



SAILLIGHTS



Magazine of the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council, Zone 1

November 23, 2023

Volume 7



Special Birthday Issue

SAILIGHTS

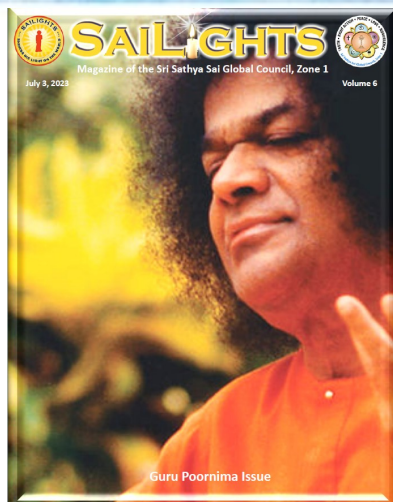
Offered with Love and Reverence at the Lotus Feet of our Dear Lord
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba
on the Occasion of His 98th Birthday



*The Eternal, with neither entrance nor exit;
The One who neither Was nor Is nor Will be;
The Immortal Person free from birth and death
That Ever-effulgent Atman is Sai for ever.*

*- Sri Sathya Sai Baba
November 23, 1979, Prasanthi Nilayam*

Note from SaiLights Team



Volume 6 Offered at the Divine Lotus Feet on July 6, 2023

Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,

As always, we thank our dear Swami for accepting our Guru Purnima issue, which we offered at His Lotus Feet on that occasion. It is now the Birthday Season! With great joy, and humility, we offer to Swami the **2023 Birthday Issue of SaiLights**, Zone 1's magazine that seeks to inspire, inform, and illuminate. Swami asks us to celebrate His Birthday not with sweets but with study and not with cake but with contemplation of all that He has taught us. This issue, Volume 7, has plenty of food...for our reflection, originating from the Divine Teacher. We invite you to partake:

- ♥ The **Zone 1 Chair's Message** is a must-read! Learn how the founding objective of the Global Council, Unity, is becoming reality in so many ways, less than two years into the Council's formation.
- ♥ **Happy Birthday Swami!** Our opening section honors the Divine Mother Easwaramma, takes us back to Swami's first (post-Avatar declaration) birthday celebration in Puttaparthi, and reveals the origins of the "*Jhoola*" (swing) tradition!
- ♥ We also encourage you not to miss **Professor Kasturi's poems** on Swami—one long, the other short, both absolute gems.
- ♥ **Sai Centers** are the very core of the Sai organization. This issue highlights their role, the

recent Center Leaders conference, and the wonderful service and other activities being undertaken by several Zone 1 centers.

- ♥ "**Sai Hamara, Hum Sai Ke**", the popular bhajan, is the inspiration for this Birthday issue's theme. In this section, read the letters written by Swami to His earliest devotees, laden with affection and motherly concern—and lessons; see how they are echoed in some of Swami's 108 Names; and compare your own views to those of some devotees who have shared what the words of this bhajan mean to them.
- ♥ The **Fall Festivals** section includes Swami's words on the meaning of Dasara; a lovely story about the ever-lovable Ganesha; and an explanation by Swami of why the much-loved Krishna was so...sweet, as extolled in the *Madhurastakam*.
- ♥ Finally, do not be fooled by the label of the "**Snippets**" section: read some wonderful poems, by no less than Swami, learn how to Be Happy Always, and ace a quiz on The Lotus Feet!

May this Birthday revive in us all the desire to follow His Teachings. May we always remember to pray for the welfare of all.

Loving Sairams from
The SaiLights Team



SAI LIGHTS

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From the Chairman



From the Chairman

Message of Zone 1 Chair

The Sri Sathya Sai Global Council (SSSGC) is continuing to grow as more and more people become aware of its main guiding principle - Unity! The unprecedented degree of collaboration among Sai devotees across the world has been a source of learning, growth, and inspiration for all members.

Bhagawan Baba's institutions in Prasanthi Nilayam continue to set the example by providing free service to all, regardless of race, gender, religion, culture or social status. Enhanced and expedited communication with these institutions, with the SSSGC branches across all of India, and across the globe are allowing for greater exchange of knowledge, improved means for mutual support, and a sharing of resources, as well as speaker and volunteer exchanges.

The following are just a few examples:

- ♦ **The Sri Sathya Sai Medical Camp** offered jointly by SSSGC India and SSSGC Overseas is held twice a year in Prasanthi Nilayam to serve local visitors and pilgrims. This united camp affords a greater efficiency, expands the pool of healthcare providers, and affords more accessibility and opportunities for patients' benefit.
- ♦ **The Sri Sathya Sai University** provides access to teachers and resources to support centers, and hosts visiting professors.
- ♦ **The Indian organization**, with all of its state branches now a part of the SSSGC, has also generously provided guest speakers, learning resources, presentations and guidance to Sai Centers outside India.
- ♦ **The Center Leaders Conference** held in July 2023 brought together over 1300 officers to participate in talks and workshops with 40 speakers provided by the Indian branch of SSSGC and 40 speakers from the Overseas branch (which covers the entire globe). By Baba's Grace, they were privileged to participate in the first conference held at the renowned newly constructed state of the art Sai Hira Global Convention Centre.
- ♦ **The Center for Human Values in Prasanthi Nilayam** is providing training so that each Zone has the opportunity to share their resources and classes with devotees.
- ♦ **The Collegium of Human Values** is being set up, with representatives from across Zones to serve on the think tank and provide guidance and material for dissemination of Bhagawan's message across the globe.
- ♦ **The Sri Sathya Sai Media Centre** has welcomed volunteers to serve in various capacities, provided many guest speakers for programs across the globe, organized worldwide online *Akhanda Bhajans* with all Zones, and given assistance for media-related issues required by Zones globally. They also help guide all presentations given by visiting Zones in Prasanthi Nilayam.



Dr Kalathia at the Sai Hira Global Convention Centre, July 2023

From the Chairman

Message of Zone 1 Chair (cont)

- ♦ **The entire ashram**, from the canteens to the accommodation offices to every aspect of ashram functions, has lovingly opened up for our benefit. They have also helped identify service projects for visiting groups to undertake, both in the ashram and in surrounding villages.
- ♦ **The Young Adult Leadership Program**, now into its second year and open to all YAs across the globe online, was held in 2023 and concluded with several days of learning, celebration, and performances at Prasanthi Nilayam.
- ♦ **A Centenary Planning Committee** has already been set up with members from across all zones to come up with plans to celebrate the 100th year of the advent of the Avatar. They will be making suggestions for the Centenary Planning Meetings to be held in the ashram in November 2023 under the guidance of the SSSGC Executive Committee.

We are most grateful to Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba for providing this collaborative venture named the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council. We pray that the entire world will soon join in unity to carry forward Bhagawan's mission to make each realize their own inner divinity.

Dr. Axay Shanti Kalathia

SSSGC, Zone 1 Chair

<https://www.sssgc-zone1.org/>

<https://www.srisathyasaiglobalcouncil.org/>

<https://www.sssmediacentre.org/#/>



"The *Veda* has exhorted: "Let us all move together, let us all grow together. Let us all stay united and share our knowledge. Let us live together with friendship and harmony." (*Telugu poem*)

Some students do not share even their textbooks with others. How can they attain happiness if they are so self-centred and narrow-minded?

You should all stand united. Where there is unity, there is bliss."

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 38, August 17, 2005



From the Chairman



SAI INSPIRES – Zone 1 Bulletin

See the picture on your right. Did it go past your eyes as you hurriedly scrolled through your emails? Did you wonder what it was?

Welcome to *Sai Inspires*! The *Sai Inspires* Zone 1 Bulletin is a new initiative of Zone 1, launched in September 2023 to keep members of Zone 1 “connected” to Sai and “connected” to Prasanthi Nilayam.

Great news: It is a quick read!

Current and practical. Issued several times a month, *Sai Inspires* is seen as a timely, current, practical vehicle to share the latest updates regarding recent and upcoming Sri Sathya Sai Global Council (SSSGC) activities across the globe. The initial bulletins have, for example:

- Provided information on registration and volunteer opportunities for the Free Medical Camp to be held in Prasanthi Nilayam during Swami’s Birthday week
- Drawn readers’ attention to the *Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna* held in Prasanthi Nilayam in October, while also highlighting Swami’s call for a Vedic Revival
- Featured a quiz on our *SaiLights* magazine to familiarize those yet unfamiliar with it, and included a call for written contributions from Zone 1 members for the Birthday issue
- Announced a “Go Green Challenge” being held by Zone 1’s Green Committee

A bit of fun. Mixing fun and substance, some issues of *Sai Inspires* have included trivia, as well as not-so-trivial, questions, with a promise to reveal the answers in upcoming issues of *SaiLights*.

Two such questions are answered here:

- ♦ **At what age did Sri Sathya Sai Baba receive a driver’s license?**

9 years of age. Click here to read more about [Swami the Divine Driver](#)

- ♦ **What three prerequisites must a disciple possess before a Guru can help him/her?**

The yearning, the questioning heart, the seeking intelligence. “The Guru warns and wakens. He reveals the truth and encourages you to progress towards it. Unless you have the yearning, the questioning heart, the seeking intelligence, he cannot do much. The hungry can be fed; he who has no hunger will discard food as an infliction. **The Guru is a gardener**, who will tend the plant; but, the sapling must have sprouted before he can take charge. He does not add anything new to the plant; he only helps it to grow according to its own destiny, quicker perhaps, more fully perhaps, but not against its inner nature.” Divine Discourse, July 14, 1965. Click here for the full discourse, entitled [“The First Step”](#).

Your Connection to Prasanthi
Nilayam

SAI INSPIRES

Zone 1 Bulletin

October 12, 2023



*Sai Inspires – Zone 1 Bulletin: A
product of Sri Sathya Sai Global
Council Communications*

“*Sai Inspires* is a Zone 1 bulletin that connects all with updates and information regarding SSSGC activities to enhance our connection and engagement with Prasanthi Nilayam as well as with Zones throughout the globe. We hope our readers will enjoy it and find it useful!”

*Axay Kalathia, Chair, Zone 1, Sri Sathya Sai
Global Council*



Happy Birthday Swami!

Happy Birthday Swami!

Where it All Began: Easwaramma, the Chosen Mother

Epitome of

COMPASSION

SACRIFICE

LOVE

Easwaramma, Mother Divine

A poem by Karen Flagg

Easwaramma Women's Welfare Trust magazine

February 2010

Easwaramma, Mother Divine
Heart of my heart - love caught in time.
Show me the ways of a pure loving heart -
Of selfless surrender - I'm ready to start
Letting go of the ways so hot and directive,
To become more like you - so cool and receptive.
Take my pride - let it dwindle and crumble,
Make me like you, so gentle and humble.
Open my eyes to the needs of the poor,
Open my heart - let it be the door
Through which flows the love of compassion and caring
Of tender succor, of patience and sharing.
Mother of Mothers, I'm ready to try
To become more like you, in the eyes of our Sai.



She held both My hands and pleaded, "Swami, there is no hospital in our village. Consequently, when the children become sick, mothers are forced to carry them to Bukkapatnam. I am unable to see their suffering. My children and others' children are one and the same for me. So, kindly construct at least a small hospital in our village." I promised her that I would fulfil her wish and accordingly I built a big hospital. Easwaramma's joy knew no bounds. The whole day she did not feel the need for food and water as she felt highly contented and overjoyed. She caught hold of My hands and expressed her happiness as her wish was fulfilled in a big way.

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 33, May 6, 2000.

Happy Birthday Swami!

The Very First Birthday Celebration at Puttaparthi

Saturday, November 23, 1946

“On the 23rd of November 1946, Baba’s Birthday was celebrated in the *Mandir* (the temple with Shirdi and Parthi Sai altar) as a major festival for the first time. All the devotees proceeded to Baba’s parents’ house with musical instruments. They carried the *Poornakumbha* (sacred water pitcher) vessel, garlanded the blessed parents, offered them new clothes, performed ‘*Pada Puja*’ (worship of the Lotus Feet) to them and invited them to celebrate their Son’s Birthday in the *Mandir*. Baba’s parents were thus ceremoniously ushered into the *Mandir*. The stage in front of the *Mandir* was decorated with *Rangoli* (colorful floor art). Baba sat on this stage in a wonderfully ornate chair. The parents then applied sandalwood paste and *Kumkum* (holy red powder) on His forehead. Baba was anointed with a flower dipped in consecrated sandalwood oil and garlanded. Baba blessed the parents with *Laddu Prasadam* (a sanctified round sweet delicacy) .



Swami in 1946

Later, the other devotees were blessed with an opportunity of anointing the Avatar, applied oil to His head, and worshipped His feet by applying turmeric and Kumkum to them. Baba blessed all these devotees by distributing laddus amongst them. After a bath, Baba sat in His chair while Bhajans were sung in devotional fervor. After the Arati, Prasadam was distributed all over again. Baba also organized a grand feast for all His devotees. The function was drawn to a close only at around 10:00 pm.”



Swami with Mother Easwaramma



Birthday Anointment by the parents in later years

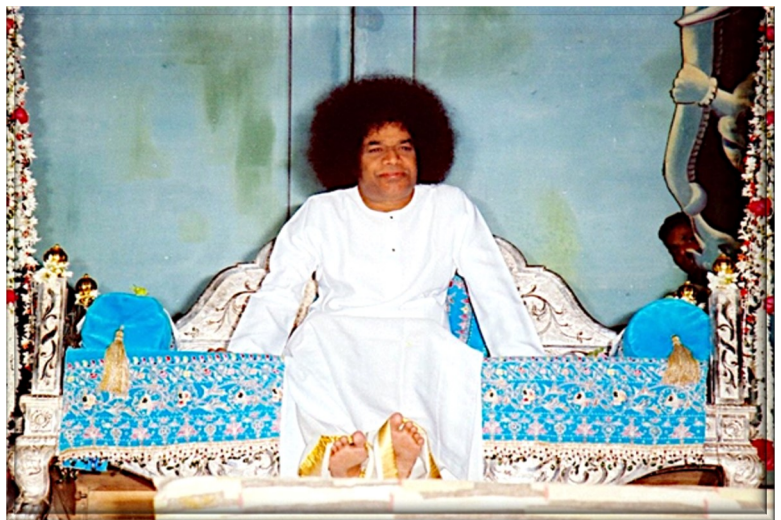
Happy Birthday Swami!

Devotee Favorite: The Birthday *Jhoola* (swing)

"The glory of the Sathya Sai Avatar cannot be described in words. But there are a few moments that truly stand out in the memory of each devotee. One of those moments is the annual *Jhoola Mahotsavam*, in which Bhagawan would most graciously and royally swing on an ornate silver *Jhoola* (swing) on the evening of His Birthday. Donning silk robes, He would sway gently back and forth as great singers would offer their musical tributes at His Lotus Feet for hours on end....

The 65th birthday celebrations of Bhagawan was no exception. On that glittering evening, Swami delighted the hundreds of thousands of devotees assembled in the Hill View Stadium for a full 90 minutes while soulful devotional songs were rendered by some of the stalwarts of Indian classical and light music...it was truly a sight for the gods to hear the popular composition by the famous 15th century composer Sri Annamacharya, "*Jo Atchyutananda*" (Sleep, dear Eternally Blissful One!), which is sung so many times in front of the Lord in Tirupati, being sung in front of Lord Venkateshwara Himself in human form! What a blessing!"

-- Sathya Sai Sannidhi (abbreviated)



65th Birthday Celebrations

Happy Birthday Swami!

Devotee Favorite: The Birthday *Jhoola* (swing) (cont)

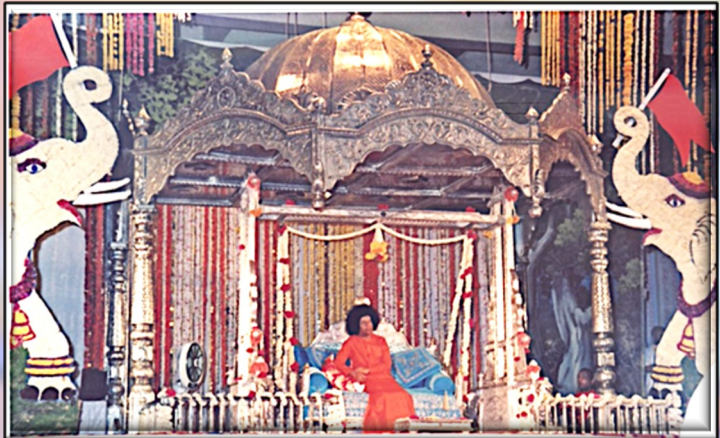
The Story of the *Jhoola*

In 1967, when Swami visited the city of **Jamnagar** in India's western state of Gujarat, the wealthy Rajmata of Gujarat gifted Him with a magnificent silver swing. *[Swings were, and are, popular in Gujarat, in good part because of their association with Lord Krishna, who is believed to have enjoyed swings, as a child; thus swings are seen to be auspicious and to invoke His blessings.]*

In his book *Sri Sathya Sai Baba: A Life*, Bill Aitken writes, "Sai Baba swings on it annually every year on His Birthday, in an elegant affirmation of the Vaishnav tradition of Kathiawad, centred in the pilgrim town of Dwarka". Dwarka is a town in Gujarat's Saurashtra region and was the residence of Krishna in His later years.

The Rajmata loved Swami dearly; and proved a generous donor in the construction and development of Prasanthi Nilayam in Puttaparthi and the Whitefield ashram in Bangalore. Baba rewarded her with a house near His own at both ashrams.

Source: Sri Sathya Sai Baba: A Life, by Bill Aitken, Penguin Books, India, 2006



Our Beloved Swami... in the words of Professor Kasturi



Our Beloved Swami...in the words of Professor Kasturi

A Poem for Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Read by N. Kasturi in the Divine Presence on October 16, 1958

Narayana Kasturi (1897-1987) was one of Swami's earliest and foremost devotees. He was Swami's biographer for many decades; the translator for His discourses and writings; editor of Sanathana Sarathi; and author of several books, including Sathyam Sivam Sundaram – The Life of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, as well as Prasanthi – Pathway to Peace.



Have you heard our Baba speak
At public meetings anywhere?
He never calls it speech;
Nor will you name it so!

He does not raise His voice, harangue,
Or rouse the mob or rail or flail;
He does not hesitate,
He will not calculate,
Hum and haw and pause and ponder,
Making you wonder why you came!



He does not waiver, wander,
Collecting thoughts, contriving notes;
He does not waste a moment, decorating thoughts in
showy lace and frills,
clothing borrowed texts in shimmering gauze.

He is no orator-pompous, proud,
Clamoring for claps, publicity-mad!
He will not circumambulate, declaim... or, even...
'speak'!



He is the rain-cloud, bringing Life
To the parched ones here below!
He 'talks'... He 'talks', to you, and you, and every
single you that has gathered there.
To every single Arjuna, with heavy heart and empty
hand,
Afraid to fight the battle of Life on to Victory.

You feel He has come for you, to you.
You see Him, silently looking around!
The searchlight eye full circle swings!
How lucky, you are there!



