companion, we have every reason to be “happy, very happy”, as He told me to be some 21 years ago!

We are grateful to Swami for His presence in our lives, His kind guidance in all areas and His abundant Grace throughout. The ball now is in our court - to prove ourselves worthy of being His devotees. May we always prove to be His loving instruments!

Jai Sai Ram

FROM THE JOY OF SYMPHONY TO THE BLISS OF SAI

By Mr. T. V. Hariharan

Mr. T.V. Hariharan joined the Sri Sathya Sai College in Prasanthi Nilayam in the year 1979, two years before the Sri Sathya Sai University (SSSU) was unfurled. After his graduation from the Sai college, he served in the Administrative Block of the newly inaugurated SSSU for two years, until 1984. He later moved to Bangalore for further studies and subsequently worked in a pharmaceutical company for 3 years. In 1989, he resigned from his job and ever since, he has been engaged in spreading the message of Bhagavan through bhajans, music and talks at various Sai centres and other holy gatherings all over the world. Here are a few extracts of his journey with the supreme teacher Sai.

There were innumerable opportunities to learn from Bhagavan while being a student of the Sri Sathya Sai College. It is, in fact, difficult to choose which one to share. In 1979, when Swami inaugurated the Sri Sathya Sai College in Prasanthi Nilayam, I was extremely fortunate to secure an admission there. And one of the foremost lessons that I received, the first Guru *Mantra* I should say, unfolded like this:

Growing out of the Cocoon of the Brahmin World

I hail from a rural set up in Tamil Nadu. My village was my world; the 75 houses there were virtually my whole universe. Additionally, it was a community of orthodox Brahmins (the upper caste in the Hindu society). Therefore, I grew up in an environment which was suffused with religious fervour, but coloured by many conventional and strict traditions. Little did I know then, as I did after coming to Swami, the true and deeper meaning of all the exercises that we ‘religiously practiced’ in our small society.

To practice a ritual ‘religiously’ is very different from understanding its underlying spiritual significance. In fact, I had no idea about this enlightened aspect of our traditions; I simply adhered to them rather mechanically, impressed by the interesting stories narrated by my grandmother. And that is the time when this *Poornavata* (Baba) picked me up!

As a part of our Brahminical way of life, we have a custom of changing the *Yagnopavitam* (the sacred-thread worn by Brahmins across their shoulder) every year on *Sravana Pournima* Day (also called the Raksha Bandhan Day in India which usually falls in the month of August).

Yagnopavitam by the Yagna Purusha

Those days, Swami used to Himself give the new threads to the students who observed this tradition in their family. So, in the first year (1979), when Swami was distributing these threads on one morning, I was unfortunately not present in the Mandir at that time. But when somebody gave me the news, I rushed over. But by the time I reached, the distribution was almost over. After

giving everybody, Swami finally asked, “Is there anyone else left?” Somebody now began to mention that there was one boy who had missed this, and just then I landed in front of Swami. He looked at me keenly and asked, “Where did you go?” And then as He was about to bless me with a thread, **He asked, “Are you a Brahmin?”**

“Yes, I am a Brahmin” I replied with pride and confidence as I hailed from a Brahmin community.

Realise the World is Brahman

But immediately, **Swami remarked, “Emi Brahmin, donga Brahmin” (What kind of a Brahmin you are? You are a phony Brahmin).**

As a raw youngster, I was absolutely a newcomer to Swami and spirituality then. I was puzzled when Swami did not accept my reply. So, I asserted again, “Swami, I belong to the *Athreya Gotram*,” that is, I belong to the lineage of one of the foremost sages of India. Unimpressed, **Swami said: “That’s OK, but are you a Brahmin?”** I again replied in the affirmative, “Yes, Swami!”

Now, Swami said, “How can you be a Brahmin? By birth everyone is low-born? Only by action alone one can be a Brahmin”. Then, He further added, “If your father is an IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer, would it mean that you are also an IAS officer?”

Incidentally, my father was an IAS officer but it did not strike me then. (Even though my father served in a city, I was brought up completely by my grandmother in the village.) My mind went blank, when Swami made this statement. I was desperately trying to fathom His words.

Now, Swami continued, “If you have to be an IAS officer, you have to qualify yourself to be so. Similarly, just because you are born in the lineage of Athreya, does not mean that you are a Brahmin. A person who knows Brahman alone can be called a Brahmin”.

Until then, for me, a ‘Brahmin’ was a person who was born in that particular community. But what Swami taught me that day was if you can see the unity in creation, that is the same Brahman that resides in every being, only then you qualify to be called a Brahmin. Just as to be an IAS officer, one needs to study, get through the competitive examinations, undergo the training, and so on. Similarly, to be a Brahmin, one must undergo the *tapas* (penance) and *sadhana* (spiritual practice) to see and realize the Divinity latent in all beings. This was the first and most profound lesson I received from Swami.

The Master Sculptor

We often carry a false opinion about ourselves. In one of His discourses, Swami said you can make use of a granite stone in any manner you like. You may use it to sit or stand on it, or use it as a table. But when it falls in the

hands of a sculptor, who chisels it and gives it the form of Lord Ganesha or Mother Laxmi, you start worshipping it. So too, Swami says that we can become Gods by chiseling out all the unwanted elements, which are the *vasanas* (desires), from our personality. And this sizing is done by the Lord constantly.

Swami always wants us to give up our ego, but it does raise its hood many a time, even without our knowledge. By the time I joined Swami's college, I had gained a lot of expertise in playing the violin; in fact, I considered this as an achievement of my life. At that time, the Students' Bhajan group had not yet formed. And I thought I could offer my services during the Bhajan sessions in the mandir. I was unhappy about my talent not being put to any use.

Violin Concert before the Lord

It was at this time that one day, in the Mandir verandah, Swami asked if any students had any talents. To this, one of the lecturers got up and pointing towards me, mentioned to Swami, that I was a Carnatic violinist. Swami then said He would be visiting the Hostel the ensuing Sunday, and I could perform in His presence. Then, I bent down and knelt before Him to take His blessings.

In the next few days, I prepared myself to play in the Divine Presence. The appointed day arrived and Swami did come to the Hostel. I sat down at His Lotus Feet and when I was given the go-ahead, I started my violin recital. I could see He was enjoying the music. So, I started playing to the best of my best ability, in all 'speeds' and our God was happily listening to my rendition.. Actually, Swami thrilled me with a beautiful surprise when He Himself started softly singing the intricate and fast *swaras* that I was playing!

(How I wish we had an audio or video record of this! At that time, there was only one student in the hostel who had an old-fashioned tape recorder, and that was a luxury!)

I was actually baffled seeing the Divine Musician in action. Many a times, we have no clue of the grandeur of the Lord whom we see everyday. That was a big lesson for me. Stupefied, I just stopped playing. **Swami then said, "Well played. You have performed very well on the violin"**. After this divine encouragement, I resumed my concert and continued to play for one more hour.

Swami Elucidates what Real Music Is

At the end, Swami praised me for my musical finesse. But before He left, He made a remark that stumped me thoroughly. He said, "**All these *swaras* and *ragas* that you played are just to demonstrate your knowledge in music. But Saint Tyagaraja conversed with Lord Rama through his music; he never 'played' with the *ragas* by expanding or altering them. He did everything out of Love for Lord Rama and poured out his devotion through music. That is real music!"**

The lesson there was too profound to be ignored. I knew I was not on the right path. Swami often says that if you sing Meera bhajans, you should become a Meerabai yourself; if you recite Kabir's couplets, you should transform yourself into a Kabir; and if you render a Tyagaraja *keertana*, you should be filled with the devotion that Tyagaraja had for Lord Rama.

This insightful message of Bhagavan is what has changed my life greatly. In the later part of my life when I began to compose *bhajans*, this is the advice from Swami which did wonders. The tune and the lyrics would just spring from within me spontaneously.

One-Pointed Devotion

In fact, on that day I realized that my music was not leading me to Divinity; instead it was only expressing its own glory which resulted in the growth of my ego. I felt the instrument had become an impediment in my spiritual growth. Therefore, on that same day, immediately after my concert in the Hostel, I broke the violin! The music, which was to lead me to God, was actually taking me away from Him.

One may wonder how I could break the violin when music was my life-breath before I joined the College. In fact, the reason was precisely that. I was very attached to the violin; many a times I could not resist the urge to play the instrument. And this, I thought was surely a hurdle in my *sadhana* to reach God.

However, the violin story does not end there. I was greatly honoured when many years later Swami Himself gave me a violin and asked me to accompany the legendary Carnatic vocalist, Mrs. M. S. Subbalakshmi, during her performance in His presence on the occasion of *Jhoola* ceremony during one of His Birthday celebrations in 1982. So, I have played the violin only once, on that specific occasion, as I received the *Saraswati* (Goddess of Music) from Him with all humility. But after this event, till now, I haven't played again.

Though I have lived a life devoted to glorifying Him through my melody, Swami has taken care of every detail of my life, whether I am physically near Him or in a distant city or country. I see His glory everywhere; it humbles me and fills me with bliss. I always pray that I should always be in this state of bliss and merge in Him ultimately.

H2H SPECIAL

ENTRALLING REMINISCENCES OF THE DAYS OF YORE

From the mental diary of Mrs. Karunamba Ramamurthy - Part 2

Extremely fortunate to come to His lotus feet when she was just a tiny girl in the 1940s, Mrs. Karunamba Ramamurthy, lovingly addressed as Kannamma, has a priceless treasure trove of incredible memories of the yester years. She is also the author of the famous book "Sri Sathya Sai Anandadayi - Journey with Sai". This is the second part of her wonderful reminiscences.

Celebrating Bhagavan's Birthday

In those days (in the 1940s), Bhagavan's birthday did not call for any major celebration. Instead we enjoyed more experiences with the Lord which we now cherish for all eternity. Elderly devotees used to apply the customary coconut oil on His head and we would garland Him with bright flowers while singing *bhajans*.

During one birthday, Swami refused everyone who came to garland Him. The ever playful Swami was enacting a divine drama. But He appeared serious all the same! The 20 or so devotees who had assembled returned with the garland still in their hands, rather downcast and perplexed. This was to have been the highlight of their year! Then they discussed how to attract the mysterious Lord to their side, and collectively requested Swami to partake meals with them. Swami asked them to sit inside the Mandir and then surprised the group by serving everyone water and food to everyone with His own hands! Needless to say, they were all moved and overjoyed after their initial disappointment. Maybe Bhagavan was teaching them the lesson that God's creation is full of ups and downs – but be assured that when it seems as if things have gone awry, He will always wipe away our tears in an unexpected way!

There lived an old man named Kadirappa in the village who used to wash up all the utensils after devotees had partaken their meals. Generally, he ate the leftovers from these cooking vessels, and often, this comprised of just plain steamed rice, without any salt, or garnish, and was rather lacking in nutrition. Once, when this old man was eating silently sitting beside the well, Swami went into the kitchen and brought out all that my mother had personally cooked for Him. This included boiled vegetables, curries, and chutney. Swami lovingly told the old man to eat all the other items and not just plain rice. It was such a sweet sight to behold. The Lord offering His own food to the man who washed the dishes! After giving him the food, Swami went up to my mother and asked her if she was upset. She replied, "Oh, Swami! You are God. How can I question what You do?"

This unique spirit of sacrifice seems unparalleled except in Swami's own life as we remember incidents from His childhood recorded in His biography, *Sathyam Shivam Sundaram*, Part 1. Prof. Kasturi writes:

At the tender age of three and four, He showed that He had a heart that melted at human suffering. Whenever a beggar appeared at the door and raised his cry, Sathya left His play and rushed inside to force His sisters to hand out grain or food. The adults were naturally irritated by the endless procession of outstretched hands. On one occasion, in order to put an end to what the elders thought was expensive and misplaced charity, the mother caught hold of Sathya, and with a finger raised in warning said, "Look here! You may give him food, but mind you, you will have to starve." That did not daunt the child. He would run inside and bring out food to the hungry man at the door and later stay away from lunch or dinner himself. Nothing and no one could persuade Him to come for His food which was left untouched!

When Sathya began running about in the streets, He sought out the maimed, the blind, the decrepit, and the diseased, and led them by the hand to the doorstep of His parents. The sisters had to secure from the store or the kitchen some grain or food, and put it into the beggar's bowl while the Little Master looked on happily – (H2H Team)

Pacifying the Turbulent Chitravathi

The Chitravati River, in the forties, was very different from what it is today, and its flood waters used to come up to the base of the old Mandir, often flooding the basement. One day, during such a flood, Swami asked my mother to offer turmeric and *kumkum* (vermillion) to the river. She brought these items on a bamboo mat, and Swami placed this on the water and gently shoved it away. After this, with His feet, He slowly pushed at the lapping water as if He were sending her away. Lo! The waters receded peacefully at once! My mother stood there for some time enjoying this spectacle of the waters obeying Swami's command, and felt rather in awe of the power evident in the small body of the Lord.

Asking Swami for Riches, Materialistic and Spiritual

Formal divine discourses on festivals and events like we have now, were not the practice 50-60 years ago. It was always casual conversations, but they were actually ridden with deep meanings. Whenever devotees gathered, He used to join them and sit in their midst. Most people used to ask Him about solutions to their personal problems such as about money for their businesses and so on.

Once, after the River Chitravathi's floods had abated, we were seated around Swami. Almost everybody was busy asking Swami about their respective

professions and their future. The topics raised were almost exclusively of a materialistic nature. After a while Swami seemed as if He wished to finish the conversation and told all of them, "See, now I will go to the river and will build a big sand heap. On that mound I will place a stick. After it is complete, I'll whistle. When you hear my signal, close your eyes and pray for whatever you want. When your wishes are completed, go to the heap and dig in it. You will get whatever you want." So saying, Swami went to the river accompanied by the group who were all agog at having their choicest desires soon fulfilled. After completing the heap and placing the stick on top Swami left at about 6.00 p.m. and returned to the Mandir.

An hour passed by, but there was no sign of the devotees returning. Swami then asked Krishnappa, His body's cousin brother, as to what happened to the group. "They have not turned up yet. Did a tiger attack them? Go see what has happened." So saying, He sent Krishnappa to the river bank.

When he reached the river, he saw a strange and comical sight - everybody was still furiously searching in the darkness. At odd intervals they thought they had found something and would start shouting "We got it! We have it!" When they lifted the object(s), to their dismay, they found only dried donkey dung, pebbles, and sand!

After some more time they realized the game was up, and dismally returned to the Mandir. On hearing what they all got, Swami laughed at their folly and told them, "Have you learned your lesson now? Don't be so greedy in the future! Whenever you are with Swami, don't ask for such cheap things." Generally, Swami was the perfection of patience in dealing with our poor understanding. And often He came down to our level to play and establish kinship with us. But now and again, He felt He must teach us the hard way, lest we never move on from our petty desires. Of course, He would do so in a playful way that would give us all a belly laugh whenever we recalled those pranks.