He smiles; He wins you by that smile!
You scarce can take your eyes from off that Face,
So alluring, so Divine!
You scarce can pull your heart from off His grip;

The clasp is cool comfort!
The silence deepens...
Though thousands have been squatting, waiting,
For hours and hours...
Himalayan stillness; twilight calm!



Our Beloved Swami...in the words of Professor Kasturi

A Poem for Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (cont)

Premaswarupulara!

"Embodiments of Divine Love!"

The Golden Hour has come!
Heaven's Gate ajar!
The voice is sweet as honey
Hived by Heavenly bees from Parijatha trees!
His call is clarion clear!

O! 'Tis thrilling, 'tis filling rapture in the soul,
Flowing like the Ganga, freeing the bound,
Yielding rich reaping, for just ploughing and sowing
Welling and swelling like Gersoppa Falls,
Yielding vast power, for just wheeling and wiring!



His talk is a cascade, so limpid and pure,
Teaching, never preaching, unraveling all knots,
Stilling the questionings ere they emerge in mind;
Defining, refining, consoling the pining,
Commanding, yea, demanding the bending of pride,
Sparing no one, be He ruling or serving.



Chiding, reprimanding the fool, and fanatic;
Joking and coaxing, poking fun at all hoaxing;
Quoting from what He said in the past ages,
Detailing facts of His incarnating.

Resplendent poetry, spontaneous, sublime,
Painting pictures of transcendent Truth,
Parable, proverb, scintillating bright,
Tinkling, twinkling, tintinnabulating lilt,

Every hour a minute, every minute a second;
Every word a manthra, every phrase, Suuthra,
A Gayathri a sentence, Upanishath a speech!



For He is no well or tank or river!
His is the ocean of Wisdom Divine!
Oh! His words shower mercy, like morning dew
On every heart-bud awakening from dreaming.

He is feeding your roots and speeding the sap,
Sprouting the buds, painting the petals,
Perfuming them well, inviting the bees,
Ripening the pods, with each word of His!



There! The meaning of His word, a tiny seed
Drops on your rock-like heart! And wonder of wonders!
It germinates there!... sprouts and puts forth leaves!
The silken half-blind baby-roots do run about
Tickling the stone, jabbing, pleading for suckling!
Succeeding at last, it grows; and, growing into a tree,
Your rock is broken into clay!



His talk, you will find, is cooling, not freezing
Warming, not burning; raining, not flooding;
Healing the ailing and hearts bewailing;
Soothing, not searing; no toxin, but tonic;
Balming and calming; all fact and no fiction!



Our Beloved Swami...in the words of Professor Kasturi

A Poem for Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (cont)

Every sentence spreads joy and scorches gloom,
Impelling attention, compelling assent,
Dispelling dejection, repelling sloth,
Attracting you nearer, detaching from bonds,
Infusing courage, and fusing creeds,
Imposing no doctrine, composing all feuds,
Informing (so charming!), never harming, disarming!
Sifting the responding, lifting the desponding.



Stressing on 'Doing, Behaving and Living',
Appealing for 'Feeling, Believing and Acting'.

Calling all listening, to spurn imitating,
Vainly disputing, blind leading the blind,
Knocking at Paradise through power and pelf,
Or boasting of branches of family tree,
And seeking for peace, in earning and spending
And wanting and panting and hoarding and guarding.



As you hear Him talking, you quietly resolve
To take a step forward on the pilgrim road;
Unfold your wings and soar into the sky!
You feel you are a Lion, cheated into bleating!
A diamond, set in dirty lead!

Engaging in no fray, enraging no foe,
He is welcoming all, who are thirsty or starving,
Or limping, or blinking, or climbing and sliding,
Raising the stooping, embracing the drooping
Assuaging pain, assuring His Grace.



He reminds us all of the road we have missed.
He describes the joy of the journey's end.
He opens our eyes; He strengthens our limbs;
He heartens the struggling, groping his way,
Awakening the sleeping, making the sitting stand,
The standing to walk; the walking to reach!



Proclaiming, revealing, announcing to all
Asserting His coming for our burden assuming,
Redeeming the wayward, the downcast, diseased;
Underlining the Truth, undermining the false;

Ah! What is this? What luck! What Grace!
Even as He talks, 'it' blossoms into song,
Oh! Captivating Song! He teaches us to pray
Tranquillizing all the furious waves,
Steeling the nerves and strengthening the will,
Attuning our soul to *Dharma! Sathya! Prema!*



And when it stops
And you open your eyes,
You find them full of tears!
Your neighbor weeps like child for mother,
But why? Look up and see; He has left the dais!



Be proud you had the chance. From this moment, I
know
You are bound to be an ascending, attempting,
adventurous soul.
Arjuna, resuming arms for the fray
With Krishna leading the horses aright -
How lucky you heard Him talk!

Our Beloved Swami...in the words of Professor Kasturi

A Poem for Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (cont)

A Bond that was Sweet and Beautiful

One day, spotting Professor Kasturi sitting in a corner where there was not much light in the verandah in Whitefield, with Vibhuti drawn on his forehead, which was like a part of his personal attire every day, Swami said "Aye Kasturi! Come here under the light," and then He mischievously smiled and continued, "Otherwise others will say, 'What is that bandage on your forehead!'" The ever affable Kasturi answered, "This is not a bandage, Swami; this actually removes me from bondage! From the bondage of birth and death." The Lord, of course, liberally laughed.

Excerpted from sssmedia - journals/Vol_06/01JAN08/



The Perfect Instrument



The Playful Lord

"Professor Nanjundaiah, who also knew him very closely, says, 'I would not be wrong if I say he is Valmiki and Vyasa to Bhagavan, who is the Avatar of the Age.'"

Source: Cover Story - Sai's Kasturi: A Phantasmagoric Fragrance Forever, Heart to Heart Journal Volume 6.



Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

"Whatever talent a person has should be dedicated to the rest of humanity - indeed to all living beings. Therein lies fulfillment. All men are kin. They are of the same likeness, the same build, molded out of the same material, with the same divine essence in each. Service to man will help your divinity to blossom, for it will gladden your heart and make you feel that life has been worthwhile. Service to man is service to God, for He is in every man, and every living being, in every stone and stump. Offer your talents at the feet of God. Let every act be a flower, free from the creeping worms of envy and egoism and full of the fragrance of love and sacrifice. "

Divine Discourse, December 5, 1964

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Sai Centers: A Graphic

** Sai Centers are the very heart of the Sai Organization

** They are local places of worship and community service, where spiritual aspirants come together to practice Swami's teachings of **Love** and **Selfless Service** and walk the spiritual path together by engaging in devotional, service, and educational activities

** They are the prime instrument envisioned by Swami to help devotees realize their innate divinity



Love All * Serve All * Help Ever * Hurt Never



- Sri Sathya Sai Center of South Bethesda

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

The Importance of Sai Centers: What Swami says

“First, it has been decided that the Sathya Sai Seva Samithi (the precursor of today’s Sai Center) will hereafter be the key unit of the Organization.”

Swami, Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 11, December 23, 1971

“The Organizations named after Me... must try to spread interest in the recitation of God's Name, meditation, and other spiritual practices which lead man Godward. They must demonstrate the Joy derivable from *devotional group singing* and *remembrance of God's Name*, and the Peace that one can draw from *good company*. They must render *service* to the helpless, the sick, the distressed, the illiterate and the needy. Their selfless service should not be exhibitionistic; it must seek no reward, not even gratitude or thanks from the recipients.

Swami, Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol.8, February 23, 1968

“We have to demonstrate to the world the unity that underlies the diversity. All should work together in harmony, act together, move together, grow together and share the common knowledge and experience with all.”

Swami, Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol.20, November 24, 1987

Three of the Points in Swami’s Nine Point Code of Conduct highlight the important role of Sai Centers. These include (a) participation by children in the Sri Sathya Sai Educare program, (b) participation in the community service programs of the Organization, and (c) attendance at least once a month in Center *bhajans* (devotional group singing).

Other Observations

“Sri Sathya Sai centers play an important part in transforming hearts and enlightening communities. With their roots firmly attached to Prasanthi Nilayam, the centers are like branches taking Swami’s teachings to individuals, families, and communities.” [*Speaking of the 2023 Center Leadership Conference*]: “It is these conversations we need to have, now, for our centers to solidify our practice of Swami’s teachings and inspire each other and consequently inspire others.”

Shivendra Kumar, Convenor, Sri Sathya Sai Global Council

"Let us recognize the profound significance of the Sathya Sai Center. It is the epicenter where the transformative journey unfolds...This journey of self realization is not meant to be embarked upon alone; it is a journey best experienced with the support and love of our spiritual Sai family. Together we harmonize our voices in devotional songs, nurture the tender hearts of our children through transformative education, and extend our hand with selfless service to uplift those in need. As we unite in purpose and dedication, our Sai Centers become hallowed grounds, where miracles of personal and collective transformation occur, often subtly and unknowingly.”

Dr Vini Raman, President, SSSGC Zone 1 Region 3, speaking at the July 2023 Center Leaders Conference

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Sri Sathya Sai Center Leaders Conference, July 4-5, 2023

“Practice and Inspire”

With the Divine Grace and Blessings of our beloved Bhagawan, the first ever Sri Sathya Sai Center Leaders Conference was held July 4-5, 2023 at Prasanthi Nilayam—the holiest of holy places in the world. Words fail to express the joy that filled everyone’s hearts. Representatives from every Zone, Country, and Region including Zone Chairs, National Council Presidents, Senior Leaders, Regional Coordinators, National Council Members, Members of the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, and Members of the Central Trust, and Young Adults all came together to participate in this conference.



Conference aims: Spiritually Energize Center Leaders and Strengthen Sai Centers in following Swami’s Message. The Center Leaders Conference marked an important occasion for all Sathya Sai Centers. The meeting added momentum to the efforts being undertaken in the Zones to put into practice Swami’s teachings. Over two days, it spiritually energized Center leaders to strive for greater heights of spiritual awareness and selfless service implementation. The challenges facing the world today require that we intensify our prayers for global peace. Strengthening the Sri Sathya Sai Centers by meticulously following the path of *Seva* (selfless service) and *Sadhana* (spiritual practice) is the path shown to us by Bhagawan.



Plenary talks, Workshops, Pre- and Post- Study Circles. The conference took many months of careful preparation. Sai Centers in all zones conducted a series of study circles based on specially prepared study guides. The guides covered important organizational and spiritual topics as a prelude to the conference. The learning continued at His Divine Lotus Feet in Prasanthi Nilayam through the talks and workshops held over

two days. *Plenary sessions* consisted of talks by eminent speakers followed by workshop sessions. We had eight *workshops* in 10 locations within the ashram; these workshops were conducted by nearly 100 devoted speakers from overseas and India, after doing intensive study and research on Swami’s teachings. With Bhagawan’s Divine Grace and Blessings, all the delegates immersed themselves in the bliss of remembering Him, remembering His directives, and soaking in His love. Post-Conference, all centers are encouraged to continue

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Sri Sathya Sai Center Leaders Conference, July 4-5, 2023 (cont)



study circles on the pre-conference and eight conference workshop topics. This approach will help ensure that all members in all the Centers focus and work together globally with unity and purity. *The study guides for all these topics are available on the SSSGC website.*

Inauguration of the Sai Hira Global Convention Centre. It is a matter of great pride and joy for all the

delegates that Bhagawan blessed them to be part of, and witness to, the historic inauguration of the magnificent Sai Hira Global Convention Centre at Prasanthi Nilayam. The Centre was inaugurated by Sri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, in the august presence of Sri S. Abdul Nazeer, Governor of Andhra Pradesh. The edifice reflects the grandeur and majesty of the Sai Avatar and will, in the years to come, host epoch-making conventions and conferences based on the universal eternal teachings of Bhagawan.

“Love in Action” Networking Event, Sharing Conference Takeaways.

Following the conference, the “Love in Action” Networking Event was held on July 6-7 in the Double Decker Building within the ashram where all devotees could get a glimpse of the wonderful Sai work that is happening in many countries and see how Sai’s Love is touching the lives of so many people across the globe. This conference has provided each Center leader with the strength to proceed with zeal and enthusiasm and to work towards the vision and goal that Swami has given us. Taking back best practices, sharing the learnings from the conference, and conducting similar workshops in countries and Centers across the globe will enable the benefits of the conference to reach every member in every center.



Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Sri Sathya Sai Center Leaders Conference, July 4-5, 2023 (cont)

Unity and Togetherness: A Testament to Participants' Love for Swami. The Conference and the Networking Event were all so beautifully managed by the dedication and devotion of the 300-plus strong core team members from all the zones and the deep commitment of all Zone Chairs. It was amazing to see the work that the team from Zone 1 handled. The coordination in the Sai Hira Auditorium, the welcome desk, and the audio arrangements was fabulous. The unity, love, and togetherness with which 300 core team members worked was overwhelming—and is a testament to the depth of their love for Bhagawan. We thank Bhagawan for the wonderful moments we experienced in Prasanthi Nilayam, which will remain forever etched in our hearts. Let us pray that Swami blesses us with many more such opportunities to visit the Divine Abode, and with the continued privilege of serving in His Divine Name.

With love and Pranams at the Lotus Feet,
Suresh N. Menon

Chair, Sri Sathya Sai Center Leaders Conference, Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, India

“The conference marks the beginning of a new era in Prasanthi Nilayam, where we can reclaim what is due to us. We are witnessing a new era in which devotees all over the world will sit together and work together—the true birth of the Global Council.”

Sri K. Chakravarthi, member of the Board of Trustees and Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning.

The venue for the Center Leaders Conference was the magnificent, newly constructed Sri Sathya Sai Global Conference Centre in Prasanthi Nilayam, inaugurated via videoconferencing by India's Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi.



Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action

We asked Zone 1 Centers to highlight one or two activities each of them has undertaken over the past year. This section presents their responses, edited only slightly to retain the tenor and 'heart' with which they have been written. They are presented in alphabetical order, with the exception of the Region 1 Food Bank Service project, which appears at the end of the section, and where each participating center has submitted its own individual contribution. Do not miss the photos at the end of the report!

Atlanta, GA: Multi-Faith and Multi-Cultural Events

At the [Atlanta Sathya Sai Baba Center](#), special attention is given to the **importance of the Multi-Faith and Multi-Cultural principles** emphasized by Swami in His talks about Unity of Faith. In the past twelve months, devotees cheerfully celebrated Christmas, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana alongside *Ganesh Chaturthi*, *Onam* and *Dasara*. Last Christmas, for example, two Christian devotees shared their experiences and insights, and the whole center enthusiastically sang lovely Christmas carols. Similarly, devotional services every Sunday start with prayers of several faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The weekly study circle too includes participants from various faiths and cultures; and the discussion often encompasses Swami's teachings on respect for different religions and countries.

Swami has said:

*"There is only one religion, the religion of Love;
There is only one language, the language of the Heart;
There is only caste, the caste of Humanity;
There is only one God, and He is Omnipresent."*

Baltimore, MD: Center Picnic, Harvest Seva

A Center Picnic in June at a local park was the **first picnic held after four long years**, due to the pandemic, and was thoroughly enjoyed by all. A relay race kicked off the event, combining three activities—a three-legged race, lime & spoon, and a scavenger hunt using Swami's quotes. The teams were a mix of SSSE children, Young Adults and SSSE Parents. It was a fun way to practice coordination during all three activities all at once. Also on tap were value games and several others such as tug of war, badminton, volleyball, and musical chairs using bhajan music and not the least, a delicious lunch.

Harvest Seva (Service), requiring good teamwork and coordination, is a favorite volunteer activity of young and adult devotees at the [Baltimore Sai Center](#). In both July and September, about 45-55 Center members, Young Adults and SSSE children volunteered to harvest 20,000 lbs. of cabbage and 10,000 lbs. of corn and potatoes for the needy. The Center has been volunteering to harvest vegetables twice a year at First Fruit Farm in Maryland since 2017. This farm grows a variety of vegetables and donates 100% of its produce to local soup kitchens, food banks and shelters. Over the seven years, volunteers have learned how to harvest corn, potatoes, collard greens, bell peppers, and tomatoes. However, this was the first time we harvested cabbage. Despite less rain this summer, the cabbages were fresh and large.

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

Canada: Inaugural Nagarsankeerthana

Numerous devotees participated in SSSGC Canada's inaugural *Nagarsankeerthana*, held September 4, 2023 at a park in Scarborough. Onlookers expressed their delight, some even recorded the session. Envisioned as a spiritual endeavor leading up to Swami's Centennial Birthday in November 2025, the event will continue every long weekend, except during winter months. The Center is inviting all devotees, including Sri Sathya Sai Educare children, to partake in this sacred *sadhana* (spiritual effort), to experience peace, happiness, and the profound bliss of Prasanthi Nilayam. Details at devotion@sssgc-canada.org.

Nagarsankeerthana is a spiritual practice in which a dedicated group of devotees goes around streets or in the outdoors in the early morning, ardently singing devotional songs known as *bhajans*. *Nagarsankeerthana* in Prasanthi Nilayam is an unforgettable experience, with chirping birds, cool breezes, and lovely *bhajans* filling Swami's Mandir with a divine ambience.

A sign of the times: a young student just arrived in Toronto learned of the event through his mother in India who saw the event flyer on Facebook, then took two buses to reach Scarborough—a testament to the magnetic pull of His divine calling!

Clearwater, FL: Gulfside Gayatri, Horseback Riding Therapy

1. Swami's boundless grace led us recently to a **remarkable service opportunity at Bakas Equestrian Center**, which is dedicated to providing therapeutic horseback riding sessions for children and adults with disabilities. Each therapy session requires the dedicated support of four to five volunteers for every rider. Under Swami's divine guidance, children aged 12 and above came forward to serve as **sidewalkers during these equine therapy sessions**. Meanwhile, our younger kids demonstrated their love and care for the magnificent horses by **assisting with horse care and grooming** and diligently tending to the barn's cleanliness. The service project yielded valuable lessons about selfless love, compassion, and gratitude. Please see box below for a glimpse of the children's reactions.

Reflections of Children who participated in this Heartwarming Service Project

- ♥ Group 2: "Bakas Equestrian Center is a sanctuary of service. The horses within its care toil tirelessly each day to serve those with disabilities selflessly. In light of their noble service to the riders, our sacred duty is to ensure a clean and welcoming environment for them by diligently cleaning their stalls. We can draw parallels to Swami's love and care for his devotee and pet, Sai Geetha. Just as Swami cared for animals, we too must extend our service to them, particularly those which play a crucial role in our community, to express our heartfelt gratitude."
- ♥ Group 2: "The service activity at Bakas Center touched our hearts as we cared for and cleaned the horse barns. Unlike ordinary horses, these **horses dedicate themselves to assisting people with disabilities**. It was a joy and a privilege to offer our service and provide the employees at Bakas with a brief respite from their dedicated work."
- ♥ Group 3: "The Bakas Equestrian Center is a place of profound beauty, where I witnessed the blessings showered upon the horses and their profound impact on the lives of the children they serve. **Through their simple acts of service, these horses become vessels of divine healing for the children**. I offer my heartfelt thanks to Swami for allowing me to interact with the riders during therapy sessions, and I was overjoyed to witness the innocent smiles they brought forth."