Despite the fun and laughter, there is always a profound meaning in all the Avatar says or does. This was clearly demonstrated by the assurance that He gave even in His previous incarnation at Shirdi when He advised His devotees thus: "There will never be any dearth or scarcity, regarding food and clothes, in any devotees' homes. It is my special characteristic, that I always look to and provide for the welfare of those devotees, who worship Me wholeheartedly with their minds ever fixed on Me. Lord Krishna has also said the same in the Gita. **Therefore, strive not much for food and clothes. If you want anything, beg of the Lord, leave worldly honours, try to get Lord's grace and blessings, and be honoured in His Court.** Do not be deluded by worldly honour..." (H2H Team)

The Coconut of Great Wealth

I remember another one of these *leelas* which concerned a lady from South India who asked Bhagavan to grant her material riches. This time Swami gave her a coconut and told her to listen to His advice carefully. “Hear properly what I have to say. I have given you a coconut. Take it home and worship it every day. You will be given all the riches you want.” Needless to say, she was overjoyed. She received it and started her journey back home. On the way she sat at Penukonda railway station awaiting her train. She took the coconut and moved it with her hands. While doing so she heard a sound inside that seemed to emanate from the coconut. A doubt crept into her mind. Was Swami’s gift genuine? Could a coconut really offer riches? So thinking, she decided to break it open and look inside. As the coconut cracked open, a golden idol of Lakshmi sprang out and instantly disappeared! Grief stricken, she came back to Swami and told Him about her mistake of breaking the coconut; she requested Him to give her one more. Then, Swami told her, “You do not have faith in My words. Hence, return just as you came here.”

Many such people came to Swami seeking such material wealth; very few were interested in spiritual riches.

Even during the Shirdi incarnation, there is an instance of a rich gentleman who had every worldly success in life and appeared to lack nothing, and therefore came to Baba seeking the ultimate wisdom. The Sai Satcharita says that despite a very comfortable and prosperous life, the wealthy man came to Shirdi, went to the Masjid, saw Sai Baba, fell at His feet and said, “Baba, hearing that You show without any delay the Brahman (Almighty God) to all who come over here, I too have come all the way from my distant place. I am much fatigued by my journey and if I get the [knowledge of] Brahman from You, my troubles will be well-paid and rewarded.” It is said that Baba replied to the rich gentleman seeking spiritual knowledge thus: “Oh, My dear friend, do not be anxious, I shall immediately show you the Brahman; all my dealings are in cash and never on credit. So many people come to Me and ask for wealth, health, power, honour, position, cure of diseases and other temporal matters. Rare is the person who comes here to Me and asks for Brahma-Gyana (Knowledge of the Self). I think it is an auspicious moment when a person like you comes and presses Me for Brahma-Gyana...”

However, the ensuing details of how Baba gave the seeker an experiential lesson in the supreme spiritual wisdom is very interestingly described in chapters 16 & 17 of the *Shirdi Sai Satcharita* and they go to show how genuine seeker’s of God’s grace are very rare, as most devotees tend to be only interested in gaining worldly favours from the God incarnate. (*H2H Team*)

Travelling to a Divine Home that is Puttaparathi

We used to live in Mysore in those days. Traveling to Puttaparathi was a long and arduous journey. We had to first come to Bangalore by train, and there switch trains to reach Penukonda. Then we had to continue the journey by bus till we found ourselves in the small town of Bukkapatnam. The frequency of this bus was very low, effectively only one per day. Needless to say, it was overloaded with passengers, often seated one on top of the other! The roads weren’t actually roads, but only mud tracks riddled with potholes. Once we reached Bukkapatnam, we had to take to the bullock carts. And this was a journey of another two hours! Once we came across the sandy banks of River Chitravathi, we often had to cross by foot as the cart would get bogged down by our weight. After arriving at the eastern bank of the river, we had to trudge along a furlong or two to the old Mandir. But the homecoming was sweet. At the gates there would be Bhagavan Himself awaiting our arrival with a smile on His face! “Come, all of you, come. Have you also brought children with you?” Swami usually would ask.

Sometimes, the trip would be so exhausting that we would fall ill. Once, when we visited Puttaparathi during the summer, we had to cross the hot sandy stretch that was Chitravathi by foot. After the ordeal, my mother and my son developed boils on their feet. However, we could not expect proper medication in the hamlet, and they bore it all. One day, during *bhajans* Swami came out, looked at us and started laughing. He told us that had they (my mother and son) washed their feet in cold water after the crossing, they would have been cured of the problem. He then advised us to apply a mixture of castor oil and cold water over my son’s body. This we did and when it was time to return, we found at Penukonda station that there was not a single boil on him!

Singing with the Lord

The ladies would draw *rangolis* (floral decorations) in the shape of ‘OM’ at the old Mandir. Swami used to sit on this, and we sat around Him; the men on one side and the women on the other. We sang old village folk songs. Swami’s sister, Mrs. Venkamma, used to lead the songs and the other ladies sang the chorus. Often there was no time limit to the *bhajan* sessions; they went on for even two hours.

Divine Gestures

Swami often created a small silver receptacle from the sands. He warned us that He would be giving us *amrit* (nectar), one drop each, and that we must be careful not to waste it because there would be no second chance. When administering the *amrit* into our mouths, He playfully commented about the way our mouths looked. He used to say that for some it looked like that of a goat’s, for another it looked like that of an elephant, and so on. At that moment we did not laugh at His jokes because we did not want to spill the nectar! We concentrated only on consuming the *amrit*. I must also emphasize

that the small receptacle never became empty despite the number of devotees present!

On another occasion, my sister, mother and I, came to Puttaparthi. My mother asked Swami to give us a photo of Him. Instead Swami created an idol of Him which had the figure of Shirdi Sai Baba on the other side. My mother told Him that this was not what she had asked for. Swami, however, told her that whenever she became ill, she should bathe the idol, i.e. perform *abhishekam* and consume the holy water thus blessed. That would be cure her.

On another occasion, when my mother and I went to see Swami, He gave her a photo. The image was wet. When mother asked Him the reason of it being in that condition, He said that the photo had just come from the studio lab after being processed, and hence the wetness!

(To be continued)

GET INSPIRED

BROADCASTING LOVE

Love has been and will always be the greatest of weapons that mankind can ever possess. I came to realise the profundity of its power, the day I chose to wield its influence on one of my customers at office, wherein I tried to handle an otherwise unwelcome incident in truly the 'Sai' way.

Working at a Helpdesk for an Internet company in New Zealand, gives me enough and more opportunities to interact with customers, who call up for help in fixing up their Internet connections. And like any employee at the helpdesk, I get my fair share of irate customers, who are either complaining or addressing an issue that has long been left unresolved.

One day at work, I had one of those 'difficult' customers. Many of our agents, and to make it worse, even outsiders, had given this particular individual, a lady, the run around. Understandably, she was upset and very abusive over the phone. But my training to deal with such customers and situations got the better of me. I kept my calm and patiently listened to her. But she still could not stop abusing me. It seemed that my explanation and help did not satisfy her enough. Almost immediately, I was reminded of Bhagavan Baba's words, and how sharing plain and simple words sprinkled with love can heal the other person even when not in direct contact.

Thinking so, I placed her on hold and consulted one of my superiors on the exact solution to her problem. But even they gave me the same resolution that I had been trying to explain to her all the while. And so, this time around, before I uttered another word, I took a deep breath and filled myself with love. I then set out explaining to her that I had only one answer to her problem, and while saying this, I prayed and sent my love to her. I prayed to Baba to fill her with content, peace and patience.

And this is when I decided to take a risk and talk to her about a similar situation that I had myself been through some time back. I promised her that I would do my best to help her, and even told her that I would pray that her predicament be solved as soon as possible. Her anger slowly subsided, so much so that she began speaking to me in her normal voice!

After being on the receiving end of her wrath, her calm words appeared as if Baba had Himself come by her side and patted her on the shoulder saying 'It is ok, life goes on!' That was the level of transformation a mere couple of sentences filled with love had brought about in her. While the duration of the phone call was certainly longer than usual, thanks to the power of His expansive love, her problem was on its way to being solved. The lady was very thankful to me as she had finally found a person who could relate to her problem and actually listen.

The phone call that had started with anger had ended with laughter! My plain-speak and a genuine effort to reach out to her had worked miracles, leaving both the lady and me happy and content. Such is the power of love.

That reminds me of one more incident. On another day, when I was walking back from work, I happened to walk past a man who looked quite familiar. Only as I moved past him, I noticed that he did not appear happy or impressed to see me. While I did not know what had caused so much disdain in that man, I did recognise him as a superior at work in the same office as mine, but in another department. I shrugged the incident off thinking that he must have had a bad day. But the very next day, I crossed paths with him again. This time again he did not look too happy to see me! So, I thought to myself that the next time I am face to face with him I will give him a big smile. Next day arrived, and sure enough the man was approaching. I greeted him with a discrete but loving smile. Yet again, all I received in return was a serious and morose look. That, however, did not discourage me. For that matter, I resolved to myself that every time he would pass by me I would greet him with a smile; I had almost made it the mission of my life to evince a smile out of this man. Days passed, and still it was the same depressing story. I, however, stayed positive and continued my 'onslaught' with this man. At last, after a week of relentless pursuit, the gentleman greeted me with a smile, and that too, on his own! I must say, that smile melted my heart immediately, for I knew that it was God who had smiled through him. It was Bhagavan who had motivated me to go that extra mile, so that I could share His love with a complete stranger, and it certainly was Baba again who, through this unexpected smile, had rewarded my intention and efforts. He taught me that if we persist with love, love will come to us. After all, is it not said that a smile is a curve that can set all things straight!

In both these instances, a simple expression of love had uplifted both its recipients and me. The message to me was loud and clear – that if we broadcast love, by whichever means possible, be it by smiling, singing, through emails or posts, the same love boomerangs to us, ten-fold in magnitude! Ultimately, all that matters is our love for Him, and how we share this sacred love with everyone around.

- *By Ankit Narotam*

THE DAFFODIL PRINCIPLE

Several times my daughter Carolyn had telephoned to say, "Mother, you must come to see the daffodils before they are over." I wanted to go, but it was a two-hour drive from Laguna to Lake Arrowhead.

"I will come next Tuesday", I promised, a little reluctantly, on her third call.

Next Tuesday dawned cold and rainy. Nevertheless, I had given word. Though loath to make the journey, I drove there. When I finally walked into Carolyn's house, I was welcomed by the joyful sounds of happy children. I delightedly hugged and greeted my grandchildren.

"Forget the daffodils, Carolyn. The road is invisible in these clouds and fog. There is nothing in the world, except you and these children that I want to see badly enough to drive another inch!"

My daughter smiled calmly and said, "We drive in this all the time, Mother."

"Well, you won't get me back on the road until it clears, and then I'm heading for home!"

"But first we're going to see the daffodils. It's just a few blocks," Carolyn said. Sensing my incredulity, she added, "Don't worry, mother. I'll drive. I'm used to this."

Soon, we were sputtering our way through the grim mist. Only a desolate road in sight and a howling wind for company. I glowered at my otherwise sane and sensible Carolyn, who was so hell-bent on this daft venture.

"Carolyn," I said sternly, "Please turn around."

"It's all right, Mother, I promise. You will never forgive yourself if you miss this experience."

After about twenty minutes, we turned onto a small gravel road and I saw a small church. On the far side of the church, I saw a hand lettered sign with an arrow that read: "Daffodil Garden". We got out of the car, each taking a child's hand, and I followed Carolyn down the path. Then, as we turned a corner, I looked up and gasped.

Before me lay the most glorious sight.

It looked as though someone had taken a great vat of gold and poured it over the mountain peak and its surrounding slopes. The flowers were planted in majestic, swirling patterns: sweeping swathes of deep orange, creamy white, lemon yellow, salmon pink, and saffron and butter yellow. Each differently-colored variety was planted in large clusters such that each swirled and flowed like a river with its own unique hue. There were five acres of flowers.

"Who did this?" I asked Carolyn.

"Just one woman," Carolyn answered. "She lives on the property. That's her home." Carolyn pointed to a well-kept A-frame house, pettily sitting in the midst of all that glory. We walked up to the house.

On the patio, we saw a poster. "Answers to the Questions I Know You Are Asking", was the caption in flowing, cursive letters. The first answer was a simple one. "50,000 bulbs," it read. The second answer was, "One at a time, by one woman. Two hands, two feet, and one brain." The third answer was, "Began in 1958."

For me, that moment was a life-altering experience. I thought of this woman whom I had never met; who, more than forty years before, had begun, one bulb at a time, to bring her vision of beauty and joy to an obscure mountaintop. Planting one bulb at a time, year after year, this unknown woman had forever changed the world in which she lived. One day at a time, she had created something of extraordinary magnificence, beauty, and inspiration.

The daffodil garden taught me one of the greatest principles of celebration. That is, learning to move toward our goals and aspirations one step at a time - - often just one baby-step at a time - and learning to love the doing, learning to use the accumulation of time. When we multiply tiny pieces of time with small increments of daily effort, we too will find we can accomplish magnificent things, even change the world.

"It makes me sad in a way," I admitted to Carolyn. "What might I have accomplished if I had thought of a wonderful goal thirty-five or forty years ago, and had worked away at it 'one bulb at a time' through all those years? Just think what I might have been able to achieve!"

My daughter summed up the message of the day in her usual, plainspoken way. "Start today," she said.

She was right. It was so pointless to think of the lost hours of yesterdays. The way to make learning a lesson of celebration, instead of a cause for regret, was to only ask, "How can I put this to use today?"

Use the Daffodil Principle. Stop waiting...

- Until your car is paid off...
- Until you get a new home...
- Until you organize the garage...
- Until you declutter your desk...
- Until you lose or gain weight...
- Until summer/spring/winter/fall...

There is no better time than right now to be happy. Happiness is a journey, not a destination.

Don't be afraid that your life will end. Be afraid that it will never begin!

Bhagavan Baba always says, "Past is past, future is uncertain, but the present is omnipresent. The present is the tree of the past and seed of the future. So, live in the present. Make it sacred and holy by cultivating good thoughts and engaging in noble acts."

Source: Adapted from an email forward

LOVE IS A FORGETTING

Life never tires of teaching us lessons. These are signatures of God, verily, His insignia, which declare His presence to us each time they manifest themselves. When Bhagavan Baba says ‘*Awareness is life*’, He wants us to take note of the Almighty’s signature all around us.