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

2. Every year, at the beginning of the hurricane season, adults and children of the **Clearwater Sai Center** continue a tradition of chanting the *Sai Gayathri* at the Clearwater Beach. Devotees thank Swami for protecting them for the past 100 years, and pray for His continued Grace in **protecting the region from the devastating hurricanes**. On the designated day, the group meets at sunrise at the entrance of the Clearwater beach; they hold hands and chant the prayer, then proceed to the end of the beach, chanting all the while. Everyone gathers around the water on the beach, praying and offering *Vibhuthi* to the Gulf of Mexico. **Swami shows us His presence with the beautiful sunrise painting the clouds**, or with the rainbow that lights up the sky on our walk back. With the collective prayer offered by the group, everyone feels the sacred vibrations and divine energy surrounding them.

"Wherever My devotees sing My Name, there I install Myself" – Swami

Note to reader from the Clearwater Center: We hope you can join us in our annual tradition of the "*Beach Gayathri*" and experience the joy of Swami's Grace while praying to protect the community.

East Brunswick, NJ: Food Service, Educare

East Brunswick Sai Center has been an active participant in **several Food Service Projects**, for example, Legion of Good Will (LGW), to provide meal kits to children and families in NJ. We also collect and deliver food and School Supplies & Uniforms to the children of Asbury Park as part of the Asbury Park Meal Kit Seva. Additionally, we collect food ingredients and gather around 6:30 AM to cook food and distribute in the Trenton area for the Urban Food Alliance Seva. In a similar fashion, we collaborate with other centers and actively participate in the Plainfield Open Market Seva. We collect food items and distribute it to the needy in the area.

East Brunswick Sai Center leads and actively participates in **several initiatives of the Sri Sathya Sai Program for Human Values and Educare (SSSPAVE)**. Group 4 SSSE children, Young Adults, and adults take part in the Academic Coaching and Tutoring program to provide free weekly tutoring and mentoring for students in K through 10 grades primarily in Math, English and Sciences. They help students strengthen their subject knowledge and boost their self-confidence, set achievable goals, acquire their full potential, and gain leadership skills to be successful in life. The Center also holds English Classes (English as a Second Language) for non-English speaking adults, both online and in-person; more than 20 students are registered in this program. **In-person Sri Sathya Sai Educare (SSSE) classes**, meanwhile, following the Covid pandemic have led to better engagement between Children/Parents and Gurus, while YAs' Gurus training has significantly increased their involvement, including the teaching of SSSE across all groups.

Indianapolis, IN (Region 5): Sai Alumni Meet– His Property Without Borders

"Come together, spend time with each other and spread ANANDA amongst each other" were Bhagawan's words during the first meet in 2009 of the alumni of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. Abiding by the divine Chancellor's instructions, the alumni of Swami's Institutions residing in North America meet annually in different parts of North America. This year the meet, named **Sai NAAM (North America Alumni Meet)** took place in Indianapolis, Indiana-Region 5.

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

Alumni of Anantapur, Puttaparthi, and Brindavan Institutions took to air and road to meet the Divine Call, eager to Re-live, Re-collect, Re-connect, and Re-energize, as hailed in the motto of the event. Sai brothers and sisters from America and Canada, ranging in age from 20+ to 60+, were privileged to literally live the life of a Sai Student for a day. Alumni and devotees from [the Indianapolis Sai Center](#) joined hands to decorate Swami's altar and chair. Beginning with Suprabhatam and Nagarsankeerthan on a brisk, windy morning at the local temple, the Big Day was filled with Alma Mater sessions and various shows of support and gratitude to the Alma Mater. The program comprised alumni talks and experience sharing, discussions on how to support the institution, heart touching bhajans and an enthralling Musical Offering to Bhagawan by the alumni's renowned and most humble musical group. Distinguished alumnus Brother R.J Rathnakar applauded Bhagawan's love for humanity; the group was also privileged to have a Q&A discussion with the Institute's Vice Chancellor Brother Raghavendra Prasad, who was the Chief Guest for the event.

[Rochester, NY: Joined the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council family](#) **New center!**

With Swami's grace on the auspicious occasion of 2023 Holy Guru Purnima, **SSSGC Rochester, NY - USA of the Northeast Region 1, lovingly and excitingly joined the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council family** in the spirit of unity and connectivity to Prasanthi Nilayam. This new center expressed their immense gratitude to Dear Swami by offering a letter which, with His Grace, was placed and propitiously blessed at Swami's Sannidhi in Sai Kulwant Hall on Guru Purnima. To mark this special inaugural occasion including the wonderful support of the SSSGC Sai Leadership team, [the Rochester Center](#) hosted a special *Satsang* with SSSGC-USA National Devotional Coordinator Dr. Dhurjati Mudigonda. Brother Dhurjati offered a beautiful musical treat of Sai experiences and Bhajans on the *Veena*, and also spoke on the importance of connecting to Prasanthi Nilayam as we all continue our spiritual *sadhana* and journey to Sai.

[Syracuse, NY: Talk by Brother Fize Mohamed from Trinidad](#)

In August 2023 the Syracuse Sai Center hosted **Brother Fize Mohamed from Trinidad**. He shared with us his transformative encounters with Baba both from a distance and in Baba's presence. His quest to truly know God, beyond religion and what he was told by elders and religious scholars, led him to the divine feet of Baba over many years. Numerous miraculous incidents occurred including Baba saving his life in a head-on car collision which left him unconscious in the hospital for several days, with little prospect of recovery. It was Baba's Grace that saved him and when he went for his first interview, Baba told him he drove too fast—possibly a reminder for all to “start early, drive slowly and arrive safely”, as Swami says. Brother Fize noted that Baba completely erased the memory of the accident; he only knows of it from the passengers in the car. Many other experiences were shared on how Baba came to the rescue of not only Brother Fize but also others, by making him an instrument to serve those in need.

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

Jersey City, NJ: Selfless Food Service, Blissful Summer Picnic

The **Jersey Sai Center** undertakes significant **food service** activities: devotees get together on a Saturday to prepare, pack, and deliver meals to a nearby church where some 70-80 people in need line up for a warm, nutritious, and sanctified lunch made with love and devotion. The accompanying box offers a closeup look at the activity and conveys a sense of the volunteers' warmth and enthusiasm.

Transformative Selfless Service at Jersey City Sai Center

On a bright Saturday morning at 8:30 am, a vibrant sense of devotion and enthusiasm fills the air as devotees gather to engage in yet another seva (service) at *Shirdi Seva Asthaan* in West Orange, NJ. Volunteers eagerly line up to unload food materials from their cars, including snack bars, bananas, fresh bread from the bakery, and groceries for the day's meals, encompassing pasta, spaghetti, sauces, and an assortment of spices.

Welcoming everyone with a warm smile is Nelli aunty, the main chef overseeing the precise combination of ingredients for delicious dishes. The sanctity of the atmosphere is established with the chanting of three OM's before diving into the food preparation process. Approximately 10 to 15 seva volunteers contribute to various tasks, from boiling pasta, making pasta sauce, cutting vegetables and garnishing garlic bread to cooking meals. The food menu features a variety of options, including pasta, mac & cheese, burgers, ziti, vegetable balls, and chili beans. Simultaneously, hot tea is prepared and served to the diligent volunteers.

While the cooking unfolds, some volunteers organize tables to prepare for the packing of meals into to-go containers. Others busy themselves unfolding bags to hold the food, snack bars, bananas, and water bottles. All the freshly prepared food items are neatly lined up on the tables.

First box is prepared and kept in front of our beloved Swami for his blessing through Brahmarpanam, the food prayer. The volunteers then line up to start packing the boxes passing hand by hand, while adding the snacks, bananas, water and any special food item for the day that goes into the bag.

We prepare approximate 70 to 80 to-go boxes and load into cars, ready to be transported to the nearby Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. Upon arrival at church, a heartwarming scene unfolds as a line of hungry individuals stands outside the church. Their eyes express gratitude as they open the boxes and enjoy the nourishing meals. The church staff and volunteers are ever grateful to the selfless service done by the Sai team.

Words fall short in describing the joy of participating in this seva, and immense gratitude is expressed to Bhagawan, our beloved Sai, for allowing us to be instruments of service to the needy. The Jersey City Sai Center consistently provides opportunities for all center members, including SSE children, their parents, friends, and families, to engage and volunteer in various service activities conducted on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis.

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

On a sunny day in August 2023, the **Jersey City Sai Center** embarked on a joyous journey to Van Saun Park in Paramus, NJ, turning an ordinary Sunday into an extraordinary summer picnic. Warm weather set the perfect stage for a **day of companionship, spirituality, and shared laughter**. The 50-person gathering commenced with Om and Gayatri chants to lay the foundation for a day of positive energy. Good food, good sports, and the park's offerings engaged all—kids, young adults, and adults—alike. Post-lunch, devotees joined in a spirited game of *Antakshari*, with Sai bhajans filling the air creating an atmosphere of harmony and spiritual connection. The grand finale was a soulful singing of Sai bhajans, followed by impromptu performances of members from various religious backgrounds, embodying a spirit of unity in diversity. Not only a treasured memory, the picnic highlighted the power of shared spirituality, social gathering, and time spent together strengthening bonds of friendship and community outside the setting of the Sai Center.

Loudoun, VA: Sandwich program, Nature Walk, Sathya Sai Vratam Pooja

With Swami's Grace, the **Loudoun Sai Center** conducted a **Center-Wide Service Activity** involving SSSE Students and Parents and all Center Members, bringing the whole center together as one family. Sandwiches were packed and delivered for lunch for a Community Shelter, and Brown Bags were packed and delivered to Community School Lunch. It was heartwarming to see all center members come together and offer their time for the community, in the name of Swami. SSSE Group 2 children helped pack items along with their Gurus. As part of the annual picnic, SSSE children also went on a **nature walk** and throughout the walk discussed quotes of Swami about nature. Among other things, they learned the importance of Mother Nature, how she safeguards us, how not to trouble her, and how to live in harmony.

In August, the **Loudoun Sai Center** performed **Samuhika Sri Sathya Sai Vratam Kalpamu as one Sai Family**, with participation by all center members including SSSE children. Families came together, individually performed *pooja* as instructed, collectively offered it at Swami's Lotus Feet for the welfare of the community, and received Swami's *Maha Prasadam*.

Mesa, AZ: Preparing for Swami's 100th Birthday

In honor of Swami's 100th birthday, a heartfelt effort has been under way, comprising **the learning of the Sri Sathya Sai Suprabhatam and the organization of Walk for Values/Nagar Sankeertan**. During the summer holidays, a fifth batch of students dedicated themselves to mastering the Suprabhatam. Upon completion of the learning sessions, the students along with a few others visited a senior home to perform a moving collection of multi-faith prayers and songs for the residents. The music's enchanting quality left the senior home's inhabitants captivated, leading to an invitation for a return visit during their "Christmas in July" event. At this second visit, the group spread joy, cheer, and Swami's Love by singing Christmas songs.

The efforts to honor the 100th Birthday were further enriched by the organization of four Walk for Values/*Nagar Sankeertan* events. As a part of these gatherings, Young Adults organized entertaining activities for center members not engaged in walking. Participants have enjoyed these activities; and these events have radiated an infectious sense of joy, prompting bystanders—human and animal—to wonder about the source of such exuberance at such an early hour.

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

Orlando, FL: Service Activities for the needy, Devotional Program for Self-Transformation

The Orlando Sai Center has been engaged in some wonderful service activities for the past year thus far. Members have actively participated with dedication, love, and devotion:

- ♥ In April, as part of our *Aradhana* Service project, members of the Orlando Sai Center had the great opportunity of preparing 50 dental kits for the residents of the **Orlando Rescue mission**, a home where aid is provided to the helpless, hungry and the homeless. Members also generously donated cereals and canned items.
- ♥ Since July, the Center has also been donating cooked food, canned goods, toiletries and dried goods to the **Russell Home of Orlando for Atypical children**. Members meet at the Center on scheduled Saturdays to make peanut butter sandwiches; some members prepare cooked foods like pasta dishes which are then delivered to the home. There is also an ongoing collection of needed items which are delivered monthly.
- ♥ The center is also taking part in the **Sri Sathya Sai Prema Tharu** project, an initiative to “adorn Mother Earth with 10 million trees by Bhagawan’s Birth Centenary in 2025”. Some devotees have already planted trees and uploaded their pictures. A marigold tree will also be planted on November 18 at the Orlando Sai Center as part of this project.
- ♥ The Center has had an excellent **devotional program focused on self-transformation** and building confidence through faith. Through *Samarpans* from Prashanthi and weekly study circles, we are focusing on ways to achieve inner transformation, including: offering all our actions to Swami; practicing constant integrated awareness as well as self-introspection; seeing all beings as one; and understanding who we are. We also continue our weekly center *sadhana* of Gayatri chanting and Jyothi meditation for world peace.

South Bethesda, MD: Celebration of Festivals and Avatar Day

The South Bethesda Sai Center celebrated **Ganesh Chaturthi** and **Krishna Janmasthanmi** (birthdays of Lord Ganesha and Lord Krishna) in a grand manner. Both celebrations started with *Vedam* chanting followed by an uplifting study circle. The *Krishna Janmasthanmi* study circle on “Radha *Bhakti* and Meera *Bhakti*” focused on the divine love of Radha and Meera, among Krishna’s foremost devotees. The *Ganesh Chaturthi* study circle focused on the “Significance of OM” which Swami says is the verbal symbol of God and the one sound from which all other sounds arise. **Avatar Day** in October included a highly inspiring talk by Dr Panchanathan titled “In every moment of my life please be with me”, while SSSE children enacted a scene where the 14-year old Sathya makes His announcement that had been held back so long, “I am Sai Baba”. The play was followed by uplifting bhajans!

West Palm Beach, FL: Special Speaker, Helping the Homeless

A study circle in August featured a special speaker, **Sister Padmaja Malayala**. Sister Padmaja is the niece of Shri B. V Raman Rao, who served Baba for several decades and was one of the foremost coordinators of Puttaparthi’s *Seva Dal* (volunteer corps). Sister Padmaja offered a bhajan to Swami, then recounted several of her grandfather’s and uncle’s experiences as well as her own, linking her remarks beautifully with the attributes of Swami as described in the *Sathya Sai Ashtotra Satha Namavali* (108 Names of Swami). Dr. Sastry Pappu (a pioneer of the study circle in the Sathya Sai organization and also a part of our study circle group) then narrated

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

his own experiences with Raman Rao *garu* and remembered him as Hanuman to Lord Rama for all the service he did in the name of our beloved lord “Sai Rama”. Sister Padmaja received much appreciation for sharing such beautiful experiences.

The aim of the “**Helping the Homeless**” project is to support the homeless people in nearby communities through food donation and hygienic items and arranging temporary stay for people in need. To promote healthy eating, protein and nutrient-based foods are served along with other regular items like Pasta, Spanish Rice, Cookies, fruits, water etc. Utmost care is taken to serve the food with love, engage the homeless people in conversation and find out, and provide, the help needed, including with respect to hygienic items. Occasionally, and as called for, the Center provides financial assistance for families on a waiting list for housing placement and in need of temporary accommodation. The West Palm Beach Center’s other service projects include Park Cleanup and a Back-to-school “Bash” program.

Region 1 SSSGC-USA Special Service Project: Regional Food Bank Service

With the Blessings of Bhagawan Baba, the Sri Sathya Sai Global Centers of Region 1 put a focused spotlight on food insecurity and hunger awareness. Coinciding with the National Food Bank and Hunger Awareness month in September, **SSSGC Region 1 Sai centers of Norwalk, Scarborough, Shelton, Syracuse, Scarsdale, Rochester** all participated in this Regional Food Bank Service.

Food is a basic necessity. We often take food for granted yet many families around us unfortunately struggle with food insecurity challenges. Harsh statistics reveal to us that millions of people suffer from food scarcity and it’s still an ongoing problem of hunger. As soon as the Regional Food Bank Service Project initiative was discussed by the service coordinators, in no time the devotees sprung into immediate action and looked into opportunities to selflessly serve the vulnerable populations. They wanted to do something positive and make a clear difference to help alleviate hunger. Observing the hunger adversities and physically seeing homeless people living on the streets, Sai members were gifted an opportunity by Dearest Swami to rise and take action with love and humility. Members saw the plight of individuals using a grocery cart to literally carry and store all their belongings like clothes, cans, bedding - that was their lifeline. All the Northeast Region 1 Sai centers felt a spirit of kindred unity in carrying out similar food pantry service projects during the same time in their respective communities.

Our loving Lord Swami has often emphasized Narayana Seva as one of the best Seva activities to feed the hungry, or “Narayana’s”. Narayana Seva means serving Narayana or serving the Lord. ***Swami says, “The gift of food is the noblest of all gifts.”*** In fact, the humble devotees of Region 1 Sai centers drew their inspiration from hearing and seeing Bhagawan Baba Himself serving in Narayana Seva activities taking place in Prasanthi Nilayam. The service enthusiasts whole-heartedly participated in the food bank seva and felt immense gratitude to Swami for providing this blessed opportunity. They even reached out and encouraged friends in the greater community to also participate. ***Swami says, “A wave of service, if it sweeps over the land catching everyone in its enthusiasm, will be able to wipe off mounds of hatred, malice and greed that infest the world.”***

Through their active engagement in Sai Service, SSSGC Sai Centers of Region 1 have very lovingly supported the families lacking in basic food and amenities. Here are a few glimpses from all the SSSGC Sai centers in Region 1 and may all be inspired to adopt the same goal of pleasing our Dearest Bhagawan.

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

SSSGC Norwalk Sai Center (CT)

Norwalk Sai Center earnestly participated in the **Regional Service Project** on occasion of Food Bank Awareness in September. It was a wonderful collaboration with a Person-to-Person non-profit organization, to help humanity and walk on the Sai path of helping and serving all.

Additional Service Highlights:

The Center has been lovingly serving the soup kitchen of **Norwalk Open Door Shelter** for more than 20 years by sponsoring lunch on the 4th Saturday of each month. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, serving was not allowed on site yet the members continued to donate pizzas. After Covid and going forward, Center members can serve in person, with all their enthusiasm.

SSSGC Scarsdale Sai Center (NY)

Devoted members of the **Scarsdale Sai group** also participated in the “Regional Service Food Pantry” project helping to support the vulnerable by collaborating with HOPE Community Services located in New Rochelle, NY. **HOPE’s Food Pantry** is one of the largest in Westchester County. HOPE’s Soup Kitchen serves about 100 meals each week night where every guest is warmly welcomed and treated with dignity and respect. The Sai team provided fresh perishables to the community, including, for example, 300lbs each of tomatoes, bananas, and potatoes.

Additional Service Highlights:

Among other activities, the SSSGC Scarsdale Center **joined with the Manhattan Center** to provide 250 T-shirts, cookies, assembly of nuts, and oranges to the underserved community in NY city.

SSSGC Scarborough Sai Center (ME)

By Swami’s grace, in October the **Scarborough Sai Center** donated about 100 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as well as a large collection of non-perishable items to the **Prebel Street Food Pantry hub** in support of the Regional Food Bank Seva. Devotees lovingly attached Swami’s quotes to all the sandwich bags as part of the community outreach advocated by the Sri Sathya Sai Program for Awareness of Human Values (SSSPAVE). They also prepared ziplock bags with healthy goodies along with a drink to hand over to homeless people encountered on the way.

Additional Service Highlights:

SSSGC **Scarborough Sai Center**, Maine also dedicated their time and efforts by participating in **SSSPAVE Seva!** Over 200 sandwiches were made and specially included were universal quotes. Additional post cards with quotes were distributed to all. Center members had lovely musical interactions with the elderly residents, which was touching for all. One such rendition was of the timeless song, “*This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!*”, chosen to underscore the importance of shining one’s light in the world, and the impact that even the smallest light can have everywhere you go!

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization

Zone 1 Sai Centers: Love in Action (cont)

SSSGC Shelton Sai Center (CT)

On the Holy occasion of Krishna Janmashtami, **Shelton Sai Center** enthusiastically reached out to the nearby sub-regional Sai centers, and all lovingly participated in the **Food Bank Regional Seva**. Much needed pantry items were donated by devotees, collected, and delivered to the food pantry. Donations were made to Spooner House, indeed so many in number that some excess supplies were donated to another homeless shelter, namely, Bridgeport Rescue Mission, another homeless shelter providing meals and safe housing to the residents.

Additional Service Highlights:

In September the Center's SSSE Group 4 children took part in the homeless shelter Seva activity. What a great way to start the academic school year with a Sai Service project! They served meals and pizza to **Columbus House Seva** (Homeless Shelter in New Haven, CT) serving 80 people. Center families served food at Columbus House, a homeless shelter in New Haven, serving pizza, salad, fruit and cookies.

SSSGC Syracuse Sai Center (NY)

On a beautiful fall day, **Food Bank Seva** took front row center as part of the Regional Service Project from **Syracuse Sai Center**! Over two to three weeks, loving devotees donated food bank pantry items and collaborated with the Food Bank of Central New York, located in Syracuse. The Food Bank supports 11 counties with a population of around 140,000 residents who are in desperate need. Nearly one out of eight individuals is food insecure in central New York. The Center arranged for the pantry donations to support those less fortunate and help eliminate hunger for Syracuse community.

Additional Service Highlights:

Syracuse Sai Center also regularly takes part in **monthly pizza Seva** to the underserved at Oxford Home. This project has been going on strong for over 25+ years!

SSSGC Rochester Sai Center (NY)

The Rochester Sai **food bank service activity** was conducted in support of the Regional Seva Project-National Food Bank during September. The intent was to provide nutritious items that are high in protein (legumes, protein pasta), whole grain (granola bars, oats), low sodium (veg cans, kidney beans, garbanzo), and low sugar (no sugar added fruit cans), for both healthy impact and good taste. Located in downtown Rochester, the People's Pantry caters to the underserved population, providing groceries to families and individuals to help mitigate the effects of food insecurity. Community members can come in and choose their needed items from this pantry. The service activity provided food/household items for 60 families; it was inspiring to see committed, dedicated volunteers and staff helping to get food to the people in need.

Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization



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Sai Centers: The Very Heart of the Sai Organization



Birthday Issue Theme:

Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke

(Sai is ours, we are His)



“What can I tell you for the day? Whenever I see you, My heart overflows with love. When I visibly see so many of you exhibiting your love for Me, there is no limit to My joy. I have not sent out invitations to any of you. The love in Me has drawn you here. Your love to God and God's love to you is the true message...I give and you receive and you give and I receive. This exchange is the true bond between man and God.”

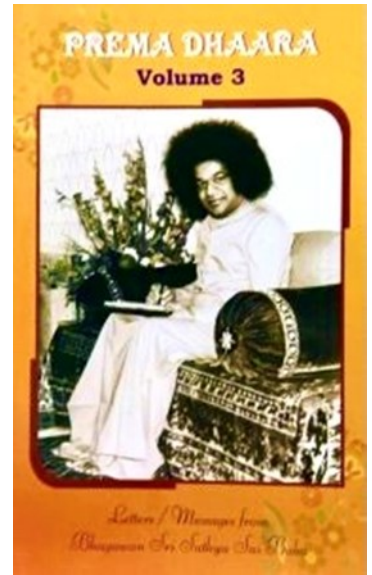
- Divine Discourse, November 23, 2001
(Swami's 75th Birthday)

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Prema Dhara: When God Loves

The theme of this Birthday issue, *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke* (Sai is ours, we are His), is perhaps best exemplified in the unique and intimate relationship between Swami and his earliest devotees. At a time when the Sai Avatar was just unfolding and relatively few had come into the Sai fold, these fortunate devotees embraced Swami, at once as both the Divine Lord and one of their own family members. Swami, for His part, showered His abundant Love and Grace on them, drawing them close to His divine bosom and becoming one of them. He guided them and took care of all aspects of their lives, be they mundane or momentous—all the while teaching them how to live a spiritual life.

The book *Prema Dhara* (Stream of Divine Love) beautifully captures these sweet interactions between the Lord and these early devotees, laying out the “love affair” that took the form of letters, poems, and messages—and even the odd drawing—that Swami sent to His devotees. These letters afford a rare and precious look at the personal and loving messages sent by no less than the Lord Himself to His dear devotees.



A Few Observations: When God Loves...

The letters are a delight, a sheer pleasure to peruse. More than anything, they offer a window into what God’s Love, pure and profuse, feels like.

A motherly love. First and foremost, the letters highlight Swami’s deep love and concern for His devotees, as well as the very familiar and informal nature of their relationship. They convey the affection of a caring mother or father, making sure that everything is right with the child. In his characteristically meticulous manner, even in those early days, Swami would take care of every small logistical detail, and provide specific instructions on all matters to ensure that the devotee would face no inconvenience or problems. Indeed, no effort was too big or too small for Swami to get directly involved for his devotees, a sign of His great love for them and His own humility.

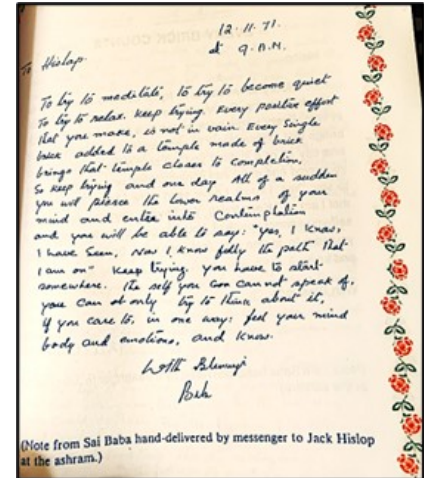
A one-to-one bond. The letters also attest to Swami’s one-on-one relationship with devotees. Swami used to make it a point to deal directly and know all the members of each family, mindful of the particular needs of each, from the grandparents to the youngest children. Thus, His letters would always include a kind enquiry and specific message for each individual of the family. With the benefit of foresight, we know that throughout His avataric years, Swami continued to follow the principle of dealing directly and uniquely with each devotee.

A mutual yearning. Equally, these letters show how eager Swami was to be in the midst of his devotees and how much he missed them in their absence. While it is often said that spiritual seekers need to have a strong yearning for God to attain Him, here was Swami who longed for the company of His followers! In the second excerpt below, the Lord of the Universe is almost pleading with a devotee to visit him. Recent residents of Puttaparthi, including His students, have also talked of His sadness to see them leave, bearing witness again to His humility.

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Prema Dhara: When God Loves (cont)

An Avatar's unique role. The letters also reveal the two-fold nature of Swami's interactions with His devotees—on the one hand, walking and talking with human beings as one among them, and on the other, fulfilling His mission as the Kali Yuga Avatar. Thus, even while dealing with his devotees on a very casual, down-to-earth basis, Swami frequently conveyed important spiritual messages in these letters. This was increasingly the case as Swami began to focus more and more on His spiritual mission, with His letters often entirely devoted to His teachings. A key message that Swami gave his followers was to have deep faith in God and recite His name always, to help carry them through the inevitable difficulties of life.



The Divine Letters

Excerpts from some of the letters themselves make up the remaining portion of this article.

CARE OF A PATIENT: To Subbama garu

"I returned to Puttaparthi today itself. I have made all arrangements for you. I have paid Rs. 150 to Venkataramana towards room rent. Rs. 20 to be paid to you. I have paid Rs. 10 to the servant maid. For your return charges I have paid Appa Rao and entrusted the task with him. I was told that you cannot travel by car after discharge from the hospital....you can stay at Venkataramana's house and return only after taking rest for two days. You need not worry on any account. I have made all the arrangements for you personally before leaving...I am keeping under my personal custody your baggage with jampala, saris, and others. Be happy I have kept some *prasadam* in this for you. Warn the servant maid to take care of your property and inform her that this is my directive to her...Come to Puttaparthi with Appa Rao. With blessing, Baba garu."

PD, pages 32-33

BABA'S FRIENDLY CONCERN: To Mr. Thirumal Rao

"I observed from your letter that you could not come for want of a car... if you inform me well in advance, I will arrange a car or any other comfortable alternative, and send either Yadalam Narayana or anyone of our people to Makkajepalli Station....I will send you with Basavaraju car when you want to return. I write this letter with greatest hope that you will come. It is already six months passed since I saw you last. Therefore if you write to me immediately on seeing this letter about the date of your coming, I shall surely send a car to Makkajepalli station to meet you.

I write this letter with greatest hope. Surely you must come (reminds one of the bhajan "*Sai, Aana hi padega*") without fail. Please tell this to Pushpamma and ask her to give consent for your coming here. Since it would be difficult for them to come by train, you can bring them next time when the car comes here. Inform this to Kamalamma and also convey my blessings. Convey my blessings to Vanitha and Naga Prasad. Inform Pushamma that I have remembered her many a time and convey my blessings to her. It would be a great pleasure. You

Birthday Issue Theme: Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke

Prema Dhara: When God Loves (cont)

should come under any circumstances; whatever work you may have. Do not hesitate because you do not have a car. You should send a telegram before you leave". With blessings, Sri Sathya Sai Baba garu"
20th July, 1947, PD, pages 20-21

COME FOR ONE DAY AT LEAST: To Sri Chidambaraiah garu

"It is my desire that you should also visit and derive the pleasure of the divine grace. It is also a long time since you have visited Prasanthi Nilayam. In case you are busy otherwise, come here for one day at least. I will make all arrangements for your stay; hence do come. I bless you to have good health. With blessing, Baba garu."
PD, pages 30-31

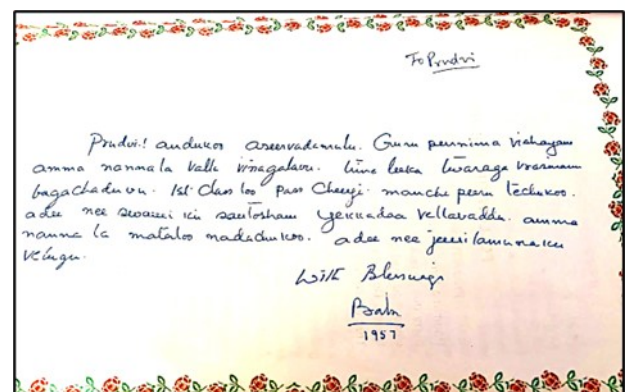
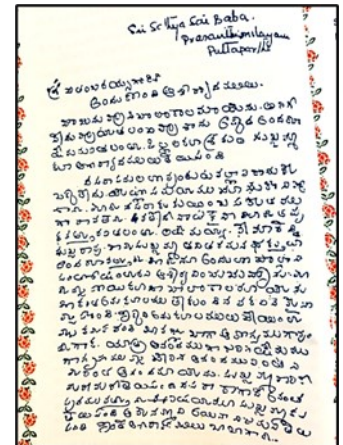
BABA LIKES TO MEET ONE AND ALL: To dear devotee Sankaramma

"Child, your message gave me immense happiness. But for me, my recent trip has not given me any satisfaction. Not being able to talk to everyone, not being able to meet everyone. I have not been happy. This time when your house is completed, I will immediately come and spend many days happily..to hear again that your sister-in-law had pain filled me with sympathy. Slowly it will decrease. She will be bedridden for 4 to 5 months. Do not get scared. Your husband too will get cured, gradually. Convey my blessings to your sister-in-law, your brother Kesava Rao's family, the doctor's family, and bhajan singer girls. With blessings, Yours truly, Sri Sathya Sai Baba garu."
1947, PD, pages 8-9

BLESSINGS FOR NEW COUPLE—To Srimati Subbamma Garu

" When I am residing in your hearts how can you be far away from me? My name and figure are imprinted in your minds as such how can I be far away from you? Between God and devotee there are no distances. I am always by your side and you are always by mine.

I will never forget you. I have not forgotten, nor will I ever forget you. This is the truth. What do I have other than my devotees? My devotees are the source of my entire happiness. There is no happiness for me if I forget them. With blessings, Baba garu"
PD, pages 36-37



Telugu written in English

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Prema Dhara: When God Loves (cont)

BHAGAWAN'S MISSION: A poem by Baba included in a letter to his brother

"To protect and grant *Ananda* (joy) to mankind is my commitment
To rescue and reclaim all those who go astray from the right path is My Vow
To redress the sufferings of the poor and the needy is my definition of love
To save all those who worship me with austerity and devotion is my pride
To Me, devotion means the equanimity with which people welcome both
their sorrows and joys"

May 25, 1947, PD, pages 16-17

GOD OF THE HELPLESS: A Telugu poem written on the back of a picture of Lord Vishnu materialized by Swami for a devotee named M.L. Leela.

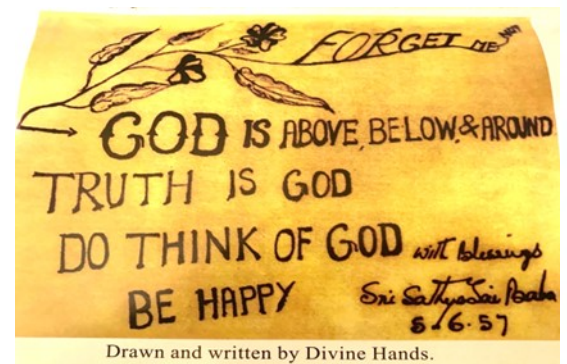
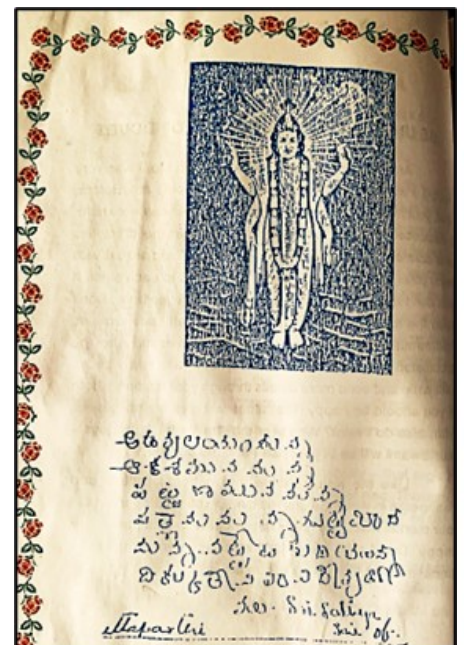
"*Adavula yandunna* (Whether one is in a forest)
Aakasamuna nunna (Or in the sky)
Pattanamuna nunna (Whether one is in a town)
Pallenu nunna gutta meeda (Or in a village or on a mount)
Nunna nattaeta vadi yunna (Or under a stream)
Dikkulaeni vaani Devudanumu (The refuge for the helpless)
Sri Sathya Sai of Puttaparthi" (Is Sri Sathya Sai of Puttaparthi)
PD, pages 50-51

SOOOOO HAPPY: Letter to Mahadevan

"Dear Mahadevan! Accept my Love and Blessings. I received your letter. I was sooooo happy. How is your health? How are you my Boy! Don't worry. Your 'Sai maa' is always with you, in you, around you. Be happy and healthy. Tell my blessings to Rani (Challamma).

I am sending *prasadam* with Love through Balaram. I will give *darshan* soon. With love, Baba"

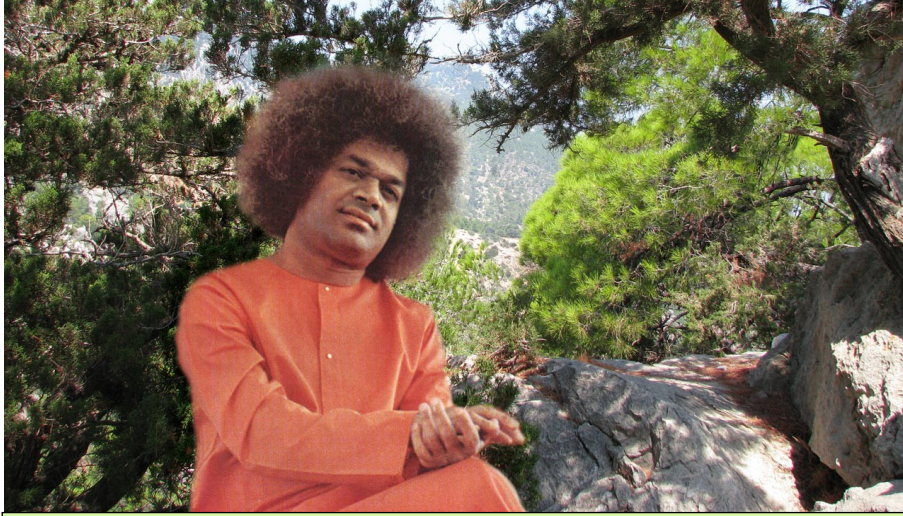
May 27, 1986, PD, pages 202-203.



This article deals with *Prema Dhara*, Volume 3, September 2009, compiled by the Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, Publications Division, comprising 103 letters written by Swami to devotees going back to the year 1946. Some are in the Telugu script, some are in English, and some are transliterated by Swami into English. The volume is unique as it contains scanned copies of actual letters, many of which are in His own handwriting. All the excerpts and photos in this article are drawn from this book. The first two volumes of *Prema Dhara* contain letters from Swami addressed to college students.

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Insights from the Sri Sathya Sai Ashtotram (108 Names)



"God will never give you up, nor should you ever give up your hold on God."

The Sri Sathya Sai Ashtotram is a garland of 108 Names written in praise of our Lord, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The Names, no doubt not exhaustive, put into words the divine qualities of the Avatar. Many of these Names echo the sentiments embedded in the phrase "*Sai Hamara*", the feeling that Sai is ours, He is on our side, He is there for us, He looks out for us, He makes sure we stay on the right path, He protects us, He teaches us, He will do whatever is good for us.

This section highlights three such Names, with beautiful accompanying incidents or stories that offer a glimpse of how these attributes of Divinity play out in our daily lives. The attributes featured below are:

Anaatha Naathaaya Namaha – the One who is the Guardian and Lord of the destitute

Kalusha Viduraaya Namaha – the One who removes the faults and blemishes in us

Karunaakaraaya Namaha – the One who is compassionate

Om Sri Sai Anaatha Naathaaya Namaha (no. 39)

Salutations to Sri Sai, who is the Guardian and Lord of the destitute

In Marathi there is a proverb which says, 'One who does not have anybody in this world, he has God'. God is the Guardian of every living being in this world, so indeed nobody is a destitute. But when human beings neglect such souls, the latter develop a feeling that they are orphans. But Bhagawan Baba's name 'Sai Baba' itself indicates that He is the Divine Mother and Father. He nurtures the world and looks after those who are helpless.