Someone has said, poets are those who can perceive things that we cannot. And, therefore, poets communicate to us the experience of what we have missed: the joy of exploration and discovery. God does just that. For, He is the Timeless Poet, the *Kavim Puranam*. Like a true creative artist, He takes great joy in showing His poems to us. But when we fail to comprehend the surreal beauty of His poems, He sadly turns His face away. Sometimes, God undertakes to compose special poems to remove our special ignorance or answer our special quests. And when we finally begin to understand His poetry, we realise that there is no joy better than connecting to His joy.

I was sitting in the compound of the Primary School at Prasanthi Nilayam on a visitors’ day. The whole campus was a festival of joy: children meeting their parents and relatives while the others frisked about, playing games. There were kids enjoying the caper and tumble of the see-saw, some others shrieking delightedly on a swing, a few others disgorging themselves from the mouth of a slide that resembled an elephant trunk – the entire scene looked like a fairyland. I could see a couple of teachers walking around, keeping a watch on the children.

Suddenly I discovered an interesting scene. A boy, barely in the second standard, was standing a few feet from me, rubbing his eyes, and sobbing. An older boy came up to him, and asked him why he was sobbing. One hand still rubbing his eyes, he pointed out what was happening a little distance from him. A teacher was gently reprimanding a couple of children.

Non-plussed, the older boy asked, “What? Why are you crying?”

“Teacher is scolding them”, he replied.

“She is scolding them, not you. Why do *you* cry?”

“They are my friends, my class”, the boy replied, whimpering.

The older boy did not know what to say.

Then the scene changed. The teacher lifted one of the boys, a tiny, cute-looking chap, and carried him on her shoulder. Surely, she did not like to draw tears from his eyes. The boy who was crying until now suddenly leapt up jubilantly.

Bewildered at this unexpected change, the other boy and asked him, “Hey, what happened? Jumping in joy!”

“See, ma’m is loving my friend, she is carrying him”.

He jumped a few steps, and ran away.

I was not only speechless, but stupefied too! What an absolute identification with another's tears and smiles!

A few days ago I had read a cryptic message of Bhagavan Baba in which He said, 'Love is a forgetting'. I did not really understand how love can be a forgetting. Who forgets what? How can that be love? Now, Bhagavan in His great kindness was showing me what is forgetting. It is forgetting oneself, forgetting one's separateness, and identifying one's self with the other, the object of love. This boy had so identified with his friend's tears and smiles that he forgot he was not being scolded or being loved, yet he experienced both. It was perfect self-effacement, death of ego. Therefore Bhagavan says *love is egolessness*, and *ego is lovelessness*. 'True love is when I live in the beloved, when I forget myself in the beloved; when a river jumps into the sea and forgets its separate identity in the identity of the sea'. Bhagavan wrote a little poem, a visible one, and taught me the meaning of a great lesson. The joy of learning is always immense. I was floating in joy for some weeks after this incident.

But that was not all. Bhagavan is never satisfied with teaching only a segment or part of a lesson. And, no lesson that Bhagavan teaches can be circumscribed. The dimensions of His lessons are always cosmic, expanding, and enveloping endless situations. A few weeks after the aforesaid incident came dasara. It was during the *Veda Purusha Saptaaha Jnana Yajna* (the holy sacrifice performed during dasara celebrations), when we spent hours in Poornachandra Hall that I was shown, one day, another interesting and, for me, elevating scene. The ritual was going on, and people were coming and taking their place in the hall. A father arrived with his three-year-old child and sat near me. She was a chubby little girl, with a heartwarming dimpled smile. They sat down, and the father wanted the baby to sit by him on the mat. But the child refused to sit on the ground. She sat on her father's lap, one hand around his neck. Then she looked up at the pictures on the ceiling of Poornachandra, and started to ask her father about each. Yet, all the while, she resolutely remained on her father's lap, clinging on to his neck tenaciously. I was so amused; I could not take my eyes off this child. After a few minutes, she got probably tired of looking at the pictures, for now she held her father's neck in both hands, and hid her face on his shoulder.

Then it came to me in a flash. Bhagavan was teaching me an extension of my previous lesson. If I could hold on to my Father like this! Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to tell his disciples, "Tie non-duality in a knot at the end of your *dhoti*, and go wherever you would, you are safe"; which means, if one is established in the knowledge of non-duality, the attractions of the *samsara* (world) will have no power over him. Sri Ramakrishna was using a word-metaphor to drive home a great lesson; now Baba was using a picture-metaphor to drive home an immensely profound lesson. I realized if I could hold on to my Father like this child, and refuse to budge from His lap to give way to the attractions of the world, seeking comfort and independence, I

would be quite safe. I may get interested in the many pictures of the world, but I must have one hand firmly around my father's neck, and listen to how He explains them to me, forever ready to hold Him in both my hands, and take my eyes away from the world, to hide myself in Him. My whole existence, then, is centred in my Father, who is far more real than all the colours and shapes of the world. Needless to say, my eyes and heart were overflowing.

This was a great lesson in surrender, an extension of true love. *Love is a surrender, and to surrender is to love.* Both operate in the field of *faith*, of implicit trust. One need not denounce the world, nor be too attached to it. "Take it as shapes in shadow", Bhagavan says, "for God alone is the Sun". Truly, God indeed is the Sun that illuminates all beings, all things sensate and insensate. And when we begin to see Him, the Divine Indweller, in every human heart, how can we not but feel and radiate the Love, that selfless, unconditional, forgetting Love, which seeks no rewards but is its own reward?

- Mr. B. K. Misra

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

Bhagavan Baba is the embodiment in human form of the essence of all religions. He always exhorts everyone to follow their own religion but in its true spirit, hence, He says that a Hindu should become a better Hindu, a Christian a better Christian and so on. His message of "Love All Serve All" and "Help Ever Hurt Never" is as universal as the Sun and the stars. Through this quiz, let us try to understand these religions better in the light of Bhagavan's teachings.

1. The Zoroastrian or Parsi religion is symbolised by the flaming fireplace. Also known as the Fire of Wisdom, what does the fire symbolize?

- A. Our heart should be full of sacrificial emotions.
- B. To remind us that one of the 5 elements of matter is fire.
- C. So that evil thoughts and tendencies might be reduced to ashes.
- D. To illuminate our minds.

2. The Jewish religion has the "Menora" as its symbol. This consists of seven branches of lamps indicating that God created the world in six days, with the central shaft representing the Sabbath, the seventh day for rest.

On which Jewish holiday is this Menorah lit?

- A. Shabbat
- B. Yom Kippur
- C. Sukkot
- D. Hanukah

3. The Buddhist Wheel which stands for the wheel of time, the wheel of *samsaar* - the phenomenal world cycle, and most importantly for the wheel of righteousness, which is the key to the release from bondage to Time.

Bhagavan has given us the spiritual meaning of the Buddhist wheel as follows: **'Remember the wheel of cause and consequence and the wheel of dharma that rights them all.'**

What other figurative representation does the wheel symbolize?

- A. Unity of all religions.
- B. Rapid spiritual change.
- C. One should always be engaged in work.
- D. A reminder to always think good, speak good and do good.

4. The Jain religion is symbolised by an outstretched palm of the right hand bearing the word *Ahimsa* or non-violence, which is the cornerstone of the Jain faith. On top of the hand is the *Swasthika* with four sides.

What do the four sides of the *Swasthika* represent?

- A. The four destinies of man.
- B. The four paths to liberation.
- C. The four weaknesses in man.
- D. The four methods of promoting love and peace.

5. The Christian cross symbolises self-sacrifice by crossing out, or removing the ego. Bhagavan tells us that the spiritual meaning of the cross is: **“Cut the ‘I’ feeling clean across and let your ego die on the cross, to endow on you Eternity.”**

Bhagavan also stresses: “The highest and the most fruitful sacrifice is that of the ego. Crucify it and be free. Dedicate it to God and be rich beyond all dreams. Prepare yourself for this supreme status, by engaging in holy *karma*, that is to say, *karma* cleansed in the crucible of *dharma*, and attain *Brahman* (the One Indivisible Absolute), which appears as all this multifarious Universe.

You too have undertaken this birth for this very mission: the mission of crucifying the ego on the cross of _____”.

- A. Service to mankind.
- B. Charitable actions.
- C. Material prosperity.
- D. Compassion.

6. The Islamic Crescent moon with a star is an inspiration for firm and steady faith in, and unflinching loyalty to God. The changes of the moon are interconnected to vagaries of the mind. Fixing the mind that is filled with Love on the supreme Lord captures the spirit of Islam. It means the one who understands the connection between the mind of fixed faith and Love reaches the highest abode.

Bhagavan has given us the meaning of the crescent moon and star symbol of Islam as: **‘Be like the star which never wavers from the crescent but is steady in fixed faith.’**

Since the moon, plays an integral part in all religions, in a Divine Discourse from 1983 delivered during Ramzan, Swami expounds on the rituals of fasting: “Islam gives importance to the moon...with the *darshan* of the new moon, the Ramzan fast begins....”

During which phase of the moon does the Ramzan fast end?

- A. New Moon.
- B. First Quarter.
- C. Full Moon.
- D. Last Quarter.

7. The Sikh symbol is known as the ‘*khanda*’, which symbolizes God's Universal and Eternal Power.

The *khanda* is a very important symbol in Sikhism and is commonly seen in *Gurdwaras* (Sikh Temples) and on the Sikh flag. It consists of a double-edged sword surrounded by a circular wheel, called *chakra*, held up by a sword on each side called *kirpans*.

The double-edged sword is the creative power of God, which controls the destiny of the whole creation. It is the sovereign power over life and death. The right edge of the double-edged sword symbolizes freedom and authority governed by moral and spiritual values. The left edge of the double-edged sword symbolizes divine justice and morality, which chastises and punishes the wicked oppressors.

What does the *Chakra* signify?

- A. The perfection of God’s Creation.
- B. The impermanence of life.
- C. God is without beginning or end.
- D. The cycle of birth and death.

8. All these and other religions are sourced and therefore headed by the Ancient, Eternal, Universal Religion, Sanathana Dharma, symbolised by the sacred syllable *Om*, also known as the *Pranava*.

The sound of creation and beginning of knowledge is ‘*Om*’. Bhagawan says, **“Listen to the primeval *Pranava* resounding in your heart as well as in the heart of the Universe. *Om* is the symbol of the unchanging, eternal, universal, supreme God. *Om* is the sound of the movement of the stars in the firmament; it is the sound that manifested when the dawn of creative Will stirred the *Niraakaara* (the Attributeless) into activity. As a matter of fact, every little disturbance of equilibrium produces sound, however minute. The meeting of the eyelids when the eye winks, results in sound; however faint. There are infinitesimally faint sounds, which no ear can hear. So, you can understand that when the Elements originated and Creation started, the sound *Om* was produced. That sound is the primal, the primeval One.”**

What method does Bhagavan prescribe to hear this sacred sound of *Om*?

- A. By chanting the mantra at night.
- B. By sitting silently near the Ocean.
- C. By calming our passions and prejudices.
- D. By intense meditation.

9. One commonly used symbol of the Bahá'í Faith is a nine-pointed star. In the Bahá'í Sacred Writings, the numbers nine and nineteen have symbolic meaning. The Bab, the Founder of the Babi Faith, and Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, often used the numerical value of words to symbolize concepts.

What does the number Nine symbolize?

- A. The last stage of attaining liberation.
- B. Fearlessness.
- C. Surrender.
- D. Completeness.

10. In the Shinto religion, worshippers use the wooden plaque *ema* for worship of the *kami* (spirits or gods). These plaques tend to be fairly uniform in size and shape, but many have different pictures painted on them, of animals or other Shinto imagery, and they often have the word *gan'i*, meaning "wish", written along the side.

What is this plaque *ema* used for?

- A. For worshippers to write their prayers on.
- B. For blessings before they enter the temple.
- C. For the priest to baptize the worshippers.
- D. To throwing lucky coins on.

ANSWERS:

1C. So that evil thoughts and tendencies might be reduced to ashes. Bhagavan tells us that the spiritual meaning of the sacred fire of Zoroastrianism is: **‘Offer all bitterness in the sacred fire and emerge grand, great, and godly’.**

In a Divine Discourse from 1976 Swami said: “Zoroastrianism, the Parsi religion, was founded by Zoroaster, who wanted that man should ever have the Fire of Wisdom blazing in his consciousness **so that evil thoughts and tendencies might be reduced to ashes.** It has to infuse all thoughts, words and deeds with the illumination of virtue and vigour; it must destroy all worldly desire and render man pure for entry into the heaven of freedom. Adoration,

meditation and acts of selfless service are essential for the dawn of enlightenment.”

2D. Hanukah.

One of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith is the Menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum used in the Temple. The Jews believed that the Menorah had been made by Moses, and had been with the Jews when they wandered through the desert. It is thus a symbol of the Jewish faith and was always present in the Temple when it stood in Jerusalem. Priests would light it every evening and clean it every morning.

Ultimately, the purpose of this Menorah is not to illuminate the temple, but to spread its light throughout the world. **An important part of the Hanukah celebration is the Menorah.** After the lighting of the candles, people give gifts to one another and sing.

3B. Rapid spiritual change.

Buddhists see the wheel as having three basic parts or "three trainings". The first section is the hub; it symbolizes moral discipline, which is able to stabilize the mind. The eight spokes represent wisdom that can be applied to defeat ignorance. Each of the eight spokes symbolizes one aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path set out by the Buddha in his teachings. The rim is a representation of concentration, which holds everything else together. **The wheel's motion is seen as a metaphor for the rapid spiritual change that happens when someone follows the teachings of the Buddha.**

4A. The four destinies of man.

The four arms of the swasthika remind us that during the cycles of birth and death we may be born into any one of the four destinies: heavenly beings, human beings, animal beings, (including birds, bugs, and plants) and hellish beings. Our aim should be liberation and not rebirth.

On top of the *Swasthika* are three dots standing for spiritual knowledge, strong faith and good conduct as means of emancipation. There is a crescent with a top dot - all these elements covered by a rectilinear enclosure.

5D. Compassion.

In His Divine 1972 Christmas Discourse, Swami expanded: "People talk of the sacrifice of Christ as evidence by His crucifixion. But, he was surrounded and bound, and crowned by the crowd who captured Him with a crown of thorns, and later, nailed to the cross by his captors. A person bound and beaten by the police cannot say that he has sacrificed anything, for, he is not a free man.

Let us pay attention to the sacrifice that Jesus made while free, out of his own volition. He sacrificed his happiness, prosperity, comfort, safety and position; he braved the enmity of the powerful. He refused to yield or compromise. He

renounced the 'ego', which is the toughest thing to get rid of. Honour Him for these. He willingly sacrificed the desires with which the body torments man; this is sacrifice greater than the sacrifice of the body under duress.”

6A. New Moon.

During this Discourse Swami further expands: “Islam **gives importance to the moon...with the *dharshan* of the new moon, the Ramzan fast begins and when the new moon is seen again, the fast ends.** 'Fast' does not consist in merely desisting from food and drink. The fast starts at sunrise and is broken only after sunset and is observed most rigourously.

Waking as early as three or four, in the *Brahma Muhuurtha*, prayer is started, and throughout the day, the constant presence of God is sought to be experienced. This is the meaning of *Upavaasa* (fast). Also, during the Ramzan month, rivalry is avoided, hatred is suspended. Husband and wife live apart though in the same home, mother and children both follow the same spiritual regimen and an atmosphere of brotherhood is maintained. The body, the senses and the mind are subject to rigourous discipline.

Periods of fast comprising a month are prescribed in all religions. The Hindus observe it in *Maagha* and *Shraavana* months. Zoroastrians and Christians have allotted for themselves months for the same purpose.”

7C. God is without beginning or end.

There must always be a balance between the two and this balance is emphasized by the *Chakra* which is **a symbol of all-embracing divine manifestation: including everything and wanting nothing, without beginning or end, neither first nor last, timeless and infinite.**

The *Chakra* is surrounded by two curved swords called *Kirpans*. They emphasize the equal emphasis that a Sikh must place on spiritual aspirations as well as obligations to society.

8C. By calming our passions and prejudices.

In His Divine 1978 Discourse, Swami guides us further: “Our Self is resonant with *Pranava*. But amid the clamour of the market-place and the noise of the commerce of life, our little selves are not able to hear it. Our own senses lay claim to our attention. Our minds crave for being let free among the pleasures of the outer world. Obviously **our passions and prejudices have to be calmed before we can hear *Om*, the Song of the Lord that wells up from the heart.**

Sai principle 'S' stands for *Sai*, 'A' for *And* and 'I' for the *saadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) himself. Thus SAI in fact symbolizes the *Vedic* dictum: *Thath thwam asi* (Thou art that). In the first stage the *saadhaka* says, 'I am in Sai,' in the

second stage, 'Sai is in *me*,' and in the third and final stage, 'Sai and I are One,' the duality between the two having been shed. When truth strikes the individual like a streak of lightning in the midst of dark clouds, and abides, it confers Bliss, and in that moment of illumination *Om* is revealed in all its grandeur.”

9D. Completeness.

Nine, as the highest single-digit number, symbolizes completeness. The Bahá'í Faith regards humanity as an organic entity which has developed through its embryonic state to infancy, then to adolescence and is now coming of age, which is the state of fulfillment. So likewise, the number nine reflects a sense of fulfillment or culmination and perfection. Bahá'í Houses of Worship, for example, have nine sides.

10 A. For worshippers to write prayers on.

Ema are small wooden plaques on which Shinto worshippers write their prayers or wishes on and then leave hanging for the *kami* to read them. Stereotypically, the image on the plaque would be of a horse, *uma* or *ma* in Japanese; *ema* means, literally, "horse picture". This name originates from the fact that real horses were once offered by the wealthy in exchange for blessings at shrines.

At some of the more central and popular shrines, such as the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, one can find *ema* in many languages, as tourists leave their own wishes and prayers in their own language.

**QUIZ ON LORD SHIVA
BASED ON DIVINE DISCOURSES**

We begin the quiz with a poem on Lord Shiva as described by Bhagavan Baba.

*He has abundant hair with the moon adorning His head,
The cool water of the Ganga flowing between the matted locks,
With His radiant eye of wisdom in the middle of the forehead,
And the purple neck gleaming like the sheen of a blackberry.
He wears serpent bracelets and a snake belt,
His entire body is smeared with Vibhuti,
His forehead is adorned with a kumkum dot,
His ruddy lips glow with the juice of the betel,
Diamond-studded gold earrings dangle from His ears
And His whole swarthy body glows with divine effulgence.*

(Telugu Poem)

1. In His Divine Mahashivarathri Discourse from 2007, Swami narrates the story of how Lord Shiva’s unkempt external appearance could not dissuade Goddess Parvathi from marrying Him. “Once Lord Easwara was absorbed in intense tapas (*penance*). Parvathi wished to marry Him, but her parents tried to dissuade her. They started to reason with her, describing Shiva’s form thus: ‘Oh! Gowri! You are very young and Sambashiva is old; He has matted locks and wears a tiger skin; He rides a bull and is constantly on the move; He is adorned with snakes; how did you court Him? Don’t you know all this? He has no house of His own and sleeps in the cremation ground.’

Why did Parvathi not pay any heed to all this reasoning?

- A. Because her friends had challenged her.
- B. Because she knew there was no difference between Lord Shiva and herself.
- C. She wanted to win Shiva’s heart anyhow.
- D. She was getting too old.

2. In a Divine Discourse from 1997, Swami shares with us the story of how a prayer from a pure heart to Lord Shiva can save a devotee even from the hands of the Lord of Death! “Markandeya was allotted only a lifespan of sixteen years. The mother looked after him all those sixteen years as the apple of her eye. The father protected him from all dangers from any quarter. The teacher took care of his education. But none of them had any control over his lifespan. The lad realized this truth. Hence he placed his reliance on God regarding his destiny.

A few days before he was to complete his sixteenth year, he went to the Shiva temple and prayed: ‘Oh Lord! My parents have protected my body. The teacher looked after my education. But God alone can protect my life. Hence,

make me one with You.’ Placing his head on the Shivalinga, hugging the *linga*, with both his arms, he declared: ‘Eeshvara! You are my sole refuge!’ Saying so, he closed his eyes. When the sixteen years were over, the Lord of Death arrived and cast his noose to take the life of Markandeya.”

Why was the Lord of Death not able to take Markandeya’s life?

Lord Shiva transformed Markandeya into a baby.

The noose kept slipping off of Markandeya.

The Shivalinga would also get caught in the noose.

The Lord of Death felt pity and granted him another 10 years.

3. In a Divine Discourse from 1961, Swami narrates the story of how a spiritual seeker attained Realization from Lord Shiva. “There was once a *sadhaka* (spiritual seeker) who approached a guru for guidance. The guru gave him an idol of Vishnu and also necessary instructions for daily worship. But the *saadhaka* found that, even after some months of meticulous *puja*, he did not get any spiritual reward or elation. So, he reported his dissatisfaction and the *guru* gave him another idol, this time of Shiva and asked him to have another try. The disciple came after another six months demanding another idol, because even Shiva had failed him. This time, he got a Durga idol, which he duly installed in his domestic shrine. The two previous idols were standing, dust-ridden and neglected, on the window-sill.

One day, while *Durga-puja* (ritual worship of Goddess Durga) was going on, the disciple found that the perfumed smoke from the incense-stick was being wafted by the breeze towards the idol of Shiva on the window-sill. He got wild that the ungrateful stonehearted God who was deaf to his powerful entreaties should get the perfume intended for his latest idol! So, he took a piece of cloth and tied it round the face of Shiva, closing up the nostrils that were inhaling the perfume. Just at that moment, to his immense surprise Shiva appeared in His splendour and Glory before the *sadhaka!* The man was dumb-founded. He did not know how the ill-treatment had induced Shiva to give him *darshan*. But, what had really happened?”

- A. Goddess Durga compelled Lord Shiva to have mercy.
- B. The seeker had once received a boon from Lord Shiva for His Darshan.
- C. Secretly the seeker’s wife had been fervently praying to Lord Shiva too.
- D. For the first time the seeker had believed that the Shiva idol was alive.

4. In a Divine Mahashivaratri Discourse from 1962, Swami narrates a story of how Lord Shiva proves to Goddess Parvathi that God could respond if one cries longingly even for a physical mother: “Even if you are not able to conceive the idea of a Lord or a God, you must be able to know what Love is by experience, is it not? You have experienced the love of your parents, of a friend, of a partner or of a brother or sister, or towards your own children. That

love is itself a spark of God, who is all Love, who is all the Love in all the worlds at all times. Call upon your mother and even if your physical mother cannot come to your rescue, some Mother or the Supreme Mother herself will certainly hurry towards you.

There is a fine story to illustrate this: One dark night when Shiva and Parvathi were journeying through the sky, they saw a man perched on the branch of a tree, about to fall on the ground through sheer exhaustion of limbs. Parvathi pleaded on his behalf and wanted that Shiva should save him; and Shiva preferred that She should save him, instead!”

What did Lord Shiva and Parvathi decide to do then?

- A. Lord Shiva disguised as a fisherman and rushed to save him.
- B. They made the winds blow stronger to see if he remembered God.
- C. They decided to help him based on whether he called for Mother or Father.
- D. Goddess Parvathi said she would save him if his good deeds merited this.

5. In a Divine Discourse from 1961, Swami narrates a story of how Lord Shiva tested a devotee’s faith: “When a house is to be certified as habitable, the engineer tests the foundations. The Lord too tests the foundations whether Faith is true and deep. Shiruthondar, a devotee of Shiva was also similarly tested by Shiva who came as a *jangama* (ascetic). When Shiruthondar showed that he had no attachment to the world, Shiva revealed Himself and said, ‘Worship Me as your own Self.’”

What did Shiruthondar say in reply?

- A. “Please reveal Your Immanence to me first!”
- B. “Please grant me a Gurumantra first!”
- C. “I will worship You in penance for 1,000 years”
- D. “I want to adore You as separate from me!”

6. In a Divine Discourse from 1977, Swami narrates a very touching story of how compassionate Lord Shiva is towards a truthful act of service: “Millions come to Kashi as pilgrims. It is said that those who see Kashi will not be born again. One day at Kailasha, Parvathi asked Shiva, ‘Lord, I have heard it said that all those who visit Kashi, where there is a celebrated shrine for Your worship, will attain Kailasha and stay on there in Your presence. Millions are coming to Kashi, but is this place big enough to accommodate all of them?’ Shiva replied, ‘All the millions cannot come to Kailasha. I shall design a play and make clear to you who among the millions can come here. You, too, have a role to act. Do as I direct you to.’”

Parvathi became an old hag of 80 and Shiva a rickety old man of 90. The old woman had the old man on her lap, right at the main entrance of the famous Shiva shrine of Vishweshwara, and she implored in piteous tones to the pilgrims who passed by on their way to the temple.”

What did Goddess Parvathi say to the passing pilgrims?

- A. “We need donkeys to take us back home!”
- B. “Please say some prayers for our situation”
- C. “Will anyone help us into the temple!”
- D. “My husband is dying of thirst! Please get him some water from the Ganges!”

7. In a Divine Discourse from 1997, Swami shares with us a story of how Lord Shiva (Eshvara) readily grants whatever boon His devotee prays for without considering the consequences: “Once upon a time there was an *asura* (demon) named Gajaasura. He performed a penance. Eshvara, pleased with his penance, offered him as a boon whatever he desired. Eshvara is a deity who is easily propitiated. Hence He is known as Bhola Shankara. When He is pleased with a devotee, He gives the devotee whatever he asks.”

What was the boon that the demon Gajasura desired from Lord Shiva?

- A. “I want to stay young forever!”
- B. “I want You to dwell in my stomach!”
- C. “I want Your trident to rule over the world!”
- D. “I want Your vehicle - the Bull!”

8. In a Divine Discourse from 1961, Swami narrates yet another amazing story of how Lord Shiva used the formidable and fearful Planet *Shani* (Saturn) to prove that nothing can avert Divine Will: “I shall tell you the story of *Ishwara Sankalpa* (Will of the Supreme Lord) and how nothing could stop its realization. Shiva was every day discoursing on *Kailaasa* to sages and saints and *Devas* in the evening hours. One day, Parvathi suggested that a Hall be constructed for accommodating them all, so that they could all listen without being affected by the constant fog and mist and cold winds. Shiva did not have the *Sankalpa* to put it up; still, Parvathi insisted that her idea must be implemented. The astrologer who was consulted before the foundations were dug said: ‘The stars forecast that the Hall will be consumed by fire, since *Shani* (Saturn) is not propitious from the very beginning.’ The Hall was completed, nevertheless. Now, that set a problem for the Couple.”

What did Lord Shiva propose to do about it?

- A. He distracted Shani into taking up some other time-consuming project.
- B. He surrounded the Hall with water from His Ganges.
- C. He went to Shani Himself to ask him a favour of saving the Hall.
- D. He calmed Shani’s wrath in exchange for a boon.

9. In a Divine Mahashivaraathri Discourse from 1978, Swami tells us: “Shivaraathri is celebrated in all Shiva temples; Shrishailam is a particularly famous temple of Shiva. There is a fine story told about this festival at Shrishailam. At the foot of the Shrishailam range of hills there is a village, where a boy of nine years named Baala Raamanna, attended primary school. He learned from his friends at school that their sisters and brothers-in-law were coming to their homes in order to attend the *Shivaraathri* celebrations on the Shrishailam Hills.

Raamanna came home and wanted that his mother should send his sister and brother-in-law too to the festival. His mother told him that he had no sister and, therefore, no brother-in-law. But he would not listen. He said he must have a sister and a brother-in-law like his friends. So his mother just to quieten him, said, ‘You have a sister and a brother-in-law, but they are in the temple on the Shrishailam. Their names are Bhramaraamba and Mallikaarjuna.’ She gave him the names by which Shiva and His consort are known - Bhramaraamba meaning ‘bee’ and Mallikaarjuna meaning the ‘white jasmine.’ These names are very apt, because the consort draws inspiration, instruction and wisdom from the Lord even as the bee draws its sustenance from the jasmine flowers. When he was told that his sister was in the temple on the Shrishailam, Raamanna insisted that he would go and invite his sister and brother-in-law to come home and stay there for some time. He wanted to take some presents for them, but his mother said that they were far too rich and that younger members of the family should not present anything to the elders. The mother sent the boy with a neighbour who was going to the temple to see the festival. She gave him some money so that he could get presents for the boy. Raamanna hastened up the hill and rushed into the temple, crying ‘Sister...Brother-in-law,’ and fell at the feet of the idol of Bhramaraamba. He held the idol in embrace and began dragging it, wanting it to accompany him. He clasped the idol of Mallikaarjuna and would not leave it. At last the priests in the temple drove him away as a mad boy.”

What act of Raamanna appeased Lord Shiva and His Consort enough to go to his house?

- A. He climbed a high rock and threatened to jump.
- B. He kept chanting the Shiva Mantra all night.
- C. He made his mother come there to clean the two idols.
- D. He sang Shiva bhajans and danced till his feet bled.

10. In a Divine Discourse from 1995, Swami shares with us the story of the result of the effect of the intense love that Lord Shiva bestowed on Nandi (His Divine Bull) when he was put to test, thereby redeeming his life: “Shiva and His consort Parvathi were playing a game of dice. For any game there has to be an umpire, who has to declare who is the winner. Shiva and Parvathi agreed to have Nandi (the divine bull) as the umpire. Nandi is a favourite of Shiva, as he is Shiva's vehicle. Although Shiva lost the game, Nandi declared Him the winner.