Even since His childhood, Swami always helped the poor and the downtrodden, gave them food and clothes and served them all the time. Later, this was transformed into '*Narayan seva*'. Now Swami's devotees from all over the world participate in this seva. Since the '*Sathya Sai Sevala*' came into existence, every active worker has got involved in serving others and thinks himself to be blessed for getting this opportunity. Whenever there is a natural calamity, Swami's devotees from all over the world lend a helping hand to all those who have suffered by becoming instruments in the Divine Hands.

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Insights from the Sri Sathya Sai Ashtotram (108 Names) (Cont)

Here is a story from foreign shores. A lady devotee of Swami from abroad was always involved in feeding and helping the poor and the downtrodden. Once due to heavy rains and floods, she was unable to visit a particular area. During those eight days, she continuously invoked Swami and prayed to Him to look after those helpless people. She was very concerned about their well-being. After eight days, the situation eased and it became possible for her to visit the place. She carried food and medicines, along with Swami's photographs and vibhuti packets, to distribute among the people.

On reaching there, she realized that everyone was safe and secure. She started distributing food packets and Swami's photographs and noticed that, on seeing the photographs, all those persons started talking among themselves. When she enquired, she was told that in her absence the person from the photograph used to come and give food and medicines to all of them! They thought Him to be her assistant helper! On hearing this, she was choked with emotion. She told them about Swami and all of them offered their heartfelt gratitude to the *Anaatha Natha* (Lord of the destitute) Sri Sathya Sai.

Om Sri Sai Kalusha Viduraya Namaha (no. 47)

Salutations to Sri Sai, who removes the faults and blemishes in all of us

When Bhagawan draws His devotees closer to Him, He removes their faults and weaknesses. This enables the devotees to carry out their duties in the right manner. Can our faults remain hidden from Bhagawan Baba? Right from His childhood, He was very particular that everyone should stay away from bad habits. Here is a story that highlights this aspect.

Swami was just eight years old at the time. A well-known person living in Puttaparthi had a bad habit of collecting friends and gossiping with them all day long. Little Sathya noticed this fault and He also knew its bad effects; the person indulging in gossip himself becomes idle and makes others idle too. Sathya found a remedy for this. He composed a song and taught it to His friends. When this group of people were sitting around and indulging in gossip, the children would go in their vicinity and sing the song.

The song conveyed to the listeners:

'Oh! Elderly people, Your behaviour is not ethical.
If you don't follow righteousness, Your friends will hate you,
They will leave you, and may even beat you'....

After hearing the song, the main culprit became uneasy but by and by, all of them grasped the truth behind it and improved their ways. Sathya composed many similar poems and skits in which He highlighted the defects prevailing in society. One very popular skit composed by little Sathya was called '*Cheppinatlu Chestara?*' which means, 'Do they do what they say?' In other words, is there unity of thought, word, and deed?

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Insights from the Sri Sathya Sai Ashtotram (108 Names) (Cont)

Om Sri Sai Karunaakaraya Namaha (no. 48)

Salutations to Sri Sai, who is compassionate.

One of the qualities of divine incarnations is 'karuna'. They are supremely compassionate and respond to a devotee's call, shower compassion on him and grant him bliss. The present Sri Sathya Sai Avatar is Himself the source of all compassion and His devotees have always experienced this grace. Here is a story from Chennai, which tells us how compassionate Swami is.

A few years ago, a manufacturing unit at Chennai signed a contract with a Korean firm to manufacture and supply railway wagons. The wagons had to be delivered in a stipulated timeframe. But the non-cooperation of the factory workers resulted in a delay. As the last day neared, a Korean officer arrived in Chennai and booked a cargo ship to carry the consignment. But the wagons were not ready. Since it was not going to be possible to execute the contract on time, the executive in charge was very worried and, being an ardent Sai devotee, started praying fervently to Swami. The stress caused him to fall ill, but somehow he managed to write a letter to Bhagawan Baba, praying to Him for His compassion. He gave the letter to a subordinate officer to personally give to Baba.

At the time, Swami was staying in a bungalow at Anantapur. When the officer reached there, letter in hand, he saw Swami emerging from the main door. Baba was walking through the crowd and blessing the devotees. As He walked on, He kept tying knots in the handkerchief in His hand. Swami came near the officer and, seeing the letter in his hand, said, "Why are your superiors worried? The ship will reach only when the wagons are ready and all their problems will be solved." As He said this, He pulled two corners of the knotted handkerchief and all the knots opened up. For a few moments, He looked at the sky, moved His finger as if writing something in the air, and walked away.

At that very moment, a storm appeared in the sea and the ship was unable to reach Chennai as scheduled. The ship was also damaged in the storm and needed repairs. To top it all, when it finally arrived near the port, due to heavy traffic there was a further delay of four days before it could be anchored at port. In this manner, the ship reached Chennai after a delay of one month. By this time the wagons were ready. Swami's compassion alone had saved the devotee from disgrace!

We gratefully acknowledge SSSGC USA, Devotional Wing, whose emails over the past year on the Glory of the Divine Names of Sri Sathya Sai are the source for the stories recounted in the above article.



Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Devotee Reflections

“Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke”

We all sing the popular bhajan *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke* with much fervor. But what do we mean when we sing those words? We asked Sailights readers and share with you a few responses from across the Zone.

*Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke Aisa Prem Hamara
Sai Ram Hamara Sai Ram Hamara
Sathya Sai Hai Naam Tumhara Shirdi Sai Avatara [Sai Ram ...]
Hindu Muslim Sikh Isai Sab Ka Palanhaar [Sai Ram ...]*

O Lord Sai, we belong to You and You are verily ours; this is the loving relationship that we share; Glory to You, O Lord Sai Ram, You are ours. Praise be to Lord Sathya Sai who is the Avatar of Shirdi Sai and who is the nourisher and protector of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians.

Every Sai devotee who has heard or sung this high energy, upbeat bhajan inevitably falls in love with it. I was no exception. The first time I heard the bhajan in the Houston Sathya Sai Center, I was mesmerized by the words, their meaning, and the intensity of emotions with which people sang this bhajan. And this was even before I sang it myself.

I had the good fortune to hear this bhajan sung in many places and eventually got a chance to sing it. It was at a time in my own spiritual journey when I was as concerned about what people thought of my singing as I was about the heartfelt offering of my bhajan to Swami. So, when I was assigned to sing this during the high profile last two hours of the Akhanda Bhajans, I was very happy. Here was my chance to get all those accolades for my singing. When the actual time came to sing the bhajan, I was next to a very good singer, who, I found out, had also wanted to sing that bhajan. So, we decided to sing it together. The joy and bliss I felt after that shared singing was much more than what I had felt when I sang it solo.

Upon reflection, I realized that it had something to do with the words, *“Sai Hamara, Hum Sai ke, Aisa Prem Hamara, Sai Ram Hamara, Sai Ram Hamara.”* My co-singer felt as strong a love for Swami as I did. Singing the bhajan in unity and harmony magnified the love for both of us. I am sure Swami must have enjoyed it more than if I had sung it alone. It had a bliss magnifier effect, and I felt a oneness with my co-singer.

I think about that episode today in the context of today’s world events. If only all the Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Sikhs of the world realized they all love God equally, in the form of their own Ishta Devatha – whether as Krishna, Allah, Yehovah, Jesus, etc., and he loves them ALL equally...and that He is the ultimate Protector (Palanhaar) of ALL of us, perhaps they would stop the madness of war and the atrocities being heaped on each other.

Ajit Karnik
Loudoun , VA

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Devotee Reflections (cont)

During this bhajan, I just try to visualize Swami swaying, looking at me, and enjoying the “*Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*” words while this bhajan is sung because this is exactly what Swami has taught us: *Swami is ours, and we belong to Swami. There is no separation. Only One.*

We offer this bhajan as a Unison bhajan in our programs sometimes because it really brings up the energy and it is nice to hear everyone together sing this bhajan to Swami and become One Voice, to say: Swami, You are Ours, and we are Yours.

No matter what I go through in my life, good or bad, the beauty is that Swami reminds us all the time that He is watching us and whatever happens to us is for our Good Alone. This bhajan gives me more courage to continue to sing His Glory and remember that He is there, all the time, wanting each of us to Think of Him Alone and be Happy with Him.

Amit Palicha
Flushing, NY

* * * * *

The bhajan, *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*, endearingly reminds us of the beautiful bond that we share with Swami. The endless and ageless bond that knows nothing but pure and unconditional love. It is the kind of love that knows only giving and forgiving. This is the love that makes our eyes well up with inexpressible joy at the mere uttering of the name “Sai!” How fortunate we are to belong to Him and how blessed we are that He is ours! But to truly understand his essence to the best of our abilities, we must go a step further where we do not differentiate Him from us. The Vedas proclaim, “*Tat Tvam Asi*” in order to explain the unity of the individual and the Absolute. When there is no difference between the two, it only makes sense that they belong to each other in the same way that a water droplet cannot be separated from the ocean. We are a mere droplet of water in the vast ocean that is Swami. Our plight, however, is such that the truth is in us, yet our ignorance is inhibiting us from understanding it, but if anyone can guide us to our source, it is the source Himself.

*Punarapi Jananam Punarapi Maranam
Punarapi Janani Jathare Sayanam
Iha Samsare Bahu Dustare
Kripayapare Pahi Murare*

Lalitha Ravipati
Baltimore, MD

* * * * *

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Devotee Reflections (cont)

The words of this bhajan remind me that Baba belongs to us and we belong to Him. What could be more beautiful than that? Each time I hear it, I feel uplifted and the warm sense of belongingness washes over me.

Madhulika Jinsi
South Bethesda, MD

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Some years ago, we were having an informal conversation with the head priest at Sri Siva Vishnu Temple. He told us he was going to visit Tirupati, and we asked him to offer our prayers to the Lord. He instantly said, “*Tappakunda*” (of course), “*Aina mana vaadu*” (He is our guy). His use of the word *vaadu* made us laugh - one often gives God a lofty rank in terms of address, and the use of such a word, which one would use only for a male sibling, buddy, or someone who required no formality or respect, was completely unexpected. But it highlighted the degree of intimacy that the priest felt with the Lord.

Similarly, in the Sai Aarthi there is a line “*Mari antayu neevé*” (mother father teacher god, you alone are all that). “*Neevé*” is the familiar and informal version of “you”, equivalent to the French “*tu*” as opposed to “*vous*”, for example. While I to this day use the formal “*meeré*” because I grew up addressing God as “*meeru*” and cannot now bring myself to say “*neevé*”, the point to note is that the composer of the song saw fit to use the more intimate “you”.

For me, “*Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*” is about intimacy with the Lord. He is ours, on our side, our man, our guy. We can take any liberty with Him, we can always count on Him, He is always looking out for us, will do anything for us. He loves us unconditionally. We can ask anything of Him, as we would our mother. That is *Sai Hamara* - He is ours, period.

In a group bhajan setting, one further realizes that all present are feeling the same intimacy with the Lord. It is not *Sai Mera* (mine); we are collectively singing *Sai Hamara*—one cannot but feel a sense of unity with every other person in the bhajan—we are *all*, each of us, saying He belongs to us. It brings us closer, we are walking the spiritual path together, it is a shared experience.

A last thought. The “*Hum Sai Ke*” is literally true, in other words, we belong to God, we, indeed all of creation, are born of Him. Beyond that, “*Hum Sai Ke*” suggests to me a certain reciprocity in the relationship: just as He is there for us, we are there for Him. Or, *should* be there for Him. In that sense, “*Hum Sai Ke*” is a prompt for introspection. Are we really there for Him, willing to do whatever He asks of us? Can He count on us? Do we love Him unconditionally? The questions beg reflection, and are worth pondering when we sing “*Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*”.

Manorama Gotur
South Bethesda, MD

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Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Devotee Reflections (cont)

Om Sri Sairam, Whenever I hear the bhajan "*Sai Hamara, Hum Sai Ke*", I feel so connected to Swami. The beginning words "*Sai Hamara*" bring the assurance to me that our beloved Sai who bestows His tremendous love of the thousand mothers upon us, who is constantly guiding and protecting us, belongs to each one of us.

Swami said in His divine discourse from July 13, 1984, that, "Swami's *Prema* (Divine Love) has no trace of self-interest in it. It is absolutely pure. "You are Mine", whatever wrong ways they may pursue, Swami will not abandon them."

It's only He who is with us on every step of the way. I can go to Him for any questions or requests without any hesitation.

The next words of "*Hum Sai Ke*" constantly remind me to surrender everything to Him and purify myself so I can be worthy to become His instrument. Swami said in *Prasanthi Vahini*, Ch 7 that "If the devotee has dedicated everything - body, mind, and existence - to the Lord, He will Himself look after everything, for He will always be with the devotee!"

So this bhajan is very dear to me since it gives me assurance and reminder of His divine love and I dedicate everything to His lotus feet.

Megha Parmar,
Baltimore, MD

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Words are powerful. Words set to music and sung in unison are even more powerful. The bhajan "*Sai Hamara, Hum Sai Ke*" reminds me every time I sing it of the unique and intimate relationship that we all, every one of us, are blessed to share with our Lord, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Every time we utter those words, we reaffirm and proclaim aloud that He belongs to us and we belong to Him! Even after being in the Sai fold for over 40 years, I still feel anew a deep sense of closeness to Swami whenever I sing this bhajan, and a warm wave of contentment comes over me knowing that the Lord is always there for us, He has our back! Indeed, several bhajans convey similar messages, but these five succinct words, "*Sai Hamara, Hum Sai Ke*" denote the essence of what our relationship is, or should be, with God.

The relationship with Swami is often compared with that we have with our parents, and this comes home to me especially when things are not going our way. As children, we get angry with our parents and may even disrespect them when they do not concede to our smallest request. We do so because we are confident that they have unconditional love for us and will always take care of us no matter what. As adults, we take it to the next level and direct our frustration and disappointment at God, and blame Him for our difficulties and setbacks. We get upset and our faith falters when our prayers are not answered. Swami says good things will happen but in His time, but this message falls on our impatient ears, and we secretly plan to stop talking to Him to send Him a tough message! We behave no differently from our childhood selves, but why do we behave that way? We

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Devotee Reflections (cont)

do so because we take the same liberties with Him as we did with our parents, knowing that He is “*Hamara Sai*”, and will never leave us however we behave!

The bhajan “*Sai Hamara*” also reminds me of one of the nine paths of Devotion to God, namely, *Sakhyam*, when our relationship takes the form of friendship, as epitomized in the relationship between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. We express our love and devotion to God as a dear and close friend. Swami has said that that this is the relationship with His devotees that He most cherishes, and He is always waiting to be our special friend. Indeed, He has said God is the truest and best friend that we can have. We would all do well to cultivate this Divine friendship!

Padma Gotur
South Bethesda, MD

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The Bhajan *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke* evokes many warm feelings. It brings to mind the deep bond one forms with Bhagawan Baba and His immense love towards all. I remember having learned to sing this bhajan at a young age and it has stayed a favorite since. The opening lines are so meaningful to me, in that my Sai and I are one.

It also highlights the oneness of the Shirdi Sai and the Sathya Sai Avatar and the unity of all faiths - something that is so significant in troubling times like the present. I hope to be able to continue to sing this bhajan and feel the bliss of its meaning for many more years to come.

Prasad Betadpur
South Bethesda, MD

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***Sai Hamara, Hum Sai Ke* – You are my only Property**

The instant I read the lines “*Sai Hamara, Hum Sai Ke*”, tears of gratitude roll down my cheeks, for my Divine Chancellor, my Lord, once declared, “My Students are my only property.” It is a beautiful feeling to say He is ours and we are His. This divine declaration of Sai brings joy to my heart. Being His student is a life-long privilege and at the same time, it is a huge responsibility on my shoulders, as I ought to be conscious of my every thought, word, and deed even when no thought is decrypted, when no ear hears my whispers, and when no human eye watches me.

Can I escape from my almighty who resides in my heart? Can I escape from His omnipresence and omniscience? Swami has been guiding my life be it through internal conversations or dreams or experiences or His teachings. I may not always realize or see His guiding hand in times of trouble, but I do know for sure He is always there for me, and nothing happens to me without His divine will. This helps me always smile at life.

Birthday Issue Theme: *Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*

Devotee Reflections (cont)

O Sai! Your declaration gives me the strength and pride to live a life worthy of being called your only property. After all, properties are nothing but proper ties with you. And I must say *You* are *my* only property too, O Sai Maa. My divine property is immortal, indestructible, and eternal. Let this property of mine which arose with my first breath of realizing your divinity remain with me even beyond my last breath on this earthly plane. May I pass on this divine property to my future generations, so that You live through them eternally.

Sharmila Sanka
Indianapolis, IN

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"*Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*" is not just a bhajan for me; it is an experience, particularly during the final hour of *Akhanda* Bhajans. The atmosphere is already buzzing from 23 hours of continuous devotion, yet this bhajan manages to supercharge everybody. I attribute this to the profound significance of the word "Hamara"—OURS. It emphatically asserts that Swami is for everyone transcending boundaries of age, class, religion, national origin, gender, race, and creed. This bhajan is a testament to the unity of humanity under Sai's divine's umbrella, highlighting our collective journey towards self-realization. It reassures us that we are not alone, offering the companionship of fellow devotees. Together, we share experiences, memories, and narratives about OUR Swami—His grace, His leelas, and His love.

The impact of "*Sai Hamara*" was poignantly illustrated when an esteemed elder from our Center passed away after an illness. His hospital bedside became a meeting place for those he had touched, all gathering to express their love and respect. Clutching onto a photograph of Swami, he departed, surrounded by the community he cherished, a true embodiment of the bhajan's message. In essence, Swami's presence is a constant in our lives. This bhajan reaffirms our bond with the divine, assuring us that we belong to Him, in this life and beyond. "*Sai Hamara Hum Sai Ke*" is more than a melody—it's a spiritual anchor, a reminder of the divine love that sustains us through life and into the expanse of the unknowable.