It is stated that Parvathi was indignant over Nandi's partiality for Shiva and cursed him that he should die from an incurable disease. Thereupon Nandi fell at the feet of Parvathi and pleaded for forgiveness. 'Mother! Forgive me. Should I not show at least this amount of gratitude to one who is my Master? Is it not humiliating for me to declare that my Master has lost the game? To uphold his honour I no doubt uttered a lie. But am I to be punished with such severity for so small an offence?' Nandi prayed for forgiveness in this manner."

How was Lord Shiva's Nandi able to atone for his sins?

- A. He had to become Parvathi's vehicle from then on.
- B. He had to leave Lord Shiva's abode forever.
- C. He had to eat food he disliked for the rest of his life.
- D. He had to offer Lord Ganesha what pleased him most.

ANSWERS:

1B. Because she knew there was no difference between Lord Shiva and herself.

Swami shares further: "Lord Easwara knew her nature and Parvathi knew Shiva's nature. They are in fact, not different from one another. **Lord Shiva is Shiva-Shakthi-atmaka-swarupa (Embodiment of Shiva and Shakthi). So too is Parvathi.** How can ordinary mortals understand such mystic nature of Lord Easwara and Parvathi! Where there is a feeling of duality, doubt arises. A man with dual mind is half blind. In fact, **there is no difference between Lord Shiva and Parvathi.**

2C. The Shivalinga would also get caught in the noose.

Swami continues: "The noose did not cover Markandeya alone. **The Shivalinga was also caught in the noose because Markandeya was embracing the *linga*.** When the Lord of Death started drawing the noose, Shiva emerged from the *linga*. Shiva asked the Lord of Death: "How dare you cast your noose on the one who has become one with Me and also cast Me in the noose?"

Shiva chastised the Lord of Death saying that he would be entitled to take the life of Markandeya if he had been alone, but not when he had become one with Him. "No one is entitled to touch a person who has united himself with Me," said Shiva. Shiva chastised Yama and protected Markandeya with immortality. With the Grace of the Divine, Markandeya got the blessings of all - his parents and preceptor."

3D. For the first time the seeker had believed that the Shiva idol was alive. Swami reveals further: **“The *sadhaka* for the first time believed that the Shiva idol was alive, conscious, *chaitanya*-full (full of life) and it was that belief which forced him to tie the bandage to the nose. The moment he realised that the idol was full of *Chith* (consciousness), he got the Realisation he was struggling for. Therefore, the *saadhaka* should see, not the stone which is the material stuff of the idol, but the Power that is inherent in it, that is symbolized by it, is the same Power that is inherent in his own heart and that pervades and transcends all creation.”**

4C. They decided to help him based on whether he called for Mother or Father.

Swami continued: “Meanwhile, the fall became imminent and so **they decided that if while falling the man shouted “*Amma* (mother),” Paarvathi should hasten to arrest his fall and if he shouted, “*Appa* (father),” Shiva should help** and see that no bones are broken. The man fell, but he shouted neither *Amma* nor *Appa*, but *Ayyo* (a sigh of misery)! And so he had to be left severely alone!”

5A. “Please reveal Your Immanence to me first!”

Swami continues: **“Then Shiruthondar demands, ‘Reveal to me Your Immanence in all Creation and then I shall worship me, for then I can know that I am really You.’**

Shiva blessed him and he saw all as Light. The vision was the finale of his career in *maaya*. He merged as light merges in Light, without noise and without announcement. Even his body became a streak of light which rose up into the depths of space.”

6D. ““My husband is dying of thirst! Please get him some water from the Ganges!”

Swami continues: “She lamented: **‘My husband is terribly thirsty. He is about to die of thirst. I cannot leave him and go to the river Ganga to bring him water. Will any of you pour a little water down his throat and save his life?’** The pilgrims were coming up from the ghats after their ceremonial bath in the holy river, their clothes still wet and clinging to their bodies. Some of them lamented that their peace was disturbed by the sight of this pathetic couple. ‘We have come to take *Darshan* (audience) of the Lord, and look what meets our eye.’ There were some who flatly ignored her cries and lifted their noses in the air. Some said, ‘Wait. Let us finish the worship inside the temple and then we shall bring the Ganga water for you.’ No one offered to bring the needed help to the aged patient.

Just then a robber, who was hurrying into the temple to pick a few pockets, heard the plaintive voice of the old woman and halted near them. He asked her, ‘Mother, what is the matter?’ She replied, ‘Son, we came to this place to have *Darshan* of Lord Vishweshwara of Kaashi, but my husband has fainted

out of sheer exhaustion. He might survive if someone will bring a little Ganga water and pour it down his throat. I cannot leave him here and go for water. Please help me and earn the merit.' The robber was moved into compassion. He had a little Ganga water in the hollow gourd he had with him. He knelt down near the dying person on the lap of the old woman, but the woman stopped him saying, 'The moment the Ganga water wets his throat, my husband may die; he is in the last stage of living. Therefore speak a word of truth and pour the water. The robber could not understand what she meant, so she explained, 'Speak within his hearing, some good deed that you have done in your life, and then pour the water in his mouth.' That created a problem for the robber. He was at his wits end. He could not quite comply. He said, 'Mother I have, in truth, not done any good deed so far. This present act, the offering of water to this thirsty man, is the very first good deed I am responsible for.' And saying this, he placed the gourd at the lips of the old man and gave him a mouthful.

Just at the moment, the couple disappeared and in their place stood Shiva and Parvathi, blessing the robber. Shiva said, 'Son, life is to be dedicated for the service of others and not devoted to the exclusive interests of oneself. Howsoever many wicked deeds you might have done so far, for your selfless offering of Ganga water with truth on your tongue, We bless you with this Vision. Remember there is no morality higher than truth; there is no prayer more fruitful than seva (selfless loving service.)"

7B. "I want You to dwell in my stomach!"

Swami continues: "The demon desired that fire should go forth from him continuously so that no one dare approach him. Shiva granted him the boon. Gajaasura continued to do penance and Shiva used to appear before him off and on. **Once Shiva asked him what he wanted. The demon said – 'I want You to dwell in my stomach.'** Shiva granted the boon and lodged himself in the demon's stomach. Shiva's consort Parvathi, searched for Shiva everywhere and could not find Him. As a last resort, she went to her brother, Vishnu, and appealed to Him to trace the whereabouts of her husband. The all-knowing Lord assured her: 'Don't worry dear sister. Your husband is Bhola Shankara. He grants readily whatever boon his devotee prays for, without considering the consequences. I suspect that he must have got into some trouble. I shall find out what has happened.'

Vishnu, who is the director of the cosmic play, staged a minor drama. He converted Nandi (Shiva's bull) into a dancing-bull and led it before Gajaasura, while himself assuming the role of a piper playing music on the pipe while the bull did the dancing. Gajaasura was in ecstasy over the dancing performance of the bull. He asked the piper (Vishnu) what he wanted. The piper replied – 'Can you give what I ask?' 'What do you take me for? I shall readily give you whatever you ask.' The piper said: 'If that is so, release from your stomach Shiva who is dwelling there.' Gajaasura then realized that the piper was none other than Vishnu Himself, who alone could know the secret of Shiva's presence inside his stomach. He fell at the feet of Vishnu, released Shiva from his stomach and prayed to Him for a boon. He said – 'I have been

blessed by many boons from you. My last request is that all should cherish my memory by worshipping my head after I pass away' Shiva thereupon brought his son and placed Gajaasura's head on him. Ever since, the tradition has prevailed in Bhaarath that every auspicious function of any kind commences with worship of Ganapathi. It was the result of Shiva's boon to Gajaasura.

8C. He went to Shani Himself to ask him a favour of saving the Hall.

Swami continues: **“Shiva proposed to ask *Shani* for the favour of saving the Hall from his anger, though He doubted whether the Planet, reputed for his inevitable ire, would ever agree.** Parvathi felt deeply hurt and she resolved not to give the tiny tyrant, *Shani*, the credit for destroying the Hall that She had got built. She swore that instead of giving him the chance to declare arrogantly that he had set fire to the Hall, she would herself set fire to it. But Shiva asked her to first await the outcome of His appeal to *Shani*, for He was Himself proceeding to his headquarters! He told Her, ‘If *Shani* agrees to exempt the Hall from his anger, I shall come back and report the good news to you; but if he is adamant, I shall raise My Hand and twirl this *Dhakka* (double drum). On hearing that signal, you may set fire to the Hall and rob *Shani* of the credit for doing so.’

Parvathi was ready with a burning torch in anticipation of the signal, so that there may not be a moment's chance for the wicked Planet to execute his nefarious plan of revenge. *Shani*, however, agreed to the request made by Shiva; he said that he would not bum down the Hall in Kailaasa and Shiva was happy at his reply. So, when *Shani* prayed that he may be granted one small boon, Shiva agreed and asked him what it was. It seems *Shani* had never before seen the famous Dance of Shiva which all the stellar divinities were extolling and *Shani* craved that Shiva may show him a step or two. Shiva readily assented and started the *Thaandava* (frantic dance of Shiva), raising His hand and sounding the *Dhakka!* Listening to the signal, Parvathi applied the torch and the Hall was, as per the *Sankalpa* of Shiva, burnt to ashes! Divine *Sankalpa* must be fulfilled! *Shani* was just a tool in the Divine Plan.”

9A. He climbed a high rock and threatened to jump.

Swami continued: **“Then in despair, he climbed a high rock and threatened to jump from that height unless his sister and her husband came with him.** Just then he heard a loud voice from the temple ‘Brother-inlaw!...Raamanna! Don't jump! We are coming with you...’and soon Lord Shiva and His consort presented themselves before him and accompanied him to his cottage in the valley below. The mother and son were so overwhelmed with Divine Bliss that they merged in the Divine phenomenon and were seen no more. This story has added to the sanctity of the shrine of Bhramaraamba and Mallikaarjuna at Shrishailam. Children in those days, and elders too, had innocent minds, simple hearts, and high ideals... Baala Raamanna had unadulterated faith, so he was able to dedicate his pure self to

the Lord and reach the Goal. You must always exalt low things to a higher level by infusing them with higher meaning. Raamanna believed the stone image to be God; he did not bring God down to the level of a stone image. You may worship a picture as God, but you should not posit God as a picture. Wood, stone or mud may be assumed to be Divine, but Divinity should not be limited to wood, stone or mud.”

10 D. He had to offer Lord Ganesha what pleased him most. Swami carried on: “Parvathi forgave Nandi and taught him the means to atone for his lapse. She told him, "The Chaturdhasi day in the month of Bhadrapada is the day when my son's birthday is celebrated. On that day **you have to offer to my son what pleases you most (green grass).**" **This means that one atones for one's sins when one offers to the Lord what is most pleasing and enjoyable to him.** For Nandi the most enjoyable and relishing food is green grass. As directed by Parvathi, Nandi worshipped Ganapathi by offering green grass. Nandi was then relieved of his dreaded disease. His health improved and by the grace of Parvathi he was redeemed.”

H2H QUIZ ON LORD SHIVA

1. In *Shiva-Sai-Mahaa-Deva* from the February 2006 issue, we presented an article by late Sri G. V. Subba Rao, who masterfully explained to us the Shiva-Shakthi aspect of Bhagavan Baba through various comparisons and parallels between Swami and Shiva.

“When Swami was in His early twenties, a restless youth who was an incorrigible cricket fan, was given the task of attending to Baba. Baba was reeling out cricket scores of a match being played in far away Madras in order to keep the youth happy! Even then, the boy kept asking questions of Swami, particularly about the third eye of Shiva. Swami looked intensely at the young man.....”

What happened next?

- A. The youth turned mute and just couldn’t talk anymore!
- B. A stream of vibhuti shot out from Swami.
- C. Swami stood in front of the youth as Shiva with His third eye open!
- D. Swami’s features disappeared and the youth could only see Swami’s eyes.

2. In *The Vision Of Non-Duality - IV* from the February 2006 issue, we shared Swami Vivekananda’s Hymn to Lord Shiva.

The first stanza salutes Shiva thus:

*Salutation to Shiva! Whose glory
Is immeasurable, Who resembles sky
In clearness, to Whom are attributed
The phenomena of all creation,
The preservation and dissolution
Of the universe! May the devotion,
The burning devotion of this my life
Attach itself to Him, to Shiva, Who,
While being Lord of all, transcends Himself.*

By which name is Lord Shiva crowned with in the second stanza?

- A. Mahadeva
- B. Sambhashiva
- C. Maheshwara
- D. Bholanath

3. In *The Wonderful Swami I Have Seen* from the July 2006 issue, we shared an incident narrated by an ardent devotee Mrs. Geeta Mohanram about the

impact of a trip to Swami on her grandfather, Mr. Seshagiri Rao, a devout Shiva follower:

“On one of these trips, my grandfather was asked to go with the ladies; because they couldn’t go by themselves without a male escort on these journeys that were so difficult... So he said: ‘Alright! I will accompany you all but I am not coming to see this young boy! Do you think I am crazy to come and see a sixteen year old, uneducated, non-Brahmin, illiterate person and believe that He is some kind of important person? You people are all crazy! I am not coming to see Him. I believe in my Lord Shiva that I worship everyday. I will drop you off all there and go to my relative’s house and spend my time there and that’s about it!’

So they finally convinced him. They arrived there around five-thirty in the evening, and Swami in those days, used to sit on that stone. At that time in the evening while the bhajan was going on, these four people - my grandfather, and my two aunts – arrived, and as they entered the compound of the old *Pattam Mandaram*, the old mandir; there was Swami, sitting on the rock.

He takes one look at Swami that he had vowed not to - because he was going to go away - he takes one look at Him, two seconds, and bang! He has fainted on the floor!”

What did her grandfather reveal on regaining his consciousness?

“All I saw was snakes darting at me and I got scared!”

“Swami was not a 16 year old anymore but an old man!”

“I saw two Swami’s sitting there instead of one!”

“I saw Swami exactly like the Lord Shiva I pray to!”

4. In *The Matchless Cosmic Splendour* from the July 2006 issue, one of the incidents we shared was of Dr. Ravi Kumar’s experience of the Shiva-Shakti aspect of Swami.

“It was a week after the 70th Birthday...When I went for morning *Darshan* the next day, I carried a new book with me and continued reading it till Swami came out to give *Darshan*. After *Darshan*, Swami went into the interview room with a group of devotees. I was sitting in the prayer hall in the first row near His Throne, enjoying this book.

The narration was of the life of One, who is adored as the son of God – Thirugnana-sambandar. When the child is three years old, one day, he throws a tantrum as the father is going to the temple tank for a bath - the child wants to accompany him. Cajolements and threats are of no avail and finally the father says, ‘If this is the way you behave, then go with me’ and takes him

along. Arriving at the tank, he leaves the child on the bank and loathe to leave the child unattended, enters the water with hesitation. Seeing the father has not surfaced for a long time the child began to weep.

Now, at this point the interview room door opened and Swami came into the bhajan hall. I was delighted, and quickly closed the book. Swami went into the bhajan hall and talked to some devotees along the aisle for a long time. As He was returning to the interview room after that, He stopped in front of me and posed a strange question, “.....”

What was the strange question that Swami asked?

- A. “Why are you always sleeping?”
- B. “Why do you keep reading the same book?”
- C. “How many litres of milk do you need?”
- D. “When are you going to sing?”

5. In *Expressions of Love - II* from the February 2006 issue, we shared a narration presented by Mr. O. K. S. Sastry about one of the experiences he had with the other students when they lovingly offered to Swami cards of affection during different festivals and holy occasions.

“Soon the month of February approached, and Shivarathri was round the corner. It is a great occasion, a long awaited festival for the devotees; but for us it was bad news. Bhagavan wanted to celebrate the festival in Puttaparthi. Crestfallen, we resorted to the only medium which can melt His heart...prayer. Yes, we prayed fervently to Bhagavan to take us along with Him. We did not want to miss Him even for a day and could not imagine not being part of the glorious festival and losing out on the incredible blessings from Him during this momentous festival.

The prayers were sincere and the result too was overwhelming. Swami had agreed that we could come to Parthi and not only that; we were going to travel just behind Swami’s car! Our joy knew no bounds, to say the least.

With all the blessings that we were receiving from our sweet Lord, our hearts were filled with only one sentiment that ‘we should be with Him forever and bask in His Love’. We did not want to miss Him even for a moment and we wanted to create a card, which will commune this emotion...this intense feeling to Bhagavan.

So we started wondering... who is so blessed to be with Lord Shiva continuously? Who has the opportunity to gaze at Him at all times everywhere and be with Him?”

Who was the chosen one that the students decided upon?

- A. Lord Shiva’s consort Parvathi.
- B. Lord Shiva’s son Ganesha.
- C. Lord Shiva’s younger son Subramanium.
- D. Lord Shiva’s vehicle Nandi.

ANSWERS:

1B. A stream of vibhuti shot out from Swami.

Sri G. V. Subba Rao continues: “**Swami looked intensely at the young man, when a jet stream of Vibhuuthi shot out with gale force from the middle space of the eye-brows of Swami in such a way, that the youth was catapulted to the other end of the hall!**”

The story is narrated in ‘Man of Miracles’ (by Howard Murphet) and also reconfirmed to me recently by the then youth, now in his early sixties.

Shiva is adored as *Thryambaka* the ‘three-eyed’ as in the famous hymn of liberation “*Thryambakam Yajaa Mahe*”, and so is Sai Baba a *Thrayambaka* the three-eyed one with His *Jnaana Nethra*, the third eye of wisdom, always open.”

2A. Mahadeva.

The second stanza of the hymn is:

*In whom Lordship is ever established,
Who causes annihilation of delusion,
Whose most surpassing love, made manifest,
Has crowned Him with a Name above all names,
The Name of "Mahadeva", the Great God!
Whose warm embrace, of Love personified,
Displays, within the heart, that all power
Is but a semblance and a passing show.*

3D. “I saw Swami exactly like the Lord Shiva I pray to!”

Mrs. Geeta Mohanram amusingly continues: “Swami gets up from the middle of the bhajan and says: ‘Don’t worry, don’t worry!’ He gets up, and helps them carry this 58-year-old man into Swami’s room and puts him on His bed. Swami says ‘Don’t worry; he is going to be like this for two days. You people go and attend the bhajan.’”

So these poor ladies, this is the second time they’re seeing Swami; they have a father who has fainted away, and they are sitting and trying to sing bhajans! Talk about concentration! And there is Swami, happily sitting on the rock continuing with the bhajan. As the bhajans are done, they say: ‘What has happened to our father?’ Swami said: ‘Don’t worry, he’ll tell you when he wakes up. But he is alright, I’ll look after him.’

So, for one and a half days, Swami looks after this old man - 58 years old, puts water in his mouth every two hours, materializes *vibhuti*, puts it on his head every two hours. This goes on for two days and these poor women, they don’t know if he is going to recover or not.

Two days later he gets up and he is a completely changed man! He said: ‘You ladies, you two daughters of mine, you can go back to Bangalore, but I am not coming back.’ They said: ‘You said you were not going to come here! What do you mean you are not coming back with us?’ He says: ‘No, **when I walked in into that compound, and I saw the young boy sitting on the rock, in His face, I had the vision of Lord Shiva. In His head, I saw the moon, and on His forehead, I saw the third eye! This is the Lord Shiva that I have been worshipping for the past fifty years.** And now that I have seen Him, why would I leave Him? I am not coming back.’

4C. “How many litres of milk do you need?”

Dr. Ravi Kumar continues: “**As He was returning to the interview room after that, He stopped in front of me and posed a strange question, “How many litres of milk do you need?”**”

My immediate thought was ‘maybe I have put on too much weight!’ Swami repeated the same question again a couple of times. I was not able to give any answer and Swami went into the interview room. I sat thinking about the strange question Swami had asked me... Why did He ask this question? Being unable to find a suitable answer I returned to the book I was reading...Imagine the thrill that went through me when I read that ...

With gracious compassion rising in His heart at the sight of the child, Lord (Shiva) looked at Mother Parvathi and said, “Give him a gold cup of milk”. (The narration continues that on coming back from his swim the father sees a cup of gold in the child’s hands and the tell-tale milk drops on his face. He asks who gave him the milk and the child - who till then was barely able to lisp - describes the Lord in wonderful poetry...)

I could not control my tears (of bliss) as it dawned on me that it was the same Shiva-Shakthi who had posed this question to me. I must mention that I was sitting at the same spot at which Swami had disclosed that He is Shiva-Shakthi incarnate after the miraculous cure

of the paralysis on Guru Poornima day in July 1963... Oh! How can we measure our good fortune in being present on Earth when God has come in Human form!”

5D. Lord Shiva’s vehicle Nandi.

OKS Sastry continues: “**And it occurred to us that it was Nandi. Nandi, the so-called bovine vehicle of Shiva from mythology. He is the holy one who is always facing the Lord.** You will find Nandi straight in front of the Shiva Idol in every Shiva Temple, looking at Him with unwavering attention and devotion. The idea seemed apt and was immediately executed.

The card was made with a prayer to our Lord Sai who is the *Shiva-Shakthi Swaroopa*, the embodiment of Lord Shiva and Mother Nature, that ‘**Let us be blessed like Nandi - at all times focussed on our Lord.**’ This prayer was translated into the form of a Telugu poem in the card. The poem also sang praises on the glorious Lord Sai Siva, beseeching Him to bless us by lighting the lamps of love and faith in our hearts. With His beautiful soft hands, He put down on the card...nay, inscribed on our hearts...“With Love, Baba.” He had blessed us with the highest reward...we wanted nothing more. We were full in His love...with His love...by His love.”

HEALING TOUCH

HOW GOD GUIDED GAYATRI TO PUT HER WORST FOOT FORWARD

Driven solely by the highest aspiration to serve in the hallowed premises of Bhagavan Baba's ashram, a young lady was willing to give it her all, despite her crippling polio. All she prayed for was the special chance and in the process, she discovered untapped inner powers, a healthcare system that sought out the root of her disability, and which helped her overcome her childhood malady.

Supporting herself on a stick that she had held across her frame, Gayatri stood in the calming atmosphere near the Ganesha idol facing the main entrance of Prasanthi Nilayam Ashram. *Aarti* to Lord Ganesha was in progress. With eyes closed, her mind floated gently on the soft strains of hymns and the wafting aroma of incense, as her soul soaked in the serenity of the moment.

"Yesterday was a bad day."

Gayatri's mind raced back. Though polio had completely crippled her right leg when she was three, and forced her to lead a dependent life, she had never flinched. Nor did she pray to God to give her back her leg. Bearing her entire body weight on her healthy left leg and supporting herself on a stick, she had fought on.

A Pure Desire to Serve

Her family used to attend *bhajans* of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in her neighbourhood, and that was her first contact with Bhagavan. This was in the early nineties. She soon realised that Baba was none other than God in flesh and blood. The one desire she had was to go for *seva*, where she could serve as a volunteer at Prasanthi Nilayam, amid the Presence.

For her family, fulfilling her wish was not an easy task. The family of six stayed in their small ancestral home in Gadwal town in the Mahboobnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. Her father was a small time contractor, not earning much. A chunk of the family income came from a two room woman's hostel that her mother ran in a part of their house. She was the third of four daughters, and the most unassuming.

From the beginning, she knew that a sound grounding in academics was the only way for her to a secure future. She strove hard. Known for her academic brilliance, she finally graduated in Bachelor of Arts with an astounding 80 per cent marks. Her parents and sisters never made her feel that she was physically challenged, they helped her in every way they could.

When she put forth her wish to go for *seva* at Prasanthi Nilayam, her parents to make sure that they fulfilled her wish, put together some money and sent

her along with the other volunteers from Mahboobnagar district in December 2006.

Hopes Dashed Due to Disability

But the day she reached Prasanthi Nilayam, her only dream seemed to crumble. Considering the difficulty she faced while walking, the officials of the district seva dal, remained undecided on whether to assign her a duty to perform as part of the *seva* or not. As a rule, a typical sevadal volunteer is expected to be on her feet most of the time. Naturally, it was feared that Gayatri would find it extremely difficult to cope with the duties.

At the possibility of losing the opportunity of performing *seva* in Bhagavan's divine presence, she had cried the whole day.

Despair Drives Her to Pray for Strength in Both Feet

No wonder when she participated in the Ganesha *aarthi* on that momentous day, for the first time in her life Gayatri then asked Bhagavan to make her stand on her two feet, so that she too could have the privilege to perform selfless service at His holy abode.

That night when sleep finally overtook her, she had a lovely dream. Gayatri dreamt that Bhagavan in His ochre robe was standing right in front of her. He then put His hand on Gayatri's head and said, "Do not worry, I will take care of everything". Walking away, He gave her a red rose. In the morning, Gayatri woke up bright and full of anticipation. Her sadness alleviated and her large bright eyes shone forth, as her face wore a curious smile. Somehow she felt the auspicious dream from Bhagavan augured a very special event ahead...

It was still very early in the day and Gayatri's eyes were closed, lost in absorbing the tranquillity of the serene morning, even as the priest of the Ganesh Temple was waving the camphor steadily in circles and finally raising the fire high in the direction of the devotees marking the conclusion of the morning rituals.

Waking Reality Confirms Dream Experience

The *aarti* was over and Gayatri opened her eyes. From a distance she saw the priest descending the steps of the temple and distributing flowers offered to the Lord Ganesha to the assembled devotees. Suddenly, the priest turned and walked up straight to Gayatri. Picking up a red rose from the bunch of flowers in his hand, the priest handed the flower to her. One look at the rose and Gayatri eyes opened wide.

"It was exactly the rose, which Swami had given me in the dream. The resemblance was unmistakable. I could not believe it was all really true," Gayatri said.

That night again Bhagavan came in Gayatri’s dream, again the reassurance, and another red rose. Again after the *aarti*, the next day, the priest handed over the exact red rose, she had seen in the dream. It was as if Bhagavan was saying, yesterday was no coincidence.

First Encounter with Sai Medical Counselling Ushers Hope

That day, Gayatri’s uncle asked her to accompany him to the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital (SSSGH), in Puttaparthi. He wanted to find out whether a prosthetic leg could somehow be fitted to Gayatri’s diseased leg, so that she could walk again. The doctors at SSSGH taking a look at Gayatri, told her that what she needed was surgery on the incapacitated leg at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS), Prasanthigram, which could bring back strength to her lost right leg. Both Gayatri and her uncle were surprised, when told that everything, right from the operation to the medicines, would be provided absolutely free of cost. They were also told that none of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s Hospitals charged anything from the patients.

Information Echoes Dream Assurance

“The words of Swami came back to me,” Gayatri said. “I will take care of you, don’t worry,” He had said. “I felt certain that I would stand on my two legs and will be able to come for seva,” said Gayatri exuding joy.

Gayatri is 21 but looks barely 15. Polio had inflicted Gayatri when she was three years old. In her 13th year Gayatri’s family visited a renowned hospital close to her home. The doctors who checked Gayatri told her, there was little hope of her walking again. “We cannot do anything. The limb is too deformed for us to do anything. She is too weak, even if we perform the surgery, she will not be able to recover,” were some of the answers Gayatri’s family had received. Those who did not understand her pain, mocked at her. Others who did understand, would try and sympathise with her. Gayatri never let the insults demoralise her or the sympathy soften her.

The visit to the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital gave her new hope and information about the super specialised healthcare available at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences. This time around, she returned to her town, filled with both happiness and sadness. Happy because she had now seen a new hope after years of a difficult life with a handicap, but sad too as she could not have her much desired opportunity to serve.

Face-to-face with God’s Surgeons

Early next year, on January 2, 2007, Gayatri entered SSSIHMS, Prasanthigram for the first time. On the first day itself, all the tests were done and the Head of Department, Orthopaedics, Dr. Kailash Rao, gave Gayatri an operation date for July 4, 2007.

One of the surgeons who performed surgery on Gayatri said that due to polio in her early childhood, Gayatri's muscles had become paralysed. The paralysis of the muscles had deformed the right leg down from the waist. Gayatri's condition was described as Anterior Poliomyelitis Sequelae.

Thorough Diagnosis Traces Root of the Problem

According to Dr. Kailash Rao, Gayatri's hip had flexed and had turned away from the body, while the knee was bent in. Gayatri's right foot was pointing out of the body. The muscle function was minimal and she used to support her body on her left leg and used a stick for support.

The surgeons, then decided to first correct the hip joint and then later correct the knee and the ankle. The first surgery was performed on July 4, 2007. The muscles around the hip joint were released and the hip joint corrected. According to the doctor treating Gayatri her muscles after being released became stronger and better.

After the operation, Gayatri was put on traction so that the length of the limb was corrected. She was also made to undergo physiotherapy for a month to improve the functionality of her operated limb. The doctors advised her to walk wearing callipers for six months. After six months she was called for the second operation. In the second operation, her knee and ankle were corrected.

Second Surgery Sets Stage for Miraculous Recovery

After the second operation was performed, to everyone's surprise, Gayatri started taking her first steps, taking support of a crutch without even undergoing physiotherapy. "After the second operation, she did not require any physiotherapy," the Head of the Orthopaedics Department said. Still, for adequate recovery and normal functioning of the right limb, Gayatri was suggested to wear callipers for six months.