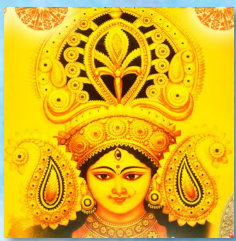
Shyam Chidamber
South Bethesda, MD

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Dasara Divine Discourse: Inner Significance of the Navarathri Festival

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 25, September 27, 1992

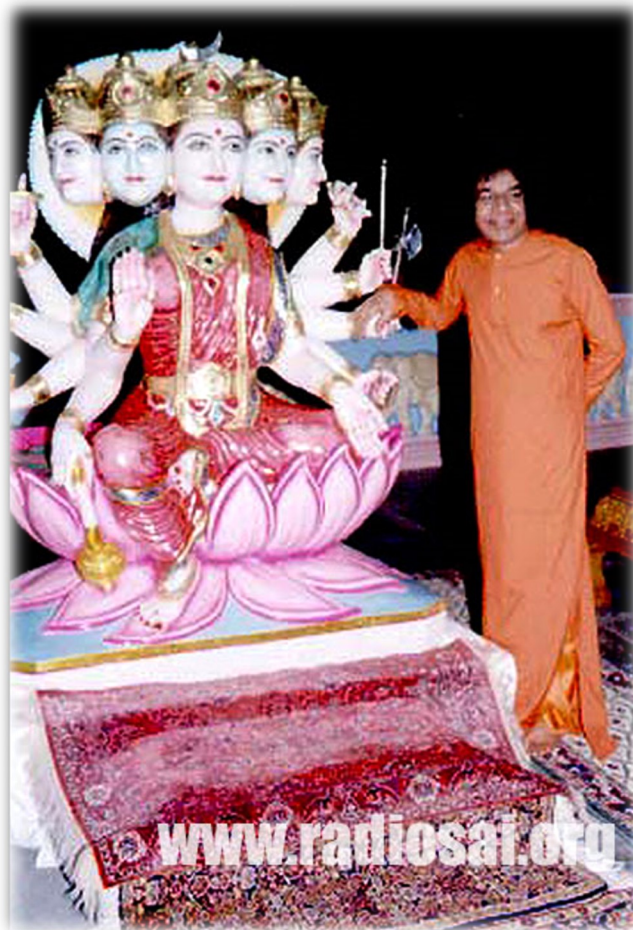
Navarathri means nine nights. Darkness is associated with night. What is this darkness? It is the darkness of ignorance. The purpose of the Navarathri celebration is to enable man to get rid of nine types of darkness which have taken hold of him. When a reference is made to Devi, it signifies the unified form of Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi. The three together represent Shakthi. Shakthi is the energy that accounts for all the phenomena of *Prakruthi* (Nature).

Nature is energy and the controller of that energy is the Lord. *Prakruthi* (Nature) is made up of the three qualities, Sathwa, Rajas and Thamas. Saraswathi represents the Sathya Guna. Lakshmi represents the Rajo Guna and Parvathi represents the Thamo Guna. As *Prakruthi* (Nature) is made up of these three qualities (Sathwa, Rajas and Thamas), to get control over Nature, man has been offering worship to Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi. These are not goddesses but deified symbols of the three qualities.

The role of Nature in the creative process

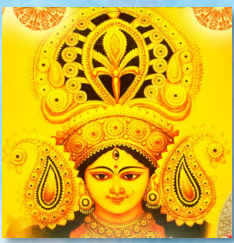
To acquire the grace of the Lord, man has to offer worship at the outset to *Prakruthi* (Nature). On the one hand you need human effort and on the other you have to acquire the grace of the Divine. *Prakruthi* (Nature) and Paramatma (the Omni-Self) are like the negative and positive poles in electricity. However powerful the Lord may be (as the positive pole), there can be no creation without *Prakruthi* (representing the negative pole).

The basis for creation is *Prakruthi*. For instance, however good the seeds you may have with you, without planting them in the ground you cannot reap the fruit. The role of Nature in the creative process is similar. When man forgets God and desires to enjoy the benefits of Nature, he becomes ultimately a



demon like Ravana who brought about his own destruction. To secure the grace of the Lord, one has to have purity of the heart, purity in speech and purity in action. This triple purity is described in Vedantic parlance as Tripurasundari. Lakshmi, who is the embodiment of all prosperity, is represented by the heart. The mouth represents Saraswathi. Kriya Shuddhi (Purity in action) is represented by Durga. The observance of the Navarathri celebration is to get rid of the darkness in which man is enveloped, by cultivating the triple purity of thought, word and deed.

The human body emerged from Nature. Nature has two forms: Apra *Prakruthi* and Para *Prakruthi*. Apra



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Dasara Divine Discourse: Inner Significance of the Navarathri Festival (cont)

Prakruthi includes Ashta Aishwaryas (eight forms of wealth), and Kama, Krodha, Moha, Lobha, Mada, Matsarya and the three mental faculties in man: Manas, Chitta and Ahamkara. Para Prakruthi (the higher Nature) represents the consciousness in man. Without the Prana (life force) and Chaithanyam (consciousness) man is only a corpse. True humanness consists in controlling the five elements which make up the Apra Prakruthi (lower Nature) and merge in the higher Nature represented by the life force and Chaithanyam (consciousness).



Maintain steadiness of mind during worship

The Navarathri has been divided into three parts the first three days being dedicated to the worship of Durga, the next three days to the worship of Lakshmi and the last three days to the worship of Saraswathi.

All Hindu festivals have a sacred purpose. Unfortunately, nowadays the festivals are observed only with external rituals without understanding their inner meaning. In the performance of all forms of worship there should be steadiness of mind and body. Only then concentration can be achieved. Today men are unable to maintain steadiness of body and mind.

(At this stage Swami referred to the advent of Shirdi Sai and described incidents from his early life. This part of Swami's discourse is published separately in the

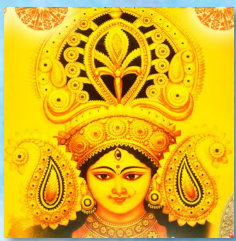
next chapter. Towards the end of His discourse, Swami again reverted to an exposition of the inner significance of the Dasara festival).

The basic significance of Devi *Navarathri* is the adoration of *Prakruthi* (Nature). Devi refers to Bhudevi (Mother Earth). All the vital requirements of man can be found in the earth. Those who travel to the moon have to carry with them the oxygen, water and food they need from the earth. None of these can be found on the moon.

Students! The progress of modern technology, by polluting the atmosphere with Carbon dioxide smoke, is causing a threat to life on earth. This smoke has already created a hole in the ozone ring above the earth which has been serving as a protecting cover against harmful radiation from the sun. If the ozone layer is destroyed, the effect of the sun's rays may be disastrous. All nations are now worried about this threat. All that needs to be done to avert this danger is to reduce the pollution of the atmosphere caused by automobiles and industrial effluents. The uncontrolled development of industries has to be checked. Development should be in the common interest, to promote the welfare of all.

The *Navarathri* celebration is an occasion for revering Nature and considering how natural resources can be used properly in the best interests of mankind. Resources like water, air, power and minerals should be used properly and not misused or wasted. Economy in the use of every natural resource is vital. Pollution of the air has many evil consequences. The inner significance of observances like Nagarasankirtan and bhajans is to fill the atmosphere with sacred vibrations and holy thoughts.

Today we know how radio and television broadcasts are transmitted to all parts of the world by radio waves. Is it unbelievable that Krishna was able



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Dasara Divine Discourse: Inner Significance of the Navarathri Festival (cont)



similarly to appear in the homes of Gopikas simultaneously? If a Yantra (machine) could achieve such a result, how much more power should be attributed to Mantra? The power of the divine name and form is all pervading. The electromagnetic waves in the atmosphere can preserve sounds and forms for all time.

When Swami was recently in Hyderabad, His activities there were seen on the TV in various parts of the country. If a mechanical contrivance could achieve this, is it incredible that much more could be done by the divine power of manthras? What is needed is the power to tune in to the Spirit just as appropriate tuning is needed to receive a radio or TV broadcast. Regard your heart as a radio receiver. Your concentration is the tuning device. You will experience the Divine when you tune your heart properly. This calls for firm, unwavering concentration. The

inauguration of the *Navarathri* celebrations means that you should use this occasion for offering worship to Nature and resolving to make sacred use of all natural resources.

The mere removal of hate from the heart will not ensure *Ananda* (bliss). Love too should be cultivated. That is to say, uproot hate and plant love. If the absence of hate ensures Bhakthi, hill and anthill, tree and twig, mud and mountain - what do these hate? They have no dislikes. But for this reason, do we ascribe Bhakthi to them at all? We do not, for that would be absurd. The Bhaktha must first be free from hate and full of Love.

Hate breeds fear, hate is the seedbed of anxiety, scandal and falsehood. It drains your mind of peace. You may have light without oil, fire without smoke, breeze without a bearer fanning you, a chilliness in the air of your room in the sizzling heat of summer - but, unless you are at peace with yourselves and with those around you, your pulse will be quick and your blood will be racing in rage and rancor. Love alone can alleviate anxiety and allay fear.



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The “Red and Gold” Ganesha: How to Joyously Revel in His Grace

Bishu Prusty, Team Radio Sai, posted September 2, 2019

in Radio Sai’s Heart to Heart Journal (slightly abridged)



“I love Ganesha. I don’t know why but I am crazy about Him! I have loads of pictures of Him – really exquisite ones which you might not have seen anywhere! I like anything about Him!”

These are not the words of a Ganesha devotee or a person steeped in Indian culture and spirituality. They are the words of a widely travelled, international media consultant, who is non-religious and keeps her distance from any discussions on God, rituals and religion.

What is awe-inspiring about the elephant-faced Lord is His universal appeal. Are you aware that Ganesha is on the currency of Indonesia which incidentally is an Islamic state?

In the Vedic hymn *Ganapati Atharva Sheersham*, Ganesha is described as ‘*Jagat Karanam Achyutam...*’ i.e., “He, the Imperishable One,

descended within the manifested universe for the welfare of the world during the beginning of creation.”

Another description of Ganesha in the *Ganapati Atharva Sheersham* is: “*Raktam Lambodaram Shoorpakarnakam Raktvaasasam, Rakta Gandhaanu Liptaangam, Rakta Pushpai Supoojitam*”, i.e., The one “With a round stomach, He is blood red in color. He has elephant ears and is attired in red clothes. He is smeared with red sandalwood paste and decorated with red flowers.”

This set me thinking, as in this verse everything about Ganesha is described to have a reddish glow. But none of the statues of this Lord at *Prasanthi Nilayam* are red in color. Our adorable Ganesha at the entrance of our *Prasanthi Nilayam* ashram is black while the one at the *Gopuram* Gate entrance has a golden hue. The Ganesha who was earlier in the *darshan* ground in *Prasanthi Nilayam* was white. (This was before the Sai Kulwant Hall was built.)

When the Vedas describe Him as being red, why then don’t we see more of red Ganeshas? This made me very curious!

The Ganesha Created by The Father

I went to sleep one night with these thoughts, in January 2018. The next morning, I woke up with this question still ringing in my mind. Suddenly my eyes fell on the little library I have in my room. Almost involuntarily, my hands went to the book, *Life is a Challenge, Meet it!* by Mrs. Joy Thomas. To my pleasant surprise, in it was a

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The “Red and Gold” Ganesha: How to Joyously Revel in His Grace (cont)

chapter called, ‘*Ganapati, the Remover of Obstacles*’. Imagine my joy and delight when the chapter opened up and I read these lines by the author:

“My first reaction to the image was one of utter delight in its beauty. The craftsmanship is of course unequalled. The red cloisonné and red gemstones which make up His garment are striking against the background of gold.”

This was the description of a Ganesha that Bhagawan had Himself manifested for the author. When I turned that page, I froze! It had the photo of the Ganesha Swami had specially created for Mrs Joy—and this Ganesha matched the description mentioned in the Vedas to perfection!

He was shining in red and gold. His garments were made of red stones. Not only His crown, even His necklace was red. His body shone in gold. It was an exquisite piece of art!

The author further wrote, “I wasn’t clear why Baba chose this particular gift for me... of course my husband Raye had asked Swami once again to help with my knees. The moment Raye told Bhagawan to do something about my knees, He said, “I know. I know. She doesn’t like having to be in that wheel chair.”

The next second Swami’s hand went up in the air and onto His hand came this enchanting Ganesha. Bhagawan then said, “Ganapati heals all diseases, overcomes all difficulties, solves all problems and removes all obstacles.” Saying this, Swami placed this lovely red Ganesha on her palm and added, “Put it in your bag.” So Mrs Joy placed it in a small pouch and wore it around her neck. They were leaving for California that day.



Once they got into the plane, an in-flight movie was going on. It was a good story and Joy started watching it keenly. Suddenly, two kids who were sitting in the front got up on their seats and blocked her view completely. After a while they settled down but a few minutes later the children stood up again. It seemed as if they were going to stand forever.

Joy was greatly disturbed. She did not know what to do. As a flash came the thought - “Swami said that Ganesha removes all obstacles...” She immediately put her hand into her little bag and prayed, “Ganesha, You should be able to do something about this!”

No sooner had she completed the prayer, than the two kids dropped into their seats as though something had collapsed beneath them! They did not rise again till the movie was over.

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The “Red and Gold” Ganesha: How to Joyously Revel in His Grace (cont)



Mrs Joy was in joy, needless to say. But when she shared this with her husband, they discussed it and concluded that it was just a coincidence. “Ganesha is not going to be bothered with such trivial requests,” they said to themselves.

They were going to Maui, in Hawaii, to rest and relax for a few days, before returning to their home in Los Angeles. After a week on this beautiful island, they flew to the US via Honolulu, the Hawaiian capital. When they disembarked at Honolulu and went to the international terminal, Mr. Thomas was told that their bags were on another airline and had not yet arrived. In case there was a delay, the bags would be sent to him on the next flight, which would be two days later. The couple became anxious. They needed their

luggage when they landed at Los Angeles. Just before they boarded the plane, a steward came up to Mr Thomas once again, to say that they had done everything possible but were unsuccessful in having their bags on board.

It was at this point that Joy remembered her Ganesha again. She put her hand into the pouch and said, “Everybody else has done all they can do. Now it is up to You, Ganesha!”

She completed this prayer and in the next instant there was an announcement by the pilot: “The control panel is showing a light. So, the plane is going to be delayed by a few minutes.” Five minutes passed, and the captain came on air again: “Now we will take off.” At that moment, a steward came hurriedly to Mr. Thomas to say: “We are so happy to inform you that your baggage is on board. During the short delay, they were delivered. They are safe in the luggage compartment.”

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas looked at each other in wonder: “Was this another coincidence?”

“This time the circumstances were not as trivial as before, still it was not an earth-shaking matter,” Joy thought and felt, “Perhaps my dependence on God on everyday affairs had been too limited. Maybe this is what Baba wants me to learn.”

Once they reached home, there was a mountain of mail to be seen and cleared. One was from the Internal Revenue Service. Everyone dreaded mail from the IRS. The couple wondered why this was happening, as they were diligent in paying their taxes and complying with the rules of the land.

The cover of that letter said: “To the Trustees under the Will of Shirley Jean Kennedy”.

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The “Red and Gold” Ganesha: How to Joyously Revel in His Grace (cont)

Mrs Shirley was Mrs Joy’s friend and co-worker who had a huge estate and a 14-year-old daughter. Before she passed away in 1974, she gave the management of the estate as well as the guardianship of her daughter to Mrs Thomas.

When the daughter of Mrs Shirley turned 25, Joy transferred the estate and all the assets to her and dissolved the trust. Even though all the accounting was done and relevant documents had been submitted, the government was asking for some papers concerning tax returns.

Mrs Joy called the IRS office multiple times to clarify but their phone was always busy. **Finally, she sought her Ganesha’s help** and tried one more time. Still, to her utter dismay, she could not get through the connection.

This was the first time her prayers to Ganesha had not worked. Now this was an important matter unlike the previous occasions. She wished that she could trace some papers relating to the estate. Once the final accounting was done and the transfer was complete, she had discarded all the documents.

In a desperate attempt, she once again randomly put her hand into her records closet. To her amazement, her fingers fell on a document which was vital for that transaction. She had no clue how it got there as she had destroyed everything concerning the estate.

Having got this important paper, she called the IRS office again. Now the line connected! With the help of the document, she answered all the queries and the problem was solved right there and then. In fact, a few weeks later, there was even a polite note from the IRS thanking her and complimenting her for her diligence.

Pondering over this incident, Mrs Joy writes, “I wondered whether or not Ganesha had given me the help that I needed, even though it was not the help I asked for... I learned that Ganesha not only clears the path for our *dharmic* activity, He also blocks our way when we are not choosing correctly.”

Many people told Mrs Joy that when it comes to the IRS, a telephone call will not do, one has to submit everything in writing. But in her case, instead of her writing to the IRS, the IRS wrote to her praising her conscientiousness!

Prayer Must be a Call of Love

In the *Ganapati Atharva Sheersham*, Ganesha is also described as “*Bhaktanu Kampinam Daivam*”, i.e., “*The Lord whose heart throbs for His devotees!*” When His devotee is in trouble, the Lord is restless; His heart indeed beats only for His devotees.

Mrs Joy further adds, “I began to realize that Swami was increasing my faith in a God of Love who was willing to help each one of us even in the smallest of difficulties in our lives. He was also bringing me closer to the ideal of ‘Praying Without Ceasing’. He once said in a group interview, ‘Prayer is everything’.

They say prayer is not a spare wheel that you put out when you are in trouble. It is a steering wheel that directs the right path throughout your life. Often, we look at our resources in comparison to our challenges and become anxious. But when we pray, we see the enormity of God’s resources, then all our fears just melt away.

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The “Red and Gold” Ganesha: How to Joyously Revel in His Grace (cont)

Bhagawan beautifully says: “Prayer alone makes life happy, harmonious and worth living in this universe.”

It does not matter which color Ganesha we have in our altar. What matters, according to Swami, is our prayers to Him. And our faith in Him. Let our ceaseless prayers to Lord Ganesha – the One who converts all our tragedies into triumphs – confer on us peace, strength and serenity.

“I want only your love. Your love makes me happy. My love is your greatest wealth and good fortune. This is My greatest gift for you. Take good care of this precious gift. This is My blessing to you on this day.”

- Divine Discourse, 75th Birthday



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The Sweetness of Krishna

Swami's Words and the Madhurashtakam

www.radiosai.org



Every *Krishna Jayanthi*, when the birth of Lord Krishna is celebrated, Prasanthi Nilayam's Sai Kulwant Hall is filled with the sweet sounds of the *Madhurashtakam*, composed by Sri Vallabhacharya (15th century) and regularly sung by Sai students even today, as they did in Swami's Divine presence prior to the *Mahasamadhi*. Presented below, the song extols every aspect and feature of Krishna, concluding each of its eight verses with "everything of the master of Mathura is sweetness indeed".

Why was the Krishna Avatar so "sweet"? Swami has talked about Krishna's sweetness in several discourses. In the following enlightening excerpts, Swami talks of how Krishna's sweetness led His devotees to yearn and thirst for Him and cling to Him, to the exclusion of all things worldly, ultimately to merge in Him and attain the highest bliss and peace.

Swami's Words

"In order to save man, the Lord appeared in a most charming Form, so, that He could draw His heart in love - '*Raso vai sah*' (He is sweetness itself). So, Krishna easily steals into the hearts of even the most hard-hearted individuals. He is the '*bada chitha*

chor' (the greatest thief of hearts). The heart yearns for His voice, His Form, His flute, His smile, His sport and His pranks. That is the *thapas* (penance) which is rewarded by His grace. The yearning is so deep that all body-consciousness is lost, the senses are ineffective, and the mind is inactive, the intelligence is at a standstill, ideas of duality disappear. The individual sees before him only step after step of *Anandha* (bliss) leading him to the highest bliss of merging in Him.