Gayatri who had come for a check up in November 2008 is now able to stand on her two feet and walk. Her steps are slow and she sometimes uses a crutch for support. But doctors treating her have said that two months later Gayatri would be able to walk freely without any support.

"The rate of her recovery has surprised us," the doctors said. Though such a recovery does occur in some cases, it is however pretty rare. We have seen cases in which after the surgery is performed the patients have to take the support of the callipers for the rest of their life. But this was a unique case, in which the recovery was much greater than we expected it to be," they said.

"But for us it is the happiness that the patient reflects after recovery, which is far more important," said the Head of the Orthopaedics Department, SSSIHMS, Prashanthigram.

Walking Towards God, One Small Step At a Time

For her part Gayatri is ecstatic. Taking small and cautious steps, sometimes taking support of her mother, she is slowly reclaiming what polio had snatched from her in her childhood.

Though she is gradually coming to terms with the metamorphosis, what is surprising her and giving her joy at the same time is the reaction of her friends. “Many of my friends could not recognise me at all,” she chuckles. “They just kept staring at me, as if I was a stranger, and I used to guffaw when I saw their jaws drop in surprise,” Gayatri said. “I had phoned almost all my friends and they came to congratulate me. That feeling was so hard to describe.

“I had never prayed to Swami to grant me use of my leg. I had told him that I wanted to be able to perform *seva* at Prasanthi Nilayam. The moment I am able to walk on my feet freely, the first thing I would do is to come for *seva*,” Gayatri said. “Swami has given me a gift of a new life and it is my duty to do whatever little I can do on my part to show my gratitude. First I will perform *seva*, everything else can wait,” she added.

This young lady’s astonishing experience is a sure testimony of the divine grace that flows into our lives when our hearts and motivation are set on the path of virtuous conduct. If our minds are directed by purity of intent then there is no obstacle that can stand in our way as we will find ourselves walking beside a God who is literally guiding our every step.

Written in association with SSSIHMS

GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP OTHERS

“Do you know God?” once asked a religious preacher when addressing a group of people gathered to listen to his discourse. A simple looking man stood up and said, “It is not important that I know God. What is important, God knows me. And He looks after me.” The preacher kept quiet, stepped away from the podium, and walked away.

If you have the faith that in sun and shower God is with you, you know all that you need to know. That is enough to call forth His power to restructure your life. In fact it is now His responsibility to remake you for His work. No wonder the preacher had little else to say. Only when we experience darkness, do we know the value of light. But sometimes adversity strikes the most unexpected.

Here is the story of a simple looking M.D. from the state of Orissa who knew that God is looking after him, and He would do whatever was good for him. And what did God do for him? He pushed back death, filled his life with His love and the light of a new dawn.

Before we have Dr. Kar narrate his experience, here are a few words by Dr. Dash, Head of the Department, Cardiology, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, on the clinical condition of the patient, a medical doctor himself, Dr. Rajender Kar.

Dr. Dash: Dr. Rajender Kar is a young paediatrician from Orissa (a state in the east of India). He developed Dilated Cardio Myopathy (DCM), a disease where the main chamber of the heart is dilated, and has poor functioning. The condition is a progressive disease and is a rapid progressive disorder culminating in death. If unchecked, it will lead to ventricular arrhythmia. To prevent progressive heart failure and sudden cardiac death, a device which contains anti-heart failure functions with inbuilt defibrillator is required. Such a device costs around Rupees 7 to 8 lakhs or US \$ 18 to 20 thousand.

His financial condition did not allow him to afford such a treatment through any outside means. So he got information that we are performing all such procedures here, totally free of cost. He came over and we were able to implant that a very expensive device in his heart. He came over three to six months later when we did a follow-up check and found it functioning well. His clinical condition has improved significantly, his clinical functioning and volume of work has gone up. He and his family are very much satisfied and very much grateful to Swami.

In the first place he is the only earning member of the family. And his mother, sister, wife and child depend on him. He is a very honest paediatrician and accepts whatever the patient gives; he doesn't demand any money from the patients. Such being his financial condition, he could not believe or dream that he could have such an expensive device in his heart. He was advised to go to AIIMS and was very much perturbed because of his financial condition. Finally he came to us and with Swami's grace we were able to implant the device in his heart. We do ten such cases a year the average cost of the ICD being

Rs.5,00,000/- (ranging from 2.5 to 10 lakhs INR) totally free of charge. One can imagine the magnitude of the contribution being made by Swami's hospitals to society.

The following conversation between the H2H team and Dr. Kar may sound familiar to many, for there are few that have not felt the hand of God in their lives.

Dr. Kar: "You have been doing so much for my poor patients, and I can not do this much for you? Do not go to Delhi for surgery, come to my Super Speciality Hospital, I will get it done free", Sai Baba told him in a dream three days before Dr. Rajendra Kumar Kar, a paediatrician from Khuntuni, about 35 kilometres from the city of Cuttack in Orissa, was to board the train for Delhi for a complex and risky heart surgery that would end up costing him around 10 lakhs rupees or US \$50,000.

"When Sai Baba appeared in my dream, and spoke to me in Oriya, my mother tongue, and asked me to come to His Super hospital, I knew it was God speaking. Suddenly I had no worries. I was not thinking whether I would live through it, or not; I was thinking I was in God's hands", says Dr.Kar.

H2H: Did you know Sai Baba earlier?

Dr. Kar: I generally knew Him, and His many welfare projects. I had seen His pictures at my place, at Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, and many other places. But I never had any direct experience of Him earlier. I never spoke with anyone about Him, nor read any book about Him. But I had profound respect for Him, and did *namaskar* to His picture whenever I saw one.

I worshipped Mother Sarala, and Lord Jagannath. Maa Sarala, in particular, was my favourite. I used to visit her temple few times a year, whenever I could. She was a living mother for me. Whenever I thought of her, tears came to my eyes, and I liked it for tears always made me feel relieved, and light. Somehow I always knew she was taking care of me, and would do whatever is good for me. Therefore I never asked her for anything, not even to cure me when my heart problem was diagnosed.

H2H: How was your heart problem diagnosed?

Dr. Kar: I never had any serious health problem. I have a private clinic at Khuntuni. It was April 4th, 2008. My wife had gone to her parents at Cuttack, along with our son, and I was alone at home. I returned home from my clinic at about 9.30 pm, boiled milk, made some vegetable curry for dinner. Suddenly I experienced severe dyspnoea. I thought I had difficulty in breathing probably because the doors and windows had remained closed for a long time. So I opened all windows and doors. But it was no better. So I climbed to the terrace for open air. When I climbed down, it was the same. Dyspnoea became worse; I felt I was choking. I thought it was my last day, and prayed to Maa Sarala to do whatever she thought best. Then suddenly I heard a voice, probably it was hers, asking me to breathe through nose, not mouth. I obeyed it. I stood near the window the whole night struggling to

breathe through nose. If for a moment I tried to lie down on bed, I felt like bursting.

Later, at the OPD of Swami's Super Speciality Hospital at Bangalore, doctors confirmed that breathing through nose saved my life. If I had breathed through mouth, I would have vomited blood, and died before the day dawned. I will come to that later.

In the morning I had a bath, and performed my daily prayers to Maa Sarala and Lord Jagannath. Not that I was feeling better, but I forced myself not to drop my daily prayer routine. Then I called a taxi and went to Cuttack for check up. I knew some ECG centres there. When they examined me, they wondered how I was still living ! It was severe DCM, *Dilated Cardiac Myopathy*. My left ventricle had been greatly enlarged. I was asked to get myself admitted to ICU immediately. I called my Professor of Cardiology at the medical college, and told him my problem. He asked me to come over for a test. As soon as he checked me, he asked if I had been drinking for long ! Such problems generally occur with people addicted to drinking and smoking. I did not even chew a pan, let alone drink or smoke.

I stayed in the ICU for about 2 weeks, and then was discharged with a strong advice to my in-laws to take me to AIIMS, Delhi, (India's premier healthcare facility in the national capital) for an immediate surgery. Something called a combo device was to be planted in my heart, and it would cost anywhere between Rupees 8 to 10 lakhs (about US \$ 20,000). I had already spent more than a hundred thousand rupees (US \$ 2500) by now.

Mother's Call

My father was a mid-range farmer, my elder brother had a small tailoring workshop. I had got a sister married recently. Where would I get rupees 10 lakhs from? But my in-laws assured me to provide the required finance, and asked me to make arrangements to proceed on to Delhi. I was unwilling to take so much money from them though they were eager to give unasked. I was forced to buy tickets and prepare to go to AIIMS. I gave myself up to my good kind Lord, and told Him to do whatever He thought proper.

Three days before boarding the train, I had a dream around midnight. Swami was sitting by my bed and caressing my head. He was saying, "Why do you think so much ? You have been doing so much for my poor patients, and I can not do this much for you? Do not go to Delhi. Come to my Super Speciality Hospital, I will get your surgery done free." I woke up with a jerk, my body drenched in sweat. I woke up the whole household, and told them about my dream. My in-laws laughed under their breath, and said since I did not have the money, I was talking about a stupid dream. Only my wife believed it. I told her I knew Sai Baba has a hospital at Puttaparthi. So we should go there. But my in-laws would not allow me to reschedule my surgery. So next morning I went to the station quietly, got my Delhi tickets cancelled, and booked for Puttaparthi.

A day before my journey Baba again came in my dream, and told me, "I have a hospital at Puttaparthi, but if you go there you will have to be in queue, and it might take months for the surgery. Instead go to Bangalore." I asked, "You have a Super Speciality hospital in Bangalore too Baba ? Where?" He looked

into my eyes, and said, "You stay in a village, and do not read anything about me, how will you know?"

But this time my wife also did not believe in my dream. So I boarded the train for Puttaparthi. An hour or two before arrival at Puttaparthi, I accosted the TTE or the train ticket examiner and requested him to extend our tickets to Bangalore. My wife, my son and my sister were with me in the 1st class compartment, and were sleeping at that time. They got up only after the train had crossed Puttaparthi railway station! I pleaded innocence, and told them, I was a patient. So I was sleeping. They should have woken me up at right time. Then my wife reconciled to the idea of going to Bangalore.

I met the consulting doctor at the cardiology department of Baba's Super Speciality hospital in Kadugodi, Bangalore on April 18th. He examined me and my medical papers, and asked how had I lived through. This I have told you earlier. Then I was asked to meet Dr. Dash of cardiology department for deciding the next step, for the doctor told me they hadn't yet done a case like mine. Dr. Dash spoke with me very kindly, and asked me to come back on June 21st for a surgery. Though they hadn't done a surgery like mine till then, they would do it for me, he said. It was surely divine intervention.

H2H: Was it first time the divine intervened in your life?

Dr.Kar: No. I have always felt my life has been in the hands of the Divine Mother. It is not just a subjective feeling. She has demonstrated it very vividly at least once. I will tell you how. I chose to study medicine for I loved to serve people, and who can do better service than a doctor? I have a clinic in a rural area where many people live under the poverty line. So when I opened my clinic there in 1999 August, I charged only 5 rupees or about 12 cents as my consultation fee. I stored in my chamber some commonly used, and some life saving drugs too. They could call on me at any time of day and night. I never demurred going to the patient's house if it was a serious case. Since I knew all the people there and they knew me, they could pay for the medicine at their convenience. My purpose was not to make money, but to help them. But I need money to do that, so I charged the minimum.

But as always some people took advantage of it. Once a person in his fifties came to my clinic for chronic asthma. He slumped into the chair and could hardly talk. I administered an injection for immediate relief. After he was relieved of his pain, I told him he could send me the price of the injection with his son. He did not. Months later he had another attack. I was called home in the evening. I went to his house, examined him, and advised his son to shift him to cardiac department at Cuttack hospital immediately. But he insisted I administer the injection to relieve him of his severe pain. I did so and came away. This person was however removed to the hospital early next morning, where he breathed his last a week later. After the death of his father, the son accused me of doing nothing to save his father, and refused to pay the outstanding bill.

Some days later a patient walked into my clinic late at night when I was going to close it. He had a certain ailment for which an injection was needed. I had it with me. But since I knew he was not paying for it immediately, and I had a

bad experience with the asthma patient, I told him that if he got the injection I would administer it, but I did not have it with me. He walked away, but I walked into trouble.

That night Maa Sarala came in my dream. Though she was loving like a mother, she was a little cross too. She stood by me, and said, “Why did you send back that patient ?”

“Mother, you know the asthma patient did not pay for the treatment, on top of it, his son blamed me for his father’s death’, I replied.

“So what if he blamed you? What did you lose? But this man was going to lose his life”, she retorted.

“You refused to treat him, but I cured him” she said with a chuckle.

“I am sorry Mother. Please forgive me”, I said.

“Look, this is not why I made you a doctor. Promise me that you shall not refuse help to anyone who comes to you at night. During the day you can. You can ask them to go and get the medication.”

I fell at her feet, and promised. Since that day till today I have never refused help to any patient who comes to me at night, fees or no fees. I don’t even ask for the price of the drugs.

H2H: How and why did you choose to become a doctor?

Dr.Kar: From my childhood I was attracted towards the profession of a doctor. I always thought they perform a very noble job. I always thought the hands that drive away a disease, and bring a smile in people’s lives are holy hands. So since I was a student in 5th or 6th class, I wanted to be a doctor. But my father was only a mid-range farmer. Though they all supported my ambition, how would they pay for this expensive course?

I studied hard, and obtained a high percentage of marks in my 12th class exam. I did not take any coaching. But my school teachers helped me to prepare for the qualifying test. I got through, and joined the medical course. My first dream was fulfilled. First year my father somehow arranged my expenses.

But second year I was at the rock-bottom. My father fell sick. Elder brother had to run the family. I could not ask even one rupee from them. But I was determined not to quit. I took some lower class school students for private coaching, and made 5 to 6 hundred rupees per month. With that I managed. I never wanted more than bare necessities. A couple of sets of clothes, lunch and dinner, some note books were all that I needed to complete my course. I never asked anyone for help, nor let anyone know my condition. I continued to support myself like this through all 4 years of my MBBS. During my last year of medicine I thought I was going to open a clinic after my graduation and start my practice. But unless I had some experience in dealing with the practical aspects of practice I would be at sea. It might take me a year to get the professional support, which I could not afford. So I decided to join one of my professor’s consultation chamber to learn prescribing. I would just be there handy for any work until he decides to teach me. I spent all available evenings

of my final year and the year-and-half residency with him. More than two years later he called me and asked me why I was doing that. I told him I wanted to be a successful doctor like him. He was obviously pleased and started teaching me the art of prescribing.

One day, after my residency, he asked me to join the post-graduate course of my choice. When he knew I was not in a position to finance it, he offered to help me. I wanted to specialise as a paediatrician. To diagnose a child who can not tell the physician anything about how it feels is certainly a bigger challenge, and a bigger challenge offers the physician greater utility. After my specialised course was over, I was offered a government job, but I preferred to remain at large to plan my service the way I wanted.

H2H: When did you have your first *darshan* of Swami?

Dr.Kar: On April 18, 2008 I was examined and asked to come back for surgery on June 21st. I decided to return to Orissa the next day, for I had lost many working days in the mean time. But I was again asked to report at the hospital on 22nd. Though I had to cancel my *Tatkal* booking at a huge loss, I had the additional blessing of Baba's darshan. Baba had come to His Kadugodi abode on 19th. When we were standing by the side of the road, his car passed us by. My wife later asked me if I had darshan. She was sad that she could see only Baba's head for He was sitting inside the car. 'But I saw His whole self, His head, His body and feet too', I said. 'How could you? He was sitting in the car, and the door was not open' she protested. I suddenly realised the improbability of my statement; but that was the truth! 'That must be a loving prank of my divine mother' I said to myself.

We came back on June 21st for the surgery. I was wheeled into the operation theatre on 24th, and after a lengthy operation came out a new man. On 30th my stitches were opened, and the same day we went back to Orissa. I was asked to report for a check up in six months. So I have come now in December, and have the good fortune of meeting you all.

H2H: Has this healing of heart affected you in any other way?

Dr.Kar: You have put it rightly, healing of heart, in more ways than one this has been. This life is now a gift of God. I want to use it fully for Him. What do I need? Some food to sustain the body for His service; some clothes to protect it in different weathers; a roof over our heads; and some money to raise our son. I am a doctor, coming from the grass roots of a hard life. I have never aspired for wealth and luxury. When my fellow doctors were charging 50/60 rupees as consultation fee, I kept it at only rupees 5. When someone referred to me as a 'poor man's doctor' I felt happy. At least they can come to me, and I can help them. God has looked after me very well. He has given me an understanding wife, a beautiful son, a good house to live in, and this opportunity to serve the poor. Now if anyone does not pay for the treatment, I don't ask. The good kind Lord knows it all.

Now I have only one desire: to spend more and more of this lifetime in His service. I want to come here or to the Brindavan Hospital, and plunge into service with all my heart and soul.

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the January 2009 issue

Feedback on the cover story: *A Medical Innovation With A Marvellous Mission.*

Dear Sir,

Part 1 is superb to say the least. I am very eager to read part 2. Oh! What a fantastic idea to evolve a Super Speciality Hospital with absolutely no investment at all. Only Sai's grace can do this, as rightly told by Dr. Mohan Rao. This is bound to catch on throughout Tamil Nadu, nay, entire India and people will marvel at SAI *Sankalpa!*

Laxminarayan, Dallas, USA.

Dear Brother,

After reading the article, tears came to my eyes and I found myself crying. I have always believed that service to humankind without any reservation is really our salvation. My heartfelt prayers that all humankind be benefited by Swami's presence on Earth.

Thank you very much.

Anil Singh, Hyderabad

Sai Ram,

Such stories bring abstract concepts to palpable reality. They are gripping, moving and most certainly inspiring.

With thanks and best regards,

Sai Chidambaram, Assoc. Prof. of Biology, Canisius College, Buffalo, USA

Feedback on: *Spiritual Questions And Answers - Part 3*

Dear Staff of H2H,

I find this series of lessons very informative and useful. They indeed provide some answers to perennial questions surrounding the existence of human life, and its intimate relationship to spirituality. Please continue publishing the subsequent chapters. Congratulations to the H2H team.

Sincere wishes for your continued success,

George

Dear H2H,

I have been pondering over the issue of escape from the recurring cycle of birth and death. I would like to express appreciation and thanks to Professor Venkataraman for his helpful and thought-provoking talks and to H2H for publishing them and to Radio Sai for making them available as audio downloads.

It seems to me that the need for not to be reborn is the result rather than the goal. To have the opportunity for human birth is a great privilege, as Swami has said. Surely the goal of human birth is to come to the conscious knowledge that I am the Atma so, after as many births as it takes me to come to this, I will have no need to go back to the school of life to learn more lessons. That is, no need for rebirth!

Sai Ram,
Sid Wilcox

Feedback on: *In Quest of Infinity – Part 22*

Sai Ram ,

The article in which Prof Venkataraman wrote about Quantum Mechanics is really superb. It would be wonderful if he wrote more and more articles on related topics.

With regards,

Sunitha

Feedback on: *A Dreamy New Beginning in New Zealand*

Sai Ram,

First of all I would like to extend my hearty thanks to all the Sai Devotees for extending their helping hands to the newly arrived Bhutanese people in New Zealand. Secondly, I would like to thank the author, for the article, which touched hundreds of loving hearts in the USA. I hope to read other such beautiful articles in the days ahead too.

Om Sai Ram,

Bhagirath Khatiwada, Concord, NH, USA.

Sai Ram,

A very interesting and inspiring story on the Bhutanese refugees. The selfless service rendered by Sai Devotees is appreciable. By reading this, we can imagine the feeling among Bhutanese refugees and Sai Devotees as they must have felt the true love of Swami. Both groups were blessed to come together in this seva initiative with the grace of Swami.

Rajni Gohil

Feedback on *The Miracle of a Lifetime*

Sai Ram Dear Radio Sai Team,

I went through Mr. Sohni's story today. It is so very inspiring. Thank you all very much. It is thanks to your efforts that we get to read about our Bhagvan's miracles. Please send more such inspiring episodes.

Thank you very much

Subhashini, Chennai, India.

Feedback on *The Expansion of Love*

Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,

I very much enjoyed the articles written by Bob Bozzani in both December and January H2H. I have known Bob since the 1970's and can say that I have witnessed the heart opening in him that he talks about since being called to Swami! Having had an opportunity to observe devotees over these last 35+ years here in the States, I truly see the inner transformation that Swami has made in so many of us.

Thank you for the wonderful work you are doing. I very much enjoy each month's H2H publication.

Many Blessings,

Mrs. Leslie Bouché, Ojai, California, USA

Feedback on *Divya Premaashrayam*

My Humble Salutations to the H2H Team,

The play is very inspirational. I hope to get the video and present it at our Sai Centre to encourage the participants to get involved in more service activities.

Thank you for all the hard work.

Ranjani Silva, Mill Park Sai Centre, Melbourne, Australia

Feedback on *The Two Wolves Within*

Dear SGH Team,

The story is very nice, because I have seen a reflection of my character. The 2nd wolf dominates me. It's time I give the reins to the 1st wolf.

Thank you for the inspiring narration.

Regards,

Tima

Feedback on the Quiz

Sairam,

I would just to add that I thoroughly enjoyed your quiz. I am currently preparing for a study circle/presentation on service and it helped greatly.

It was prodding and revealing at the same time. Keep up the good work.

Sairam,

Jagdesh Lakhan, Trinidad and Tobago

Feedback on Radio Sai's *Fleeting Moments Lasting Memories* series

Sai Ram,

I just wanted to say congrats on a job well done. I am truly grateful to all of you for bringing Swami closer to us. Keep up the good job! I particularly enjoy *Fleeting Moments Lasting Memories* - by the students of Swami. Just to hear them speak about Swami and their experiences makes me feel so good and inspired every day. Also interviews that were conducted truly enlighten us as listeners who are not able to be there in person at Prashanthi all the time. Thank you so much for bringing Swami to me.

Sai Ram,

Mrs. Jeyapalan, Ontario Canada

I live in Toronto and I just had the good opportunity to hear the talk with Sri. Partheesh Kumar Dubey on Radio Sai's *Fleeting Moments Lasting Memories*. When he mentioned about the six pound train ticket, another miracle of Swami, I felt I should share my experience of one such Divine Intervention of Swami in 2006 on our return journey from Toronto to Mysore.

Both my husband and I are senior citizens' in our 70s and the journey to Toronto was very difficult as we had to move our heavy luggage from the domestic to international airport at Delhi. My husband has had two heart surgeries and I have back problem.

Hence on the return journey I was doing namajapa and fervently praying for some kind of a help to go through this ordeal.

When we landed in the Indira Gandhi airport and started walking from the aircraft (we travelled by economy class, mind you) to the gate we saw a Notice Board with our names. The message was to contact the ground staff of the airlines!

We did so and we had someone carry our bags and leave them in the domestic airport in the lounge close to the gate where the jet Airways bus would pick us up for the boarding! We were happy that our son has taken so much pain to arrange for this assistance

But we learned later that neither our son nor daughter did anything. It was Swami's miracle! Partheesh was His student and close to Him. We are just devotees and never had any Interview with Swami. Swami's compassion is boundless.

Mrs. Padma Shetty and Dr Sundar Shetty, Ontario, Canada

Feedback on Radio Sai

Sairam Brothers @Radio Sai,

I thank you all for bringing so many wonderful programmes on Radio Sai. I listen to "Radio Sai-Ameristream" daily. From talks by Dr. Venkataraman, conversations, Q-A, Prashanti Bhajans to "Indelible Encounters With Love". All these programmes provide not only the message of Divine love of Bhagavan Baba, but His teachings as well and thereby inspire all of us to become truly His messengers by our refined actions, practising His message of Love All and Serve all.

Today I was very happy to listen the experience of Bhagavan Baba's grace to "Bill" who gave away his money and wealth to those who needed it in U.S. without any publicity for himself. Bill had only read about Bhagavan Baba and not visited Swami personally and yet he followed Swami's teachings. No wonder Swami knew him - as the indweller of all - and blessed Bill through his critical illness giving him a peaceful and healthy exit. It is very heart-stirring

story.

"The Miracle of a Lifetime" was another very powerful story of reform. From a corrupt Sales tax official to a high ranking and sincere Sai worker in Indore, Mr. Sohni not only transformed himself but transformed others around him by becoming an honest employee in an ethically unhealthy workplace. Such a divine opportunity comes to us once in a lifetime or once in several births. Those who pray and surrender to Him are the fortunate ones.

Thank you all for bringing such great inspiring and faith enriching episodes from the devotees of Bhagavan Baba.

Aum Sai Ram,

Gopal Mehta, Toronto, Canada

Feedback on Radio Sai's *Indelible Encounters with Eternal Love* series

Namaste,

I would like to compliment you on the new series, *Indelible Encounters with Eternal Love*. The music is very beautiful and as always, these stories of devotion increase the heart's longing for Our Beloved.

I would think, that just in the United States alone, at all the conferences in the different regions, one could get a wealth of such tales to share.

I listen to Sai Radio every night for a few hours. If I have missed listening I find myself yearning for my quiet time alone to hear these sacred stories of our Most Beloved Lord and Dearest Friend.

Thank you so much for all the hard work you do to bring such a beautiful and full stream of Love to our parched ears and hearts.

With Sai Love,

Laura, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

Dear Sir,

I have listened to *Indelible Encounters with Eternal Love*. Like your other radio programmes, this too is so touching and exemplifies Swami's abundant love for the mankind.

Thank you for the wonderful Sai Seva you are doing with Swami's blessings and no doubt these broadcasts will bring about a transformation in individuals to grow spiritually.

Regards,

S.Ramakrishnan, Safat, Kuwait

Feedback on the Sahasra Purna Chandra Darshana Shanthi Mahotsavam coverage

Dear Heart2Heart,

My husband and I, Sai devotees of nearly 28 years, attended the Sahasra Purna Chandra Darshana Shanthi Mahotsavam events in November. As we read the email invitation of the event we didn't feel so much a "desire" to go because it is a long arduous trip, but instead felt a "calling" to go -- as if we had to be there.

The third and final day of Sahasra ... is one of supremacy in memory. Seeing Baba arrive in His yellow gown in the gold chariot was more than words can express. Pictures cannot grasp the magnificence of it.

On that third day of Sahasra I was standing in the main grassy aisle of the women's side. I was about 30-40 feet from the aisle Swami when came in. Swami stopped in His Chariot right inside the entrance. As I stood there I felt Baba look right at me, and I said, "I'm here, Baba. I'm here." And I had a beautiful inner dialogue with the Lord. At that point I started crying, and cried for hours after. Even now, weeks later as I write this tears well up again. The moments were so incredibly special.

It has taken me a few weeks to write you to express my gratitude. Though we hadn't a clue what the chants were about, nor the purpose and meaning of the rituals something permeated our beings. Then to receive the Heart2Heart email with all the photos and your dialogue and descriptions of the events of the three days was more than perfect.

As I read your descriptions of the third day I felt as if someone had reached into my heart and spoke in exact words and detail everything I had been feeling. I truly cannot express how moved I was by your words. In fact in this moment I still cannot find expression to speak of how much I was moved, and how "accurate" it is what you wrote. When the experience is so deep, so profound, words become far too limited, yet your vision and expression of it said it all. It is perfect.

So, yes ... thank you from the bottom of my heart for putting to paper those things, those memories for which I could not find words to express.

I copied your email and it is now a part of my "treasury of gold" for remembrance of Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Shanthi Mahotsavam.

Om Jai Sai Ram,

William and Judith Jung, Boise, Idaho, USA

General Feedback

Sai Ram, dear Heart2Heart staff,

Thank you very much for the journal which I am very happy to read. I like each and every section very much and I hope you will continue this great seva.

The journal makes me feel that I'm a little bit closer to Prashanti Nilayam and it helps me to get wiser and to remember and live the teachings of our beloved Swami. I only hope that the journal will always be available. I like it as it is at present.

Sai Ram and all the best,

Mogens, Abildgaard, Denmark

Feedback on *Sai Inspires*, the inspirational daily e-mail service

Sai Ram to you all,

I have just completed the quiz and got 25 out of 30 points. I think it is a brilliant quiz and it really captures the lessons and values that Baba is teaching us in the wonderful discourses that he lovingly gives us.

I also really enjoy reading the "Sai Inspires bulletins from Prashanti Nilayam" everyday. The messages and thoughts for the day from Baba really inspire, uplift and motivate us to become better people and also strongly guide us on the correct spiritual path. What I really like is how simply Baba explains the lessons contained in the Bhagavad Gita, the Vedas and the Upanishads and relates it to our daily lives.

There were many a time when I was feeling troubled and depressed and after reading the current "Sathya Sai Inspires" bulletin I find all the answers that I was looking for. All of the discourses are so well written and presented that whilst reading them one actually feels that one is at Prashanti in Baba's Divine presence.

I congratulate all of you on the superb job that you are doing in spreading Baba's divine message to the world. Keep up the good work!

Sai Ram,

Vasi Pather, Commissions Administrator, Durban, South Africa