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume 8, 1968

"Think of the sublimely sweet Love that Krishna evoked in the hearts of...His contemporaries! Every one of them, from the unlettered cowherd to the most profound scholar and sage, was drawn to Him as by a magnet and held by Him in unshakeable devotion. Whatever the hardships and troubles that came upon them, they did not give up His Lotus Feet, to which they clung ever fast and firmly. As you walk along the road, your shadow follows you, through dirt and dust, bush and bramble, mound and midden, brook and boulder. But, note how the shadow has constant contact with the Feet. So long as the shadow (man) has fast and firm contact with the Feet of the Substance (the Lord), no hardship can affect him. Hold on to the Lord; that is the way to peace and joy. "

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume 8, 1968

"Thirst for Krishna is the healthiest and most conducive to peace. Thirst for Krishna—for seeing Him, hearing Him, His Flute, for installing Him in the heart, in the mind, for grasping His Reality through the intellect - this thirst is the healthiest, the most conducive to peace. Devotion to Krishna is the chain by which the monkey mind can be fastened and subdued. Transmute all the desire with which the senses torment you into the thirst for Krishna and you are saved.



Fall Festivals

The Sweetness of Krishna (cont)

Krish means attract, draw. Even a confirmed [believer in the Universal Absolute without name and form] confesses that the attraction for the playful child on the Yamuna sands is irresistible. [Another scholar] declares that though the *Shasthras* taught him the truth of the Nameless Absolute, his heart taught him to revere the Cowherd Boy with the Flute. He prays that, when he draws his last breath, the Fair Child of Brindavan with the Feather Flute and Flower might smile on him and bless him.

Krishna draws the mind away from sensory desires; that is another way in which the draw operates. He pulls the mind towards him and so, they are pulled away from everything else, for everything else is inferior, less valuable. He satisfies the deepest thirst of man, for peace, joy and wisdom. That is why He is *Meghashyama* - dark-blue as the rain cloud. The very sight of the rain-laden cloud is so refreshing. He is lotus-eyed, lotus-palmed, lotus-soled; the lotus is reminiscent of cool, calm, deep lakes of limpid water, the water that quenches thirst. When Krishna-*thrishna* is quenched, the highest *Anandha* is attained; there is no more need, no more want. The urge to drink inferior drinks...disappears once the sweetness of Krishna *nama* (name) and Krishna *bhava* (thought) are tasted...Radha, Godha, Meera, Chaithanya, Ramakrishna, Surdas - they knew the nectarine taste of that Name."

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 6, 1966

"[How to cultivate thirst for Krishna?] The thirst for Krishna is a sign of health in the spiritual field. Not to have it is a sign of *bhava roga* - the fell disease that afflicts worldly persons, the symptoms being grief, discontent, pain and worry, even when wealth and health are endowed. That thirst can be cultivated **by...reading scriptures, cultivating good company, learning lessons from a kind Guru and regular practice of *japam* (meditation).** Once it is acquired, the thirst itself will lead you on to places and persons



able to quench it. That is the advantage of spiritual quest; the first step makes the second easy.

Mere repetition of the name, Krishna, will be of no use, unless the contemplation of the Glory of Krishna starts purifying the character at the same time. Thus, *manava* (human) becomes *Madhava* (divine). *Mruthyu* (death) is changed into *Amritha* (immortality). Through *thanmaya*, (saturated with Divinity), this *mrinmaya* (mud-filled body) becomes *Chinmaya* (saturated with Divine consciousness) - through saturation, this clod becomes God. That is the consummation of Krishna-*thrishna*, the thirst after God, which wells up in one's own heart.

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 6, 1966





Fall Festivals

The Madhurashtakam

*Eight Verses on the Sweetness of Krishna
(translation by Sai Students)*

1. Adharam Madhuram Vadanam Madhuram
Nayanam Madhuram Hasitam Madhuram
Hrudayam Madhuram Gamanam Madhuram
Madhuraadhipaterakhilam Madhuram (2)

2. Vachanam Madhuram Charitam Madhuram
Vasanam Madhuram Valitam Madhuram
Chalitam Madhuram Bhramitam Madhuram
(Madhuraadhipate... 2)

3. Venurmadhuro Renurmadhurah
Paanirmadhurah Paadau Madhura
Nrutyam Madhuram Sakhyam Madhuram
(Madhuraadhipate...2)

4. Geetam Madhuram Peetam Madhuram
Bhuktam Madhuram Suptam Madhuram
Roopam Madhuram Tilakam Madhuram
(Madhuraadhipate... 2)

5. Karanam Madhuram Taranam Madhuram
Haranam Madhuram Smaranam Madhuram
Vamitam Madhuram Shamitam Madhuram
(Madhuraadhipate... 2)

6. Gunjaa Madhuraa Maalaa Madhuraa
Yamunaa Madhuraa Veechee Madhuraa
Salilam Madhuram Kamalam Madhuram
(Madhuraadhipate...2)

7. Gopee Madhuraa Leelaa Madhuraa
Yuktam Madhuram Bhuktam Madhuram
Drushtam Madhuram Shrushtam Madhuram
(Madhuraadhipate...)

8. Gopaa Madhuraa Gaavo Madhuraa
Yashtirmadhuraa Shrushtir Madhuraa
Dalitam Madhuram Phalitam Madhuram
(Madhuraadhipate...2)

1. The lips, face, eyes, smile, heart, movements, and everything of the master of Mathura is sweet indeed.
2. The speech, character, dress, waist, movements, and everything of the master of Mathura is sweet indeed.
3. The flute, dust of His feet, hands, feet, dance, friendship, and everything of the master of Mathura is sweet indeed.
4. His songs, His drinking, His eating, His sleeping, His forehead mark, and everything of the master of Mathura is sweet indeed.
5. His actions, crossing the river, stealing (the mind), remembrance, His words, His countenance...and everything...
6. His berry necklace, His garland, the river Yamuna, its tides, water, and lotuses... and everything...
7. The Gopis (cowherdresses of Gokul) are beautiful. Their Leelas (Divine pranks), their assembling, His glances...and everything...
8. The Gopas (cowherds of Gokul), His cows, His herding stick, His creations, separation, its effect, His accomplishment...and everything...

<https://sathyasaiwithstudents.blogspot.com/2013/08/the-lord-of-mathura-is-all-sweetness.html>

Sai Pearls



Sai Pearls

Transience

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Made of five elements
the body is fragile

No idea when
you will leave it

Theoretically, a hundred years
but don't trust that

No idea when and where
you will leave this body

In childhood, youth
or old age

City or forest, water
or in-between spaces

Well, death is certain

So wise up
Know yourself

Realize the essence of dharma
While you still have this body

This is the correct way forward
You have Sri Sai's word for it

Dear Father Mine

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Prayer given to N. Kasturi November 23, 1962

Hoping You'll guide me-
This day or the day after-
I await your call from day to day.

Hoping You'll give darshan
but afraid you may not,
I'm all alert from hour to hour.

Hoping You'll come to me straight
This very instant
I'm watching and praying ever anon.

Hoping You'll smile at me
at last, though not at first,
I'm longingly gazing with thirsty eyes.

I shall stand and stay, in deep distress
Until my day of bliss does dawn
I am Yours, Your own, though exiled far.
Dear Father mine! Do heal Your child.

Sai Pearls

Ego, ego, so attached

*Turya Nair
Dallas, TX*

Ego, ego, so attached
Blind and deaf, but unabashed
Flounder, flounder in the dark
Blotting out the inner spark

Prisoner to reason's sway
Though reason bends itself to pray
Before the altars found within
Where soul-sourced light has always been

Where then shall our anchor drop?
Should stormy seas be where we stop?
Nay, let us persevere with care
Towards the waters calm and fair

Where, having stopped, we dive down far
To find where hidden temples are
Inner sancta, deep yet dear
Known to adepts as Ever-Near

There secret gems, that shine and glow,
Adorn the truths that wise men know
But eyes made dull by life must squint
To capture but the faintest glint

A Life Soaked in Divine Love

Professor Narayan Kasturi

I firmly believe there is none kinder than You,
to shower Grace on me.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I am at Your Lotus feet?

I firmly believe You will respond quick
When I do pray and plead.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I am crying aloud for You?

I firmly believe You are ever beside me
To guide my steps aright.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I am Yours thro' day and night?

I firmly believe You can never say 'No'
Whatever I ask from You.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I long for a glance from You?

What have You designed for me this time?
Why this dire delay to offer boons?
However long You make me wait and wail
I will not leave. I will be standing still
Until Your loving eyes do turn to me.

sssmmediacentre.org/journals/Vol_06/01JAN08/

At Your Sacred Feet!

At Your Sacred Feet, Dear Sai, I Find Peace and Joy

Kanaga Ranganathan

Sri Sathya Sai Center of South Bethesda (MD)

As Thy birthday dawns soon, thy advent amongst us arrives,
I marvel at our fortune to have our earthly sojourn just now,
At a time when Divinity in full form descended in human garb,
To restore humanity to its native, sacred splendor, what a joy!
In response to the pleas of sages and saints, to their laments,
Thou taking pity on us all, seeing darkness encircling humanity,
Thou came amongst us, loving and guiding us, freeing us fully,
Nature rose in joy, humanity wept in ecstasy to see thy glory.

Our meritorious past led me and my family to Thee, years ago,
A blessing indeed to be enveloped by Thy divine aura always,
We sat for Thy darshans as we waited with the eager devotees,
Thy silent gaze locking with mine awakened my dormant soul,
In that moment of stillness, unaware of all around, I felt peace,
A peace and joy that throbbed in every vein of mine, filling me,
Thy Presence, thy interviews, thy dreams—all this enthralled us.
From the nineteen seventies on, we ever found bliss at thy Feet.

Lost in the miry paths of our worldly life, caught in its trap fully,
Enchanted by its outward charm, we were lost in deep darkness,
We forgot the trailing clouds of God's glory whence we sprung,
Dear Lord Sai, what a great compassion as Thou rescued us all,
Taught us the falseness of our form and the trick of our thoughts,
Showed us the path to the real "I", our true divine spark within,
That we are all part of the glory of Thy creative, divine energy,
Dear, Beloved Sai, let us all rejoice at Thy advent, this birthday!



Sai Snippets



Spiritual GPS

Good Practices for Sadhana

“Be Happy Always!” – But How?



One of Swami’s most frequently uttered *maha-vakyas* (great sayings) is the injunction “Be Happy Always!”. Sounds easy! But for too many of us, the smallest of things can sap a smile and furrow a brow. Ruining the past and fearing the future, we ruin the present. Bad news, bad health, bad friends, bad weather, bad food, bad luck, even bad genes—every time we encounter a “bad” in our lives, our good intentions, to follow Swami’s dictum, vanish.

Why be happy always? Because it is a Pre-requisite. For...Self-realization! This GPS offers tips on *how* to attain happiness. But one might first ask: *Why?* Swami says that “*happiness is essential for God-realization and is one of the major gateways to Divinity. [Being unhappy] is not just a fault, it is one of the most serious of all faults. It is a barrier to Realization.*” (*Conversations with Sai, March 3, 2006*). He also points out that happiness is indeed man’s inherent, divine nature. He Himself, He points out, is ever happy.

But how be happy always amid life’s often turbulent waters?
Here are nine practical ways, drawn from Swami’s discourses.



- ♥ **Curb your desires:** remember that happiness derived from worldly objects is fleeting and that as desires grow, so do worry and anxiety. “*Desires are never-ending, like the waves of the sea*”, says Swami.
- ♥ **Be grateful:** Appreciate what you have, count your blessings. Swami says, “*Offer your salutations to God. Without doing this, you will...collapse into the endless cycle of birth and death...Your tears of gratitude will liberate you from all such problems. You will always be blissful, with cheerful smiles. This is the result of constantly expressing your gratitude to God.*”
- ♥ **Curb your ego:** the more you lose the “I” and the desires, the more you will find peace. Swami has said, “*As long as you have attachment and ego, you can never...experience Atmic bliss*”.
- ♥ **Be content:** do not constantly compare yourself to others. Swami says, “*Try to understand your true nature. Do not compare yourself with others. Follow your own conscience and enjoy bliss. Do not imitate others. Imitation is the quality of the weak-minded.*”
- ♥ **Serve others:** nothing gives greater joy than bringing joy and comfort to others. “*Those anxious to live in joy must always be doing good*”, Swami has said.



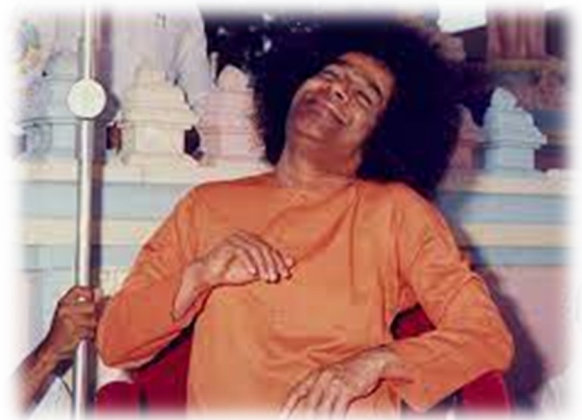
Spiritual GPS

Good Practices for Sadhana

- ♥ **Maintain equanimity:** remember that pain and pleasure come and go; also, see things in perspective and do not allow small things to steal your joy. *“Consider pain and pleasure as passing clouds... Worldly pleasure is transient...Man should maintain equanimity in pleasure and pain, loss or gain. Without pain you cannot enjoy pleasure”,* says Swami.



- ♥ **Choose to be happy, even in rough times:** remember that happiness comes from within, from the inner you or divinity. *“The eternal truth is that there is only one everlasting, never-failing happiness, and that is God. You are God, and to drink deeply of that ever-flowing spring of happiness, you must turn to yourself, to the Divine Atma, which—however obscured—is always the resident of your heart, the subtle truth of your being.”*
- ♥ **Remember that each day is a gift of God:** every “present” is a present; do not waste it. *“What matters is to live in the present, live now, for every moment is now. It is your thoughts and acts of the moment that create your future.”*
- ♥ **Let go of worry, and put your faith in God:** remember at all times that He is in control, and that whatever happens in your life is happening in accordance with His will. Swami explains, *“Each worry is like a naya paise. One rupee is equal to 100 naya paise, and 100 rupees are equal to 10,000 naya paise. When you make a bundle of 10,000 naya paise, it is quite heavy and not easy to carry. Therefore, the Lord says, give me those 10,000 naya paise and I will give you a 100 rupee note, which is very light, is easy to carry, and can safely be preserved.”*



**“Be happy.
Happiness is union with God.
If you want to be happy, join God.”**

Life is a Game: Play it!

QUIZ: THE LOTUS FEET OF THE LORD

An offering at the Lotus Feet of the Lord in this auspicious month of His Birthday

Swami says: "Feet" does not mean sandals made in silver or gold. "Feet" refers to the Divine that sustains everything. Why is such greatness conferred on the Feet? Viewing the matter from the point of view of science, it will be noted that blood flows from the feet upwards to all parts of the body. It is this blood that sustains the entire body. The feet that bear the burden of the entire body are essential for life itself. When you seek refuge in the Lord's Feet, you can secure a vision of the Divine Form.

- Divine Discourse, October 7, 1993



1. The Lord's Instruction

October 20 every year is celebrated as *Avatar* Declaration Day. What was the bhajan taught on October 20, 1940, that has gained popularity as the first prayer taught to devotees by Swami?

- A. *Hari bhajan bina sukha shanti nahin*
- B. *Manasa bhajare guru charanam*
- C. *Prema mudita man se kaho*
- D. *Govinda Krishna Jai*

2. Pada Darshanam Papa Nashanam – Darshan of the Lord's Feet Destroys Sin

A popular bhajan (*Kausalyatmaja Rama Charan*) about the Lotus Feet of Lord Rama mentions the names of five persons who were dearest to the Lord. One of these is the name of a devotee who was redeemed by the mere touch of the Lord's Feet. What is the name of this devotee whose very name brings out the power of the Lotus Feet?

- A. Bharatha
- B. Hanuman
- C. Vaidehi
- D. Ahalya

3. The Gift of Joy

Swami, in the *Ramakatha Rasavahini*, describes the emotionally charged scene when Bharatha and Shatrughna had to return to Ayodhya after failing in their attempts to convince Rama to return to His kingdom.

He narrates what Rama advised Bharatha, after declining to return with him: "Be ever aware of this truth; throw away the shroud of grief; take up the burden of empire; rule over it for 14 years with justice and rectitude as your ideals. The King is the face of the State. For, the face eats and drinks and thus strengthens and activates all the limbs of the body. The King feeds and sustains every section of his people. The mind encloses within itself all likes and dislikes; so too, the King is the repository of all moves and movements in the political field."

Rama expounded many useful doctrines of political ethics to Bharatha. But Bharatha was too agitated to earn mental peace as a result of Rama's advice. The mothers, teachers, and ministers stood benumbed, for they too were overcome by the imminence of the moment of parting.

At this critical juncture, Rama gave Bharatha a gift, which alleviated his misery and gifted him with contentment. What was the unique gift which converted his grief into joy?

- A. His ring
- B. Sita's crest jewel
- C. His robe
- D. His sandals

Life is a Game: Play it!

QUIZ: THE LOTUS FEET OF THE LORD (Cont)

4. Simple and Staunch Faith in the Lotus Feet

Swami in the *Ramakatha Rasavahini* narrates a charming incident with a boatman:

“Guha, the Nishada chieftain, summons a boatman to ferry Lord Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana over the Ganga to the forest on the other bank. The boatman was delighted, but he was strangely very insistent that he wash Lord Rama’s Feet before He could step into the boat.”

Why do you think the boatman was insistent that Lord Rama’s Feet be washed before He even stepped into the boat?

- A. He was afraid the timbers of which the boat was made would each turn into a woman.
- B. He did not want the boat to become dirty with wet mud.
- C. He did not want to make the boat wet by washing the Lord’s Feet after he stepped into the boat.
- D. He was afraid he would forget to wash the Lord’s Feet later.

5. The Real Significance of the Lotus Feet

Swami says:

To earn the grace of the Divine, the easy way is surrendering to the Feet of the Lord. The Feet, which were washed by Brahma, the Creator, the Feet which were worshipped by Bharatha through Rama's sandals, which ruled the kingdom of Ayodhya for 14 years, should be your object of worship.

There is so much power in the feet of the Lord which you cannot understand. The feet form the basis for not only the physical frame of the body, but also for spiritual and ethical purposes. The significance of each limb of the body is explained in Vedanta. The five senses of the body represent the five elements (sound is ether, touch is air, vision is fire, taste is water and smell is earth).

In the *Purusha Sukta*, the body of the Divine is described in detail. The four *varnas* in society are represented by four parts of the Cosmic Person *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. It is the Feet that support the entire body, comprising the other three classes. So, the Feet are an important part of the body. The real significance of Feet is not properly understood by all.

The Vedas proclaim the unity of all classes of people by describing them as limbs of one body. The Vedas declare that "*Ekatma Sarvabhuta Antaratma*" (same *Atma* is present in all beings).

The Vedas elucidate the importance of the Feet. Even in ordinary life we advise a person who has harmed another to fall at the latter's feet and beg his pardon to escape legal action. There is a close link between the different parts of the body. When one walks on the road, if the eye sees a thorn, the legs avoid treading on it. When the foot is injured, the eye sheds tears. There is such close co-ordination in the physical body. Similarly in the body of the Divine, the *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* form an integral part. If a *Shudra* is in trouble, the *Brahmana* should be concerned. When such feelings develop in the world, there will be peace and harmony in society. Everyone should realise this and foster unity.

Embodiments of Love! The *Prema tatva* (Love principle) is within you. What you are practising now as love is not real love. It is only affection out of *Anuraga* (attachment to the body). Real Love is unchanging. The feeling

Life is a Game: Play it!

QUIZ: THE LOTUS FEET OF THE LORD (Cont)

of love for the Divine is real devotion 'emanating from the heart'.

What do you think is the important message that Swami is building up here?

- A. Unity and interdependence of all classes of people
- B. We should love all because of the love for God who is present within everyone.
- C. We should serve all because we are all parts of the same Divine body which is God.
- D. All of the above

6. The Greatest Offering at the Lord's Feet

Swami narrates the story of Emperor Bali:

Prahlada's son was Virochana, and the hero of the story behind the Onam festival was the son of Virochana. He was named Balichakravarthi (Bali, the Emperor). Being the grandson of the devout Prahlada, Bali too was engaged in the glorification of God and in the material and spiritual uplift of his subjects. There was no trace of poverty or ill health in his empire. Every home was lit with joy; every day was a festive occasion.

He decided to celebrate an elaborate sacrificial rite called Viswajith, which would propitiate the Gods so much that, with their blessings, he could extend his beneficent rule over the entire world. The Lord utilized this opportunity to shower Grace on him. He incarnated as Vamana and proceeded to the sacrificial altar in the form of a mendicant student, just initiated into spiritual life. Bali was happy to welcome Him. When Vamana was asked which gift he would accept, He replied that he needed only three feet of ground, measured by His feet. Bali was surprised at this answer. For a short second, he doubted the intention and identity of the strange visitor. His preceptor, Sukra, warned him against promising to agree. But Bali stood by his word. He permitted Vamana to measure for Himself the three feet of ground..."

The Lord as Vamana then covered the entire earth with one step, the sky with the second, and was waiting to take the third step. But there was no space left for the third step.

What do you think Emperor Bali did then?

- A. He withdrew his gift of three steps of land to the young stranger
- B. He imprisoned the young boy.
- C. He offered himself at the Feet of the Lord
- D. He fell at the Lotus Feet and begged for pardon.

7. The Deadly Dance of the Lotus Feet

Swami describes the dance of Krishna on the hood of Kaliya.

He says: "Kaliya is a huge, big serpent, full of poison, rolling in death and destruction. Krishna saw the carcasses of animals that had died when they inhaled the poisoned air near the Kaliya pool, and birds had fallen dead on the ground. Nothing green could survive in the neighbourhood. As soon as Krishna jumped into the pool to save the region from the serpent's havoc, His companions ran home to bring the parents, so that they could intercede and stop the foolish pranks of their mischievous son. They were in a great panic. Only Radha was calm and collected. She knew that for Him, it was a minute's fun, a moment's resolve. He had no objective desires (*vishaya*), so poison (*visha*) could not affect Him".

Life is a Game: Play it!

QUIZ: THE LOTUS FEET OF THE LORD (Cont)

He goes on: “When Krishna danced on the head of Kaliya (incidentally I might add, you should make your hearts as smooth and soft as the hood of the snake), the poison was all vomited! And the serpent was subdued”.

What do you think Swami described as the poison that is removed by the dance of the Lotus Feet on the smooth and soft hearts of the devotee?

- A. Cholesterol
- B. Environmental pollution
- C. Attachment to sensory objects
- D. Toxins

8. The *Purusharthas* and the Holy Feet

Four goals have been prescribed by the scriptures for human life. They are *Dharma* (Righteousness), *Artha* (acquisition of wealth), *Kama* (pursuit of desires) and *Moksha* (liberation). Swami describes one of these as those on which all others rest and compares it to the feet of the human body.

Which do you think is the base for all other goals?

- A. Dharma
- B. Artha
- C. Kama
- D. Moksha

9. To Capture the Lord – True Meaning of *Padasevanam*

Swami narrates a beautiful tale to teach us an important lesson:

Once, the cowherd maidens (*gopikas*) became tired of Krishna’s mischievous pranks. Despite their best efforts, they could not catch Him. Therefore, one day Krishna thought: “The poor *gopikas* are pure-hearted; they are innocent and totally devoid of selfishness. It is not proper on My part to escape from them whenever they try to catch Me. I am the servant of devotees (*bhaktaparadhina*), and I should not put My devotees to hardship. This time, I will let them catch Me.”

He devised a plan by which *gopikas* could know His whereabouts and catch Him. Sensing that Krishna was in the house of a particular *gopika*, all others stood like soldiers around the compound wall so that He could not escape from them.

What do you think Krishna did?

- A. He left clues in the form of His Footprints
- B. He revealed Himself to the waiting devotees.
- C. He disappeared from the *gopika*’s house.
- D. He waved to them from the neighbouring *gopika*’s house.

Life is a Game: Play it!

QUIZ: THE LOTUS FEET OF THE LORD (Cont)

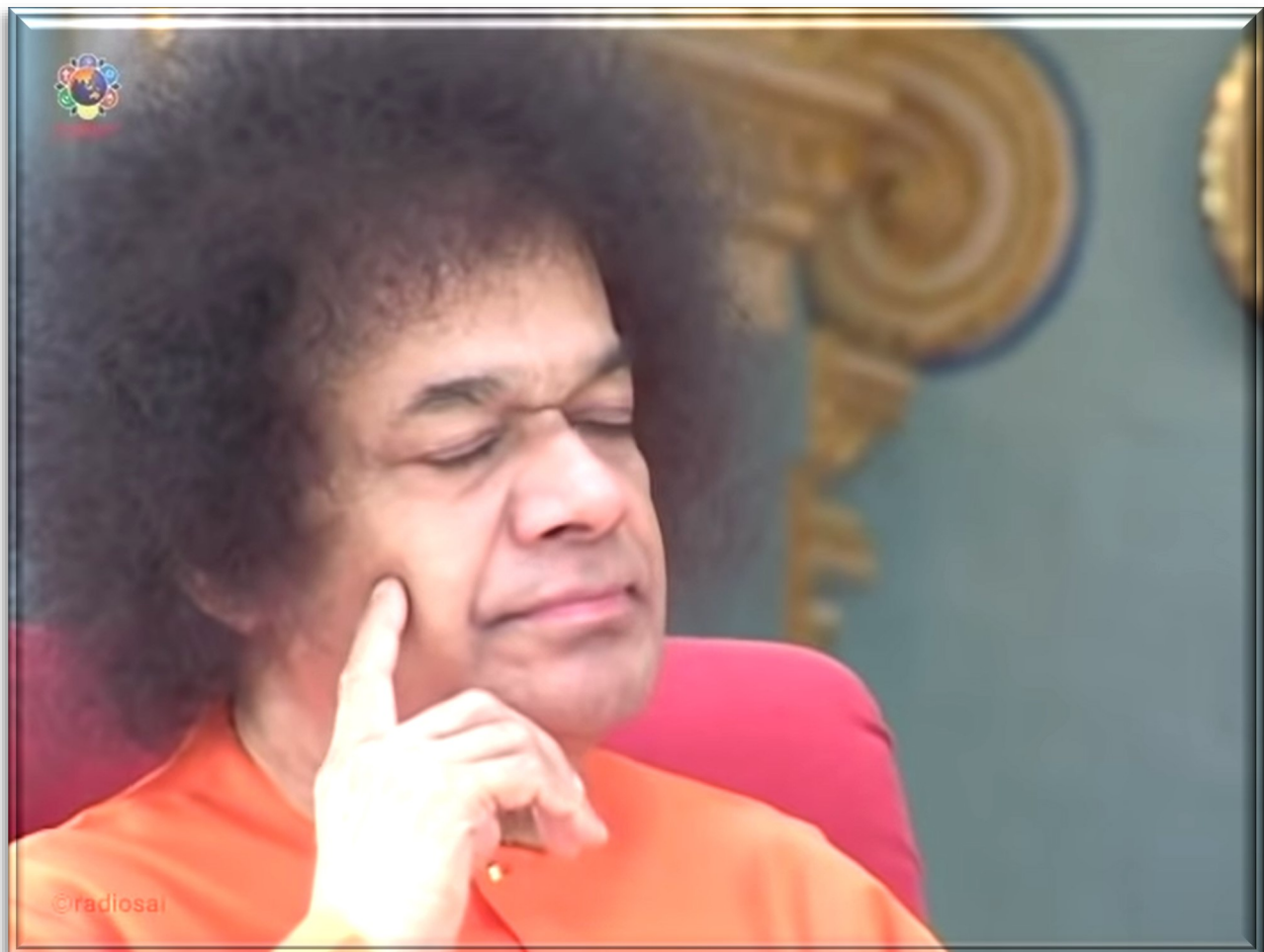
10. From External to Inner Worship

Swami says: Mere worshipping of *padhukas*, chanting the name of God or contemplating on His form is not sufficient to bring about this unification. These correspond to the outward path (*pravritti marga*). You should take the inward path (*nivritti marga*). Only then can you understand the principle of unity.

What do you think is the unification that Swami is talking about here?

- A. Of man with all other living beings in the world
- B. Of man with all of creation, living and non-living
- C. Of man with God
- D. Of man with his mind

Source: SSS Media Center. https://archive.sssmediacentre.org/journals/vol_14/01NOV16/quiz2.htm



Asked....and Answered by Swami

Avatar OR Formless God?

The following "Conversation with Sai" is excerpted from Satyopanishad, Part 18: Directions from the Divine.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Some say that God has no form. But, we see devotees praying to idols in temples. The concept of Avatar, the incarnation of God, is of special significance in our land of Sanathana Dharma. But followers of other paths argue that God has no form. We pray to you to clarify this point.

Swami: When you see a doctor, you will be reminded of your physical complaints. When you meet a lawyer, you think of litigation and court cases, don't you? Likewise, when you see a gopuram, temple tower, you will be reminded of God.

As I often say: love may not have a form, but a loving mother has. Water may not have form, but the tumbler with water has a form; air may not have a form, but the balloon into which it is pumped has a form. In the same manner, the formless divine has its form or forms. The formless expresses itself through a form.



The Face of Love

A simple example: You know the screen in a theatre. You find pictures projected on the screen. In every picture, there is the screen. Without the screen, you can't see the picture. Pictures come and pass. Not even one remains permanent. This screen may be described in spiritual parlance as 'sat' and 'asat' or 'satasat'. 'Sat' is existence, 'asat' is non-existence. Like this, these two coexist, *sakara*, one with form, and *nirakara*, the formless.

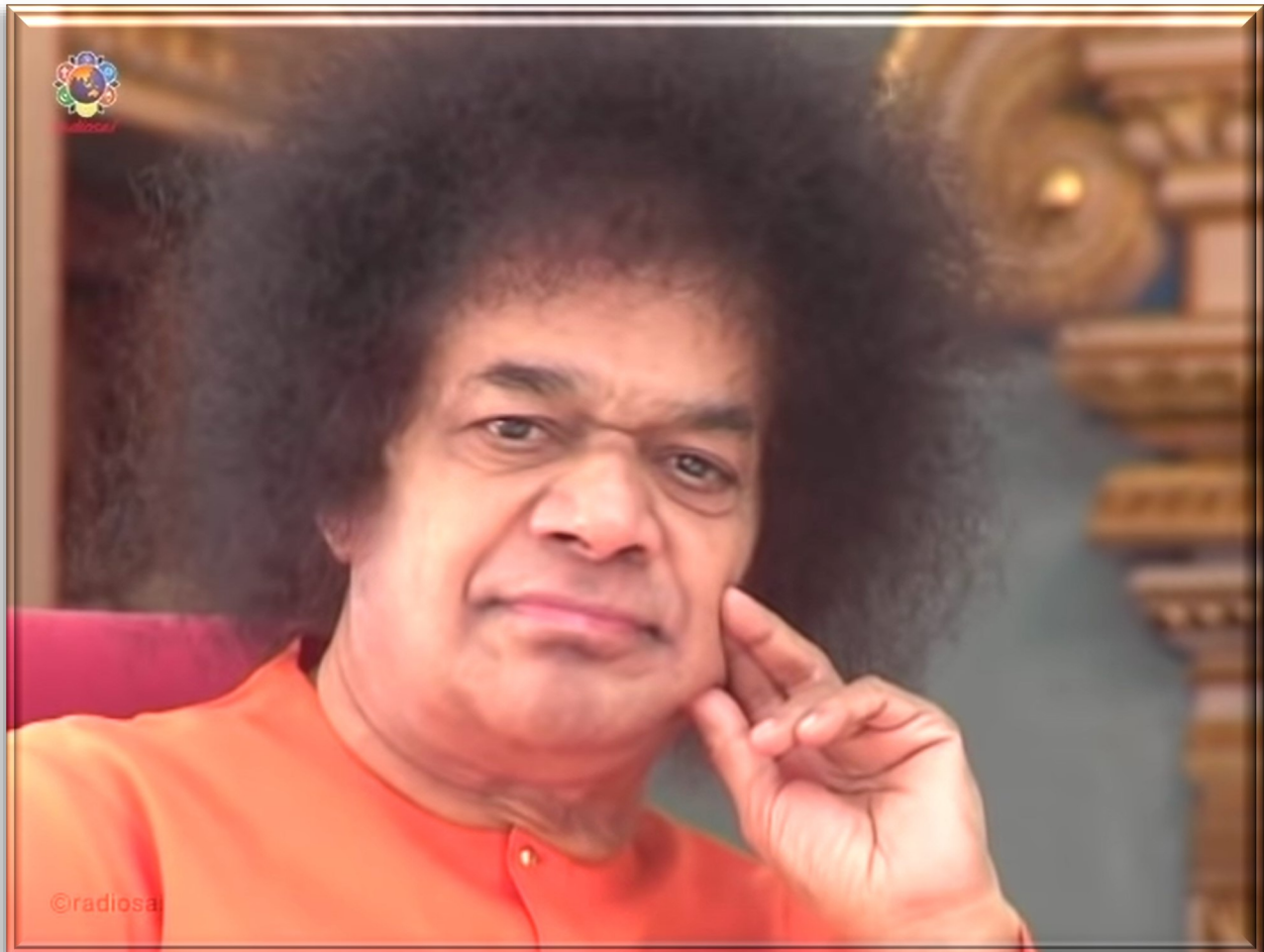


Life is a Game: Play it! - Answers

QUIZ: THE LOTUS FEET OF THE LORD (Answers)

Correct Answers:

1. B. Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam
2. D. Ahalya
3. D. His sandals
4. A. He was afraid the timbers of which the boat was made would each turn into a woman.
5. D. All the above
6. C. He offered himself at the Feet of the Lord
7. C. Attachment to sensory objects
8. A. Dharma
9. A. He left clues in the form of His Footprints
10. C. Of man with God

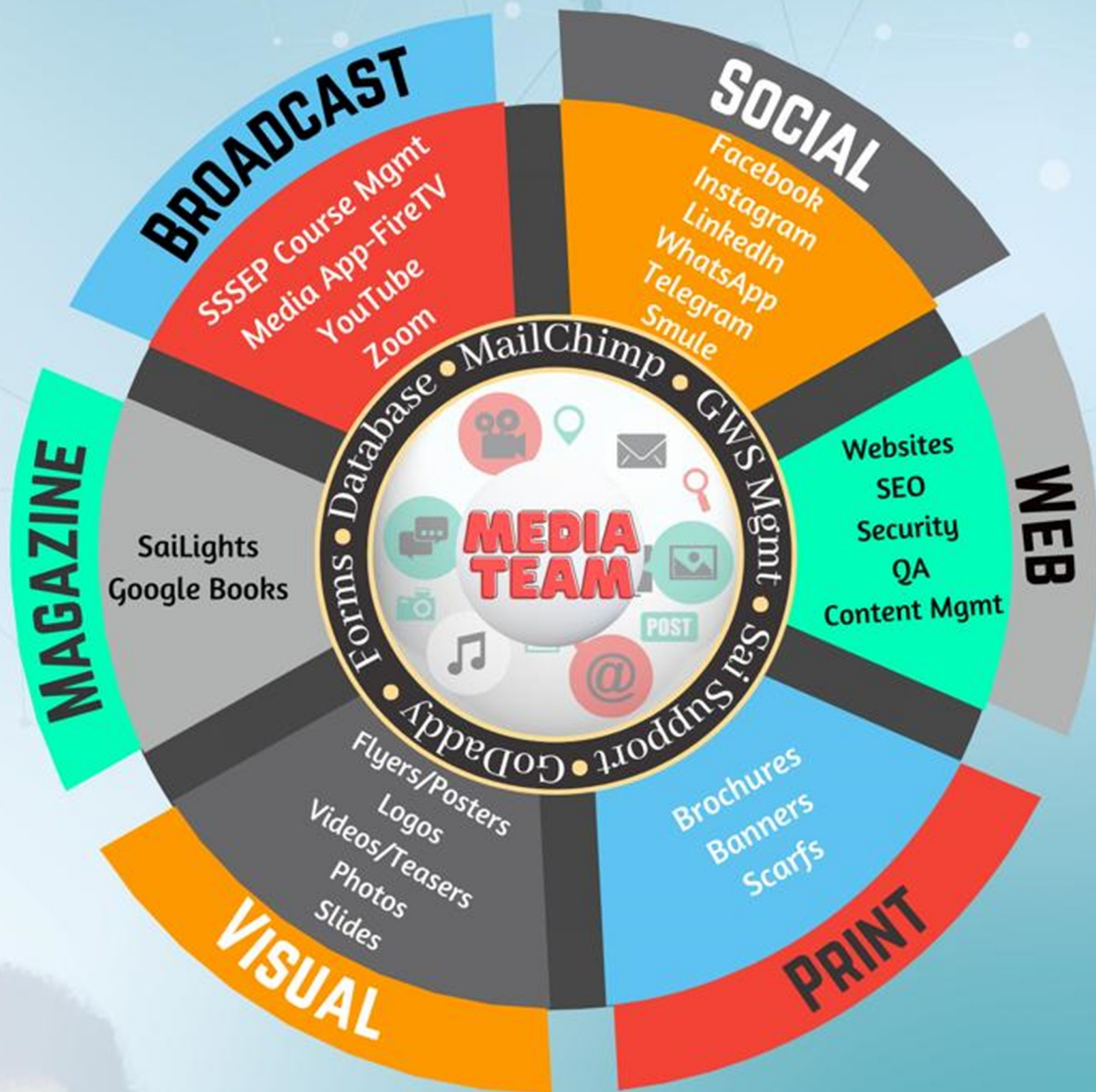


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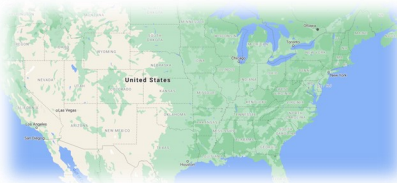
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Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavantu