



Sathyam Sivam Sundaram

Volume 4

**Life Story Of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba
1973-1979**

By

Prof. N. Kasturi, M.A., B.L.

Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, Publications Division

Prasanthi Nilayam - 515 134

Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA

STD: 08555 ISD: 91-8555 Phone: 287375 Fax: 287236

E-mail: orders@sssbpt.org

Website: www.srisathyasaipublications.org, www.sanathanasarathi.org,
www.saireflections.org

© Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, Publications Division; All rights reserved.

The copyright and the rights of translation in any language are reserved by the Publishers. No part, passage, text or photograph or artwork of this book should be reproduced, transmitted or utilised, in original language or by translation, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photo copying, recording or by any information, storage and retrieval system without the express and prior permission, in writing from the Convener, Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, Publications Division, Prasanthi Nilayam, Andhra Pradesh India - Pin Code 515134, except for brief passages quoted in book review.

This e-book is commercially licensed for you only. This e-book may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

First Edition: 20th October, 2014 (20/10/2014)

ISBN: 978-93-5069-095-6

Paperback ISBN: 978-81-7208-678-7

Published By

The Convener,

Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, Publications Division

Prasanthi Nilayam, India, Pin Code – 515134

STD : 08555 ISD: 91-8555 Phone: 287375 Fax: 287236

Distributed By Smashwords

www.smashwords.com

Publisher's Note

“Baba is Himself an open book, with no mystery, pomp, or abstruseness about Him and everyone can approach Him and secure His grace,” says Sri N. Kasturi, author of this series, Sathyam Sivam Sundaram. In this series, which is divided into four parts, the author brings out the life history of the Divine *Avatar* from His birth in 1926 to 1979. Sri Kasturi, who had the extreme fortune of being close to Baba, shares His *mahimas* and *leelas* with the readers. The first part of this book was placed in the hands of the readers in 1961.

The need for the revised and enlarged edition was felt by the publisher for more comfortable reading, especially by the elderly readers. As a result, these volumes are brought out in larger format, with computerised typesetting using larger typeface, better line spacing, and with a number of photographs.

With these changes, it is hoped that all spiritual seekers will benefit and enjoy reading this series.

Convener

Sri Sathya Sai Books & Publications Trust,
Prasanthi Nilayam

Words Of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Taken From Biography

“My mission is to grant you courage and joy, to drive away weakness and fear. Do not condemn yourselves as sinners; sin is a misnomer for what are really errors, provided you repent sincerely and resolve not to follow evil again. Pray to the Lord to give you the strength, to overcome the habits, which had enticed you when you were ignorant.”

“I have come to guide and bless those, who undergo the discipline and practice leading to Divine union. I am neither man, nor woman, old nor young. I am all these.”

“You may be seeing Me for the first time, today, but you are all old acquaintances for Me. I know you through and through. My task is the spiritual regeneration of Humanity, through truth and love. If you approach one step nearer to Me, I shall advance three steps towards you.”

“I have not started the work, for which I have come, for I am still in the stage of preliminary reconnaissance. When I start my campaign, the whole world will know of it and benefit by it.”



He, who understands the significance of My Divine Birth and My Divine deeds, will overcome the cycle of Birth and Death and attain Me.

Gita - IV-9

He is the sub-stratum, the substance; the separate and the sum, the *Sat*; the *SATHYAM*.

He is the awareness, the activity, the consciousness, the feeling; the willing and the doing, the *Chit*; the *SIVAM*.

He is the light, the splendour; the harmony, the melody, the *Ananda*; the *SUNDARAM*.

Contents

[Publisher's Note](#)

[Bhagawan's Words](#)

[Between You And Me](#)

[The Songs He Sings](#)

[1. In Confidence](#)

[2. Love On The March](#)

[3. The Call And The Echo](#)

[4. Words With Wings](#)

[5. Moves In His Game](#)

[6. Closer And Closer](#)

[7. Dabbling And Diving](#)

[8. Tomorrow](#)

Between You And Me

I should apologise for allowing ten eventful years to pass by, since placing Volume III of *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram* in your hands, before doing the same with Volume IV, although *Bhagawan* has been keeping me alive and attentive beyond my expectations. But, since I have never felt that I am the writer, I plead 'not guilty' and desist.

It has become well-nigh impossible to keep pace with the ever-expanding manifoldness of the manifestation of Divinity that is Sai. That almighty Love overwhelms us into blissful silence; the all-encompassing Power that makes us aware of our inadequacies. Nevertheless, the Divinity in us draws us to Him, even while He seeks us, the straying as well as the steady ones, to keep us In His cosy custody.

Lord Krishna describes to Arjuna those, who have received the impact of His grace, thus:

“My sweetness has soaked into every level of their consciousness. They live in Me, by Me, for Me. They take delight in narrating stories, centred on My sport and My compassion. They share with others the love, the wisdom, and the power I impart and all reap immense gain, thereby.”

I invite you to participate in this holy sharing. Travel from page to page as a pilgrim, with humility, faith, and hope, tarrying at every turn to fill your hearts with visions of the many-turreted Citadel of God and God Himself. With each vision of His glory, we shall gain nearness and dearness to Him, who has come to accept us as His own nearest and dearest.

N.Kasturi

The Songs He Sings

Thirty-five years ago, when Baba was emerging from teenage, He sang this song, while at the *Mandir* (temple) on the outskirts of the village where He was born. He has been, since childhood, a stream of sweetness, singing His way into the hearts of all around Him. Since He was not of the Earth, but very concerned to transform the Earth into Heaven, His songs then, as now, were designed as a call to man to benefit from the mystery, the majesty, and the magnificence of His incarnation. This song, in Telugu, emerged from Him spontaneously, on the morning of *Vaikuntha Ekadasi* (the holy day in the Hindu calendar, celebrating the opening of the Doors of Heaven), in 1945, while devotees were busily stringing thick garlands of *tulsi* (basil) leaves, to worship Him.

I have heard it sung since 1948, by those, to whom He dictated it. It was also printed in 1946, along with other songs sung by Baba in those early days, at Venkatagiri, by the *Raja Saheb*.

“*Chootaamu, Ra Ra,*” it exhorts us. “Come! We shall see! Come! Awake!” it warns. “Arise!” it commands. “Advance!” it pleads. And through this song, in cosmic compassion, the call comes to each one of us, even today.

*Come brothers! Come sisters! We shall go
To holy Puttaparthi now. It seems
He wears a lovely robe of orange silk.
His is heavenly glory; He is the Lord Himself
He calls to give us freedom.
He says, they say, “I shall shower grace.”*

*On the Chitravati sands,
In the shadow of the hill,
This Baba, they say, daily reveals
That He is God in human form.
It seems He was at Shirdi last
And is here, for our sake, again.*

*Come brothers! Come sisters! We shall go.
They say He waves His hands
As He often did, while there.
'Tis said they offer all you ask of Him.*

*He is, they say, Siva and Rama,
Krishna and Maruti, too.
All forms of God are one in Him;
You can see Him as such and such,
When you are good and true.*

*For the darshan of the Lord.
Join us, you uppish pseudo-wise,
And learn a little of His glory.
He digs His fingers into a heap of sand,
With a chuckle on the lip
And a twinkle in the eye;
Wet balls of sand become laddus round!*

*From far, far away, some dim-eyed dons
Pronounce it magic, mantra, tantra.
Be deaf to them; get up and start.
Don't reckon hardships; the reward is great.
In Parthi Mandir, now on this Holy day,
Tulsi leaves are strung into garlands galore,
While He sings this song to bless the happy throng.*

This call has brought the world to Puttaparthi, where the Third World Conference delegates, numbering about ten thousand, from various units of the Sri Sathya Sai *Seva Samiti*, are meeting during the Birthday festival, 1980.

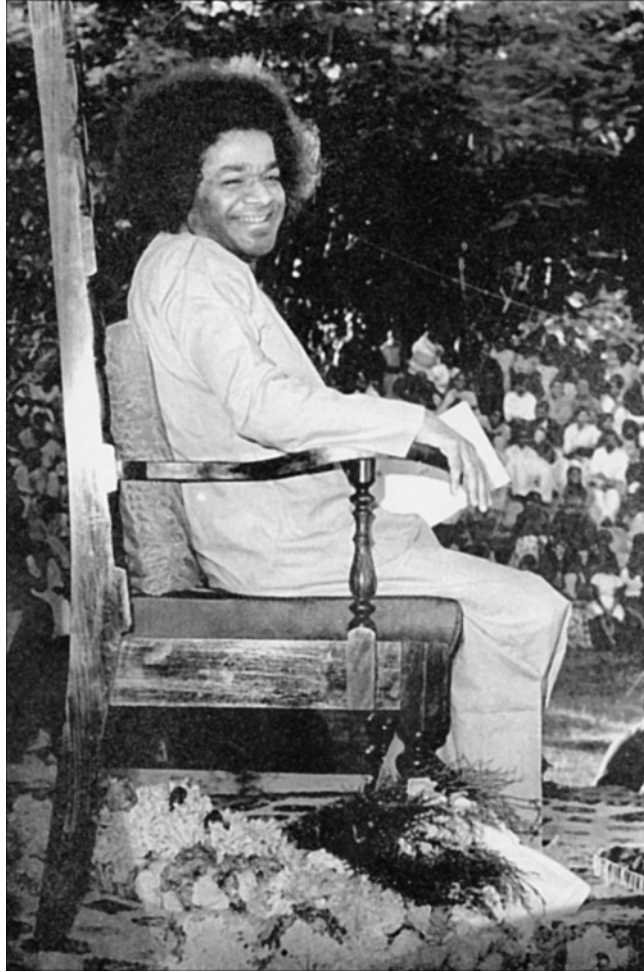
This *tulsi* leaf - Volume IV of *Sathyam Sivam*

Sundaram - is offered at His Lotus feet by a humble garland stringer.

N. Kasturi

Prasanthi Nilayam

27-7-1980 (*Guru Purnima*)





Chapter 1

In Confidence

From Baba, His Story

At Ootacamund in the Nilgiri Hills, when the Summer Course on Indian culture and Spirituality for college students came to a close, Baba held an exclusive session with the student participants. He was then in an unusually jovial and reminiscent mood. He desired to thrill the students with an account of His early days at school, so that they might realise that His oft-quoted statement, 'My Life is My Message', was true, even when He was physically emerging into boyhood and even before He had announced His advent as an *Avatar*.

He related to them how He moved among His cousins and classmates, His teachers and comrades, and also, the villagers of Puttapparthi, Bukkapatnam, Uravakonda, and Kamalapuram. He would exhort them to ponder over this chapter of His story and implant in their hearts the ideals He had placed before Himself, even as a child. When the summer course of 1978, held at Bangalore, concluded, students, who had heard of the Ootacamund discourse, pleaded with Him to disclose to them episodes of His boyhood days, at school and outside, in which He provided glimpses of His *Leela* (divine play) and Baba graciously revealed to them a few more incidents of the past, which laid bare His mission and His divinity.

In the pages of Volume I of this series, I have mentioned that even as a child of five summers, He had earned the epithets, '*Guru*' and '*Brahmagyani*', because He corrected and counselled the children, who gathered around Him as playmates, and because His conversation and conduct were on a level of consciousness higher than even the adults, who sought to guide Him.

Even as a child and later, at school, He was meek, but morally fearless, abhorred violence, vengeance, and falsehood, and preferred simple living to gaudiness and ostentation. He

could easily sing, dance, and compose hymns and poems, while other children of the same age were still struggling with the first few letters of the alphabet. He also demonstrated ready compassion for birds and animals. He avoided meat and eggs, and shed tears of sympathy, when drought animals, like bullocks, were mercilessly beaten. He stood forth as the leader of a band of children, to whom He taught the ways of God and the means to win His grace.

He stayed most days at the house of the *karnam* (village accountant), where the mistress, Subbamma, tended Him with maternal care. Baba sought shelter in her affection, in order to avoid the sight of slaughtering fowl in His family home nearby and to watch the *puja* (worship) conducted by that *Brahmin* lady, in the room set apart for ceremonial rites. Baba never played truant at school. Rather, He relished the company of children, whom He helped to get the best out of school.

Towards Upper Primary School

At Ootacamund, Baba narrated the story of a journey in a crowded cart, drawn by a pair of bullocks from Puttaparthi to Bukkapatnam and from Bukkapatnam to Penukonda, sixteen miles away. He was then ten years old. He and the other children could scarcely squeeze into the cart; a few spilled over. They were in the lower primary class and could join the upper primary school, only when they had passed an examination which was to be held at Penukonda town. There were eighteen children in all, overcrowding the vehicle. Whenever the road rose to negotiate a bump or a hill, the bullocks could not drag the cart behind them. So, the children were pulled out and made to walk up. There was also no brake to hold the cart in check, as it rolled downhill and, as a consequence, the children had to walk the road downhill, also! The children were sent to the 'distant, unfamiliar town' from their homes, after propitiatory prayers to the family deities, prayers that were also meant to help them pass the examination.

At Penukonda, they stayed together and the teachers, who led them, gave last minute lessons. Baba agreed to be in charge of the kitchen. Lunch and dinner for the party were cooked by Him and He did not demand or welcome help from anyone. This arrangement continued on all the three days of the examination. Baba had no time to revise His texts, nor could He attend the special classes held by the teachers. Yet, when the results were announced a few weeks later, He happened to be the only candidate declared fit to proceed to the upper primary school! The good people of Bukkapatnam, the village three miles away, warmly welcomed Baba into the school situated in their village, taking Him through the streets on a

chair, placed on a flower-bedecked cart that was drawn by caparisoned bullocks, right up to the door-step of the school. They were all happy, even proud, that the wonder-boy of Puttaparthi, already famous as ‘God’s Son’, was attending classes in their school.

Baba was the cynosure of all eyes, at Bukkapatnam. Though He seldom listened to the lessons and rarely opened His textbooks, He was hailed as the brightest pupil of His class. This drew upon Him the envious looks of the ones, who trudged along with Him every day, from Puttaparthi. They often overpowered Him physically, while on the Chitravati sands and dragged Him along, ruffling His shirt and knickers, and damaging them out of shape. When the Chitravati was flowing, they dowsed Him with gusto. Baba said that, He neither protested, nor complained, but bore all this as the pardonable sport of ignorant youngsters. He refused to name any of the tormentors, nor did He bear any ill-will against them.

As Monitor

In those days, every classroom echoed with the swish of the teacher’s cane, which was busy falling on the backs or palms of the luckless, little brats. When the teacher got too exhausted to inflict the punishment, this privilege was transferred to the brightest boy in the class. Baba said that, one day, the question presented before the pupils was, “Describe the glory of India.” The answer had to be in English. The other boys knew little of India and less of English. Baba, however, tersely, but confidently replied, “Consisting of high mountains, large rivers with many branches, and many plains, India is beautiful with all these grand contents.” Baba, then, related to us details of the rest of this episode, “The punishment the others deserved, according to the teacher, was My slapping them on their cheeks. I was to hold their noses tight with the left hand and then, give them the resounding slaps. There were about thirty students in the class, some far taller than me, and I had to climb upon a bench to fulfil My most unpleasant and unpopular duty. But, I could not bring Myself to slap them as forcibly as the teacher wanted and My blows fell softly on their cheeks. So, the teacher was angered. He called Me near and shouted, ‘Did I want You to apply *haldi* (turmeric, used as a cosmetic) to their cheeks? I asked You to beat them. I shall show You how.’ He held My nose and counted the slaps he gave Me, about thirty or so, before he stopped. I bore it all in silence, for a teacher should not be insulted or let down. It was My fault for having annulled, by softness, the purpose of the punishment he desired to inflict, however absurd the prize for My superior knowledge of Indian geography and history.”

Baba disclosed that, being the monitor of the class, He was burdened with duties and clothed

in authority. “I undertook to show the students and the monitors of other classes, how a monitor should conduct himself. I would reach school a few minutes earlier than the rest. I cleaned the blackboard before the class commenced and often, had to clean even the benches and desks,” Baba explained. “Rama sat at the feet of Vashishta and attended class with other boys. Krishna, too, had Sandeepani as His *guru*, while Sudama and others were His classmates. When the formless, attribute-less Divine Principle takes human form and appears among men, It has to conduct Itself as an agreeable companion and as an understandable example to contemporaries.”

In His discourses, Baba confirmed that He had ‘willed’ the incident at the Bukkapatnam school, when the chair stuck to the posterior of Kondappa, one of His teachers. He confessed that His intention in reducing him to a ridiculous figure, was not to avenge His having been made to stand up on the bench for hours. He had designed it only to reveal a little of His uniqueness, give a glimpse of His divinity, and to make the world around Him sit up and ask, “Who is this boy?”

When Kondappa’s hour of teaching was over, he naturally had to vacate the chair for Mehboob Khan, who was to take the next class, but he could not get up, because the chair stuck to him. The boys suggested that the calamity had happened, because Sathya was punished. Then, Mehboob Khan, who loved and adored Baba and who had glimpses of His Divinity, revealed to Kondappa, “You do not understand. Raju is not an ordinary person; He is a divine boy and I have seen divine brilliance in Him, many times. Withdraw the punishment you have given Him, immediately and your own punishment will disappear.” Then, Mehboob Khan asked Baba to step down from the bench and Kondappa too could get up and walk away.

The Classmates

Swami narrated the events at Uravakonda (about thirty miles away from Anantapur), where He spent about two years with His elder brother, who was a teacher of the Telugu language in the high school there. I myself visited Uravakonda, a year and a half ago. There, I walked along the long, broad verandas of the high school, hallowed by His footprints. I spent some time in the room, which was once His classroom and sat on the same desk that had been used by Him as a student - a bench cum-writing desk, with a makeshift shelf underneath the incline of the top. Three pupils could sit on each bench with their books in the bottom shelf. I sat on the bench and imagined little Baba seated next to me!

Dr. Moinuddin, now a medical practitioner at Uravakonda, was with me at the school, that day. He had been a contemporary and classmate of Baba. He said, “I was allotted a seat on the bench directly behind Baba and I could tease Him by whisking away His cap. He would then implore me to return it to Him, for no student could attend class without a cap. I knew that Baba would not fight, or complain to the teacher, or whisk away my cap in turn; He was so quiet, soft, and non-violent. So, I would insist on His creating some sweetmeat for me - a *rasagolla*, a *laddu*, or a *Mysore Pak*. I was tired of taking sugar-candy. Baba would then circle His palm twice or thrice and produce for me my favourite sweets. But, this invariably set all tongues dripping. So, a general clamour would arise for a repetition of the act and the noise would bring in the teacher. Then, he too would have his share before the lesson began.” Another of His classmates, Sri Sita Rama Rao, told me that Baba had confided in him that He would set the world right and establish the reign of truth in all lands. I saw the tangled branches of the old dwarf trees, right in the centre of the quadrangle.

Baba had described to us how He used to play the monkey game, on five trees in that quadrangle. Two of the trees have now been axed, but providence has spared the rest. The monkey game involved two rival bands of primates. They crawled along the branches, then dangled without dropping, moving from one hold to another, trying to unnerve and to demoralise members of the rival band, until one of them was touched and declared ‘out’. They snarled and growled at their rivals as angrily as they could. They swung and swayed, clung and clambered, slid and slithered. If they fell, they ‘died’ and were pronounced ‘down and out’. They shook the branches with all their might, to unseat the ‘monkeys’ of the opposite gang, loudly jeering and cheering all the while. If any of them slipped into the vocabulary of homo sapiens and revealed his true identity, he ‘died’ at that instant. Baba gave each one of them some sweets, at the end of the game. Many, like Dr. Moinuddin, who had once frisked and frolicked on those trees, are even today chewing the sweet cud of memories of this game.

The Scout Troop

Swami related in a discourse the story of His ‘boy scout’ days. “We had a physical instructor,” He said, “who formed a school scout troop. He was very insistent that I should enrol and though I too was eager to use the chance, to direct the ‘good turns’ of scouting towards the path of *Sadhana* (spiritual discipline), I could not join, because My family was too poor to afford the uniform and other contingent expenses. To make you aware of the depth of their poverty, I shall relate an incident: I used to attend classes every day, wearing

the same shirt, for I did not have a second. Some of the boys, who discovered this fact, started laughing at Me. They teased Me on the way to school and back, and pulling at My worn-out shirt, they tore it. As I had no pin to even keep it together, I was forced to use a cactus thorn, plucked from the fence of My neighbour's field, to serve the purpose.

Realising the reason, which held Me back from the troop, My chums were very sad. The boy, who always sat to the right of Me, was the son of the chief accountant at the revenue office. He went to his father and persuaded him to make two pairs of uniforms, comprising a khaki, half-sleeved short along with khaki knickers. He rolled up one pair and put it on the shelf of My desk, with a note that was addressed to Me, which read: 'You must take this and wear it. We are brothers, so do accept this from me.' But, I was not happy and decided to refuse this gift. I left the uniform on the shelf of his desk, along with a note, saying, 'If you wish our friendship to last, you must not indulge in such games of giving and taking material objects. When a needy person accepts something from another, anxiety lurks in his mind as to how he might return the favour, while pride enters and pollutes the mind of the giver over his act of charity. True friendship should be from heart to heart. If we build friendship on a give-and-take basis, the person, who takes, feels small and he, who gives, feels proud. Such friendship does not last. So, I am not accepting the clothes you left on My desk and am returning them to you with this note.' The next day, that boy pleaded, 'You can return them to me, after leaving the scout movement.' But, I did not agree even to that. 'I do not need, nor seek help,' I told him. 'I seek only the chance to help and show others the best way to help. Besides, your father got the uniforms made for you - they were not meant for My use. I am Truth, as My name indicates. If I wear it instead of you, I will be setting Truth aside.'"

I am tempted to relate, in this context, what happened to a kinsman of mine, about twenty years ago. He had bought in Rangoon, a Burmese umbrella, flat-topped, with a bright, garish-coloured, cloth cover, as a birthday gift for his sister, living in Bangalore. But, as she refused to accept it, it was lying unused. Later, his parents placed it before Baba, as an offering. Baba told them, "Why do you bring Me stolen articles? This belongs to your daughter, whether she uses it or not." Anything offered to Baba must be *ab initio* intended for and dedicated to Him.

The Thursdays

At Uravakonda, I looked into the well, from which Baba used to draw water for His home, every day and carry it, slung across His shoulder, in big, mud pots. The well is at least one kilometre away and Baba trudged the distance, six times a day. The well, the only potable

water well in the village, being very deep, He must have gone through great physical strain to get the pots filled. “The time spent in supplying water for the home did not leave Me any time for other activities,” says Baba. I was also able to see Mr. Mehboob Khan, the teacher, who loved and revered Baba as a boy and who had foreseen that He would, one day, become a World Teacher.

The house, where Baba lived with His elder brother, is now a jumble of mud blocks. We scrambled in and stood reverentially before the sacred spot, where Baba had started sitting every Thursday, after declaring Himself as the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai. Even as we were standing lost in reverie, an old resident of the village related a story of those years: “One night, a group of women from an adjacent village journeyed to Uravakonda by bullock cart, to witness a movie. They were huddled in a thick cluster in the cart. Taking advantage of the oncoming night, a woman unfastened a gold ornament, from the hair of the woman sitting beside her. The loss was discovered only when the women alighted, but none suspected the other, since they knew one another well. Some suggested that the ornament might have got loosened by itself and fallen on the road, while others asked the lady to recollect whether she had worn it at all. Then, an old man ventured to say, ‘There is a ‘miracle boy’ here, whom we can consult. He is the brother of the Telugu teacher.’ As soon as they trooped in, Baba sighted them and said, ‘Eh Janakamma! Give the jewel back!’ The startled Janakamma did as Baba had ordered, her head bent in shame. Baba told the others, ‘Go! Take her also to the movie with you. Repentance is enough punishment. Forget this lapse. It was your fault, tempting the weak minded woman. I am sure she will not do it again, for she has been blessed by Me.’”

The Rocking Chair

Baba told the students how He had borne poverty and hardship in His childhood and youth, in silence and without complaint. There was a rocking chair in the house, upon which Baba sat one evening. When His brother’s brother-in-law saw Him rocking Himself in the chair, he was very incensed and remarked, “Who gave you permission to sit on that precious chair and rock back and forth, like a *Maharaja*? Get up and go out of here.” Baba replied, “The day is coming when I will be a *Maharaja*, sitting on a silver chair. You will live to see the day.” This angered him all the more, but he did not pursue the persecution. About seven years later, the Rani of Chincholi, who could not bear to see her *Swami* sitting on a wooden chair, brought a silver chair for Him. But, *Swami* did not permit the chair to be unpacked, even during the *Shivaratri* or the *Dasara* celebrations. On the occasion of *Swami*’s birthday, His

brother's brother-in-law came to Puttaparthi. Then, Baba asked him, of all people, to unpack the silver chair and place it in position, on the dais of *Prasanthi Mandir*, which was then ready for *bhajan* gatherings. The man shed tears of repentance and asked to be pardoned. Baba soothingly told him not to worry. This was, perhaps, the only instance, when Baba reacted, for He usually bears others' anger with remarkable indifference and restraint. He told the boys that He was ever alert to guard the honour and reputation of the family, in which He was born, and to ward off the derision of cynics and carpers.

The general stores of Kote Subbanna, from where Baba got His apparel and items of stationery in return for songs and slogans, was still there as I could see. It is now being run by Subbanna's grandson. Subbanna had once sought Baba's help for boosting the sales of his baby foods and ayurvedic drugs. Baba agreed and in return, got from the shop the articles He most needed, but could not purchase. The publicity value of Baba's lilts was great, for as I was told by the contemporaries of Subbanna, when these were sung in chorus by several boys, carrying placards advertising a product, it would be sold in no time. Venkappa Raju, Baba's father, thanked Subbanna for the help he was rendering Baba, as a result of which He could replenish His wardrobe and get a few note-books. Whenever a new product (like '*Balamrit*' of Pundit D. Gopalacharlu of Madras) had to be introduced to the people of Uravakonda, it was done by means of such street music. There was a weekly fair at the town and on such days, when the villagers from surrounding areas assembled, Subbanna had a hey-day with his placards and his merry 'choir-boys'.

The Mentor

Swami said that, even as a boy, He had been intent on correcting the vagaries, vices, defects, and deficiencies of society, by means of ridicule and satire expressed in drama and poetry. '*Cheppinattu Chestara?*' which means, 'Are your deeds in accordance with your words?' is a fine example of His educative experiments. It exposed the hypocrisy of parents and teachers - an evil, which children and pupils spontaneously absorb. So also, today, Baba exhorts us to coordinate thought, word, and deed. He tells us that when He spent vacations at Puttaparthi, He composed long lampoons in folk metres, on the evils of drink, the absence of literacy, and the irresponsible accumulation of debt by the villagers. These songs were quickly learnt by the children, who were taught by Baba, and were recited by them in groups, in front of every house. Some householders were angered at this onslaught on their shortcomings and fixations, but many encouraged the boys to continue their reformatory task.

The village accountants also were a target of *Swami*'s lampoons. There was one, who prided himself on his 'Hitler moustache', on his watch with its shining strap, and even on his Don Juan diversions. *Swami* told the students how He had composed a satire in verse, on him and trained a band of urchins to parody his pomp. They stood opposite the door of his house and sang it, till their voices turned hoarse. The butt of their ridicule came out to thrash them, but the members of the gang fled into the many lanes and could not be impounded. Such shout-and-run tactics were continued, until he shaved off the horror under his nose, removed the leather strap from his wrist, and gave up his secret visits. Baba also wrote a play in Telugu, entitled 'New Times', which revolved round a poet who was ignored and insulted while alive, but whose stirring poems provided his son enough ammunition, for a rousing victory in an election, a few years after the passing away of his father.

The house where Tammiraju, the teacher who persuaded *Swami* to produce the play entitled '*Cheppinattu Chestara?*', on the annual day of the school, still stands intact opposite a heap of mud that was once the house of Seshamaraju. It is indeed a thrice holy spot, for *Swami* spent many hours there with His teacher and his devoted wife, engaged in providing them glimpses of His *Leela*, while also playing with their son who was His own age. By merely calling out their names, He had made to appear on a wall of that house, images of the Ten Incarnations of Vishnu and various other deities and saints, revered by the teacher's wife. She wrote a poem about this incident, in the monthly magazine published by the Sai Samaj, Madras.

The house of Narayana Shastry, immortalised as the person, who had witnessed the golden aura around *Swami*, when He left home to 'carry on the task, for which He had come', is almost adjacent to the place, where Seshamaraju lived. Narayana Shastry had once the pride of his scholarship pricked by Baba, when, as a little boy, Baba had questioned Shastry on his exposition of the classical texts. We could get some idea of the ecstasy that must have overpowered Shastry that day, when we met and heard Dr. Baronowski of the University of Arizona, who was wonderstruck and delighted by the aura he saw around Baba for days together, at *Brindavan*, Whitefield, when He gave *darshan* to the thousands gathered on the grounds there.



Narayana Sastry

Teaching Prayers

Swami told the students that He had seen what we would call ‘hard days’, at Uravakonda, though He was the favourite of the school and the town. He was the ‘hewer of wood’ and ‘drawer of water’ for the family of His brother. He collected dry twigs and branches from the hills around and tied them up into a head load bundle, which He brought home every two or three days. He drew water from a well, the only potable source, which was not too near. In spite of these and other exhausting chores, He was ever fresh and vibrant, and full of infectious humour. His neighbours were anguished at His plight and entreated Him to write to His parents, asking them to take Him away. Some even offered to write the letter themselves. But, He told everyone not to worry, for He was happy that He could be of service. “Why are you bothered? I enjoy being useful,” He would say.

I stood on the very dais, from where *Swami* used to sing, every day before the lessons began, the school prayers before the assembled students. It was from that very dais that, one historic morning, *Swami* had announced, “I do not belong to you, henceforth. I belong to them, who need me and call on me.” *Swami* said that, He came down the steps even before the congregation realised the significance of what He had declared. Then, He walked to the house, where His brother, the Telugu teacher, lived. Throwing His books aside, He moved on to the edge of the town, where stood the house of Anjaneyulu, the government Inspector of

Excise revenue. Anjaneyulu loved and adored Baba. Perhaps, he was one of those, who needed Him and called on Him to illumine and liberate. But, He did not enter the portals of that house. There are dozens of round, flat-topped boulders, protruding among the trees in the open ground in front of that house. *Swami* sat atop a medium-sized one right opposite Anjaneyulu's house. The congregation that followed Him from school had swelled now, to a sea of heads all around. Anjaneyulu had a vision that the trek from school marked the inauguration of a World Revolution. So, he had a *mandap* (a commemorative structure) constructed over the stone, for it had to be marked out from the rest. Recently, Baba permitted the good men of Uravakonda to purchase and take possession of the land around and to erect a community hall, for carrying on service activities under His inspiration.



Thammiraju Manchiraju

The Announcement

Seated upon that boulder, *Swami* revealed that His devotees were calling Him and that He could no longer pretend to be a student, or even a member of the Raju household. "I have My task to complete," He declared, indicating that a part had been accomplished while He was at Shirdi. He then directed the congregation to sing *bhajans* (devotional songs) and to recite the name of the Lord. He stood forth as the Teacher of teachers, whose message can liberate man from grief and greed. "*Manasa bhajare,*" He sang, "*guru charanam, dustara bhava sagara taranam,*" (Adore in song with sincere devotion, the feet of the divine teacher, for they can take you across the ocean of misery). Who was the divine teacher, whose feet He was

referring to? Those, who knew Him (but they were only a few), recognized that they were in fact the feet of Sai. *Swami* was emphasising even in those early years, that union with God demands communion with man. *Swami* saw the helplessness, the distress, and the disease that sapped the happiness of people all around Him. He was moved with compassion. The candle was no longer under the bushel. Its light was soon to spread, bright and blazing, in every heart and home, school and sanctuary, village and town. *Swami* had made the clarion call to the entire world, to clasp the feet of the Divinity, which had condescended to encase Itself in human form, and be saved from pollution and perdition. Those Lotus Feet, which He presented in their magnificence that day, have walked on rose petals, snowy mountain terrain, rain-soaked slush, fair-weather tracks, and sandy sea-shores, ever carrying consolation to grief-stricken people in all lands.

During the short time He was at Uravakonda, Baba had installed Himself in the hearts of both the old and the young. He had brightened their eyes with laughter and sweetened their ears with song. He was the bard and the boast of the school, the pride and paragon of the populace. Every family had some story to tell about His mysterious power, His love, and His wisdom. So, when He left home and school, and talked of His task and of those waiting for Him the world over, their courage failed and their tongues were tied in unspeakable sorrow.

The Tiger Skin

His return from Uravakonda and the announcement at Puttaparthi that He was the Sai Baba of Shirdi, came when He was only fourteen years of age. But, the villages around and even far off Anantapur (forty miles away) knew of His being Sai Baba.

One day, a jeep-driver crossed the river bed and walked the streets of Puttaparthi, trying to locate *Swami*. His master, a young English subdivisional officer, had gone for *shikar* to the forest, on the other side of the Chitravati and while returning to Anantapur, the vehicle had stopped right opposite Puttaparthi village. The driver did his best, as did the officer, to get the vehicle moving, but failed. The driver suggested that there was a 'Boy' at Puttaparthi, who could materialise *vibhuti* (sacred ash). Yes. "Create, by a circular movement of His palm, the very panacea for all ills, even for the jeep!" Stranded half-way, the Englishman agreed and let the driver go to the village, while he himself sat in the jeep. The driver bumped into the Boy at last, but was astounded to hear Baba say, "I am coming, Myself, to the jeep." He walked across the sandy bed and on reaching the road, peeped into the vehicle and saw the carcass of a tigress that the officer had shot barely two hours ago. *Swami's* deep love for all beings

could not tolerate animals being killed or tortured.

He said, “I stopped the jeep at this place, for it is a mother, whose three small cubs are, at this very time, loudly wailing and calling out to her, that you are carrying. Go back! Recover those cubs and gift them to some zoo, where they will be looked after. And do not shoot wild beasts again, for they have caused you no harm. Why do you kill them, surround them, and lay traps to catch them. Shoot them instead with a more superior weapon, your camera. That won’t maim or kill them.” The Englishman was at once enlightened and he never carried a firearm again. Shooting wild beasts armed with a camera, he discovered, was far more adventurous and *satwic* (pure). He presented the orphaned cubs to the zoo and when the tiger skin came back from the taxidermist, he brought it to Puttaparthi. *Prasanthi Mandir* was then under construction. He met Baba and placed the skin at His feet. Sakamma of Coorg pleaded with Him to sit on it, in *yogic* fashion, with a rosary between His fingers. She had a photographer ready. And Baba obliged, though He has never sat in *dhyana* (meditation) or held a rosary!

A Book On Him

Smt. Nagamani Purnaiya has written a book in Telugu (later also translated into and printed in English), entitled ‘Divine *Leelas* of *Bhagawan* Sathya Sai Baba’. In the foreword to the book, she says, “I have availed myself of every opportunity of witnessing His divine powers.” The book describes more than 140 miracles, of which she says, “More than 115 were witnessed by me with abundant joy.” Nagamani Amma was the wife of Sri Purnaiya, the Chief Commercial Superintendent, Southern Railways, and the miracles she records were revealed at what is called the ‘old’ *Mandir* (temple) in the village, in the first few years after *Swami*’s announcement. When the present *mandir*, called *Prasanthi Mandir* was inaugurated in 1950, the *mandir* at the village became old! The miracles described relate to cures, effected by the administration of *vibhuti* created by *Swami*, and of raging floods subdued at His command. Baba revealed to her, “It is because of your faith and trust in Me that your bus could cross the river, in spite of the surging floods.” *Swami* created *tulsi* (basil leaf) garlands, rings, and pendants for personal wear. He also performed surgical operations.

“One day, I saw *Swami* throwing over the wall, something like a banana peel,” narrates Nagamani Amma. “Then, He came towards me and asked for water to wash His hands, which were red with blood. ‘You had prayed to Me to cure that man, so I operated upon him,’ He said. That night, I could not sleep due to my anxiety for the man, since he was operated upon

without cocaine and in full consciousness. I was very troubled by the thought of the pain he must be suffering, in the adjacent room and so, I stayed wide awake. At daybreak, *Swami* called me and asked me to give the patient some surgical cotton. ‘Go and give the cotton at once,’ He commanded. When I went in, after hesitating at the door for a while, I found the patient eating a plateful of *idlis* and *chutney*. *Swami* stood behind me. ‘This is not an operation by a doctor,’ He chuckled, ‘I have done it, so there is no pain caused, no rest required, and no special diet prescribed. He can eat whatever he wants.’ I was shown a long mark on the stomach, but could discover no stitches. *Swami* said, ‘The *vibhuti* I created and applied on his brow acted as an anaesthetic. I created a *trisul* (trident) and a knife for the operation. After I had finished, I smeared *vibhuti* and it was all over.’”

“On another day, four men came to *Prasanthi Nilayam* with the intention of testing *Swami*,” continues Nagamani Purnaiya, “When they reached Bukkapatnam, three miles away, they exchanged the wrist watches they wore, deciding among themselves to find out whether Baba would discover what they had done. If He is God, He should know, they thought. *Swami* called them and said, ‘I know why you have come and what you were talking on the way. One is wearing the watch of the other. I know that you have come to test Me, but this is a place for devotees. You can go back to where you have come from.’”

The Song He Made Them Sing

Baba had not only to encourage *bhajan* and give a boost to the declining *bhajan mandalis* (groups of *bhajan* singers) in the village, but He had also to compose *bhajans* and *namavalis* to satisfy the demand for new songs. During those early years, He wrote quite a few. The four pillars of the mansion of Sai *Dharma* were first demarcated in one such song, composed by Him when He was seventeen years of age.

With Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, and Prema

Let step by step, the pilgrim road of life be trod.

Your duty is to but trudge and try;

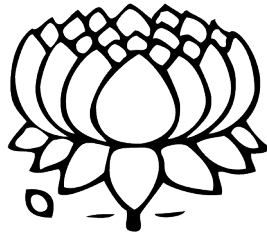
Whether you win or lose the game -

Tis the Will of God.

Fill your mind with God, be devoted in full to Him;

It will grant you freedom from grief and pain.

*Janaka was king, but he lived in God;
He ruled his realm and gained moksha (liberation) too.
Why yearn for superhuman skills? Have faith, O man!
They swell your ego and blind your wisdom eye.
While passing through this trackless jungle
The name of God is the only guide.
Your heartland is a precious field;
Plough it with your mind; and use
Your virtues as animals yoked.
Hold the intellect as the whip to urge them on,
And gather the harvest of love and light.*





Chapter 2

Love On The March

Why Colleges?

THE *Avatar* had illumined the world for forty five years, when this narrative was completed up to Volume III of *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*. That name, which flashed into my consciousness when wondering what title to adorn His biography with, now brings to my memory a prophetic declaration by *Swami Vivekananda*. During his discourses on *bhakti yoga*, he announced, “Religion, which is the highest knowledge and the highest wisdom, cannot be bought; nor can it be acquired from books. You may turn your head in all directions, you may explore the Himalayas, the Alps, and the Caucasus, you may search the bottom of the sea and pry into every nook and corner of the world, be it Tibet or the desert of Gobi, yet you will not find it anywhere, till your heart is ready for receiving it and your teacher has come. And when that Divinely appointed teacher comes, serve him with child-like confidence and simplicity. Freely open your heart to His influence and see in Him God manifested. Those, who come to seek truth with such a spirit of love and veneration, to them, the Lord of Truth reveals the most wonderful things, regarding truth, goodness, and beauty.” Translators of this passage into Indian languages have, even without the knowledge of the *Sathya Sai Avatar*, interpreted truth as *Sathyam*, goodness as *Sivam*, and beauty as *Sundaram*! The Lord of Truth is best translated as *Sathya Sai*. Baba has revealed the most wonderful thing about human beings - that the core of every individual is *Sathyam-Sivam-Sundaram* and that this awareness alone can confer liberation. I had no inkling of this truth. *Vivekananda* himself must have led me to the teacher, the Lord of Truth.

Baba blessed the city of Anantapur, headquarters of the district of which *Prasanthi Nilayam* is a part, with the College of Arts and Science for Women, not with the intention of adding one more to the hundreds already dotting the land. His plan was to create an educational

institution, which would mould the girls entering its portals into daughters revering the spiritual traditions of Bharat (India), sisters eager to serve the ever-expanding circle of their kith and kin, in the villages of this land, wives wedded to simplicity and sincerity, and mothers skilled and eager to instil ideals of service and spiritual discipline in the hearts of children. Before long, *Bhagawan* blessed Anantapur with another structure, dedicated to the furtherance of 'higher living', a *kalyana mandap*. "When love is the lever that operates the mind, only good can result. I have come to restore love among mankind, to cleanse it of meanness and restrictive attitudes," He declared, while inaugurating the building. The *mandap* is used as a community hall of service. Baba Himself arrived a few years later, when devotees celebrated therein the wedding of four indigent *harijans*, and showered grace on the happy couples. He created for each bride, a gold *bottu* (a sanctified ornament, worn to indicate wedlock) that the groom had to place around her neck as part of the ritual and for each groom, a gold ring, which the bride had to put on his finger. The *harijan* families were entertained to a hearty feast, which they shared with the devotees and with *Bhagawan* Himself.

Seventy Apartment Flats

In the month of August, 1971, when thousands gathered at *Prasanthi Nilayam* for offering homage, on the sacred day commemorating the birth of Krishna, Baba declared, "People tell Me that mankind is, today, on the brink of destruction, that the forces of hypocrisy and hate are spreading fast over all the continents, and that anxiety and fear are stalking the streets of every country. There is no need to tell Me this, for I have come here for this very reason. When the world is on the verge of chaos, the *Avatar* comes to still the storm raging in the heart of man."

The *Dasara* festival in September afforded an opportunity for the vast gathering of seekers, to benefit by what it has actually become - a course of divine lessons on the mystic symbolism in *Vedic* culture. Baba explained that the *yagnya* (ritual sacrifice) was a reminder of our essential duty, to sacrifice the self in order to visualise the Overself. The body is the altar; the world we live in, the oblation; *bhakti* (devotion) and *gnyana* (knowledge), the sacrificial flames which accept, transmute, and sanctify the oblation; and the sublimation of the consciousness (*purusha*) into the Absolute (*Purushottama*), the fruition thereof. *Bhagawan* also announced, "This year, *Dasara* marks a new chapter in the history of the *Nilayam*. Recognise that Divinity is its core; yearn for that Divinity and strive to reveal It in yourselves through *sadhana*, to which this campus is dedicated." The prayer hall had a new

frontage added to it, besides an extended porch with silver doors and traditional temple sculptures, and ornamental domes having golden finials. The *Mandir* was proclaiming the presence of the *Avatar*. The residents and visitors were to be conscious of the presence and to mould their daily schedules in conformity with the spiritual upliftment that they could partake in the sanctified atmosphere. Baba blessed by His divine presence, more than seventy flats, which were allotted to devotees who were anxious to spend their days in *Sadhana*. The allottees had come from different parts of India and even from overseas. They professed different faiths and spoke different languages. But, *Bhagawan* showered grace on them all, for as He declared, “There is only one caste, the caste of humanity; there is only one religion, the religion of love; there is only one language, the language of the heart; there is only one God and He is omnipresent.” The flats have since increased in number to about 300. *Sadhakas* (spiritual aspirants), eager to spend their days, or at least some months every year, in this atmosphere of silence, self-reliance, and surrender to the Divine Will, are fast increasing in number.

***Sivam* Arising**

October saw *Bhagawan* at Hyderabad, enthusing the citizens into *nagarsankirtan*, inspiring them to instruct their children in the rudiments of *sadhana*, and transforming the baser ideas and goals of the elite by His discourses, at the Academy of *Vedic* Scholars, growing in strength and usefulness under His benign guidance. On 25th October, 1971, Baba laid the foundation for a *lingam*-shaped temple at Hyderabad, the capital city of the state of Andhra Pradesh. “I am consecrating this temple for devotees, who, instead of following Me from place to place, can now gather here, assured of *darshan*,” He said. At *Dharmakshetra* in Bombay, the divine residence is named ‘*Sathyam*’. ‘*Sivam*’ is second in the series, while ‘*Sundaram*’, in Madras, was raised last. Of the three, Baba said, “*Sathyam* is the feet, *Sivam* is the trunk, and *Sundaram* the head. On *Sathyam* we stand, on *Sivam* we act, and on *Sundaram* we think. In Truth we are born, in Goodness we live, and into Beauty we merge.” *Bhagawan* inaugurated ‘*Sivam*’ on the Telugu New Year Day, in April, 1973. This architectural gem, enshrining the cosmic message of emergence from and merger into the One, was completed in eighteen months. Here, He materialised a *lingam* for continuous worship by devotees, who may be so inclined, and installed it in the hall, which forms the *peetha* (base) of the *lingam* structure. For seven days thereafter, large concourses of people listened in rapture, to the recitation and exposition of the glory of *Siva Purana* texts. The event marked the dawn of a cultural and spiritual revolution, with ‘*Sivam*’ as the fountain of

inspiration.

During the Birthday celebrations, 1971, *Bhagawan* explained, "Life is a challenge; meet it. Life is love; share it. Life is a dream; realise it. Life is a game; play it." - a message, which thousands now cherish and live by. He spoke of the three bodies, which each one is encased in - the gross, the subtle, and the causal. He said that, intelligence is master of the gross body, intellect of the subtle, and intuition of the causal. Every day, during the celebrations, all those who were alert to the proceedings could advance a few steps towards self-control, self-knowledge, and self-realisation. Christmas came soon after and in His discourse, *Bhagawan* emphasised omnipresent Christ, saying, "All are one in Christ and the One Christ is in all," He assured.

The Conference Did Meet

The Fifth All India Conference of the Sri Sathya Sai *Seva* Organisations was held at Abbotsbury, Madras, in the last week of December, 1971. Baba had encouraged the organisers to proceed with the preparations, in spite of the country being involved in a war with Pakistan, for He said that the war would be over by that time. "The civil war in Pakistan, between its western and eastern halves, forced millions of terror-stricken people to take refuge in India. They prayed in their agony that we should help them. True to our culture and tradition, we sacrificed a great deal, gave them food and shelter, and sent them back to their homes, after ensuring that they could be safe and live there in peace. We do not wish to expand, or dominate, or injure anyone," Baba said after the conflict ended. His Will prevailed. The Pakistan army surrendered, administering indeed a pleasant surprise to India. This happened barely a week before the conference was due to start, with more than 3,000 delegates gathering at Madras from all over the country.

Many had come from outside India. The Cowans - Walter and Elsie, Dr. John Hislop, and many others came from the U.S.A. The Cowans returned home in April, 1972. At a gathering of 'Friends and Fellow Seekers', Elsie said, "We have come from India, my husband and I, brim-full of the most astounding news that can happen to anyone. It is so fantastic, that many of you may doubt it, because hardly any of us realise the great importance and the tremendous power of this Great High God, who not only walks the Earth, but cares for all the planes from Earth to eternity. Walter died at Madras. Sai Baba resurrected him." And Walter confirmed, "While in the Connemara Hotel at Madras, two days after I arrived, I was taken very sick with pneumonia and was in bed. As I gasped for breath, suddenly, all the body

struggle was over, I died.”

During the conference, *Bhagawan* inspired the devotee delegates to endeavour to translate the love they bore for Him into acts of service, for those less fortunate than themselves. He exhorted them to share their resources, power, and skills with others, who are also integral parts of the same God whom they revere equally. Service must not become a routine gesture, an exhibitionistic activity, or mere oral out-pouring of sympathy. 'All for one, one for all' is the ideal, towards which society should march. *Bhagawan* castigated institutions and individuals, who deride holy festivals, defame holy men, deny God, and thereby, undermine the faith, charity, sincerity, and honesty in man. He pointed out that man had mastered vast fields of knowledge, yet he had no knowledge of himself. He limped, though his legs were strong; he was insane, though his inside was sound; he was deaf, though his ear was sharp. The time had come to awaken him to this absurdity and infuse confidence into his behaviour. Before the delegates left for their homes, He directed that all traces of dislike or distrust that they may have had in their hearts for Pakistan, be drowned in the flood of Universal Love that they had experienced. “All mankind must be welcomed into the warm fold of your love,” He said.

In a letter to the residents of *Prasanthi Nilayam* on the New Year Day, 1972, about the Madras conference, Baba said, “The sessions of the conference gave *ananda* (bliss) to all. But, more time and attention was devoted to the needs of the tongue and the stomach, than to the needs of the *atman*. For those who have appetite for the *atman*, these cravings are trivial. It is best to keep feeding and feasting at a low key. In Madras, this did not happen.” Baba is uncompromising in His emphasis on values. He also explained, “Where material comforts are over stressed, *ananda* escapes. *Sadhakas* should reckon that idle talk, voraciousness, indulgence in back-biting and scandal-mongering, the denigration of others, and the exchange of flattery are inveterate enemies. Only those who avoid these evil tendencies can earn *Swami*'s grace. May you deserve that grace in the year ahead. Determine today to get out of the old ruts and move along the paths laid down by *Sanathana Dharma*.”



Prasanthi Mandir (See page 17)

A College For Boys

The foundation stone for a Sathya Sai College was laid on 16th March, 1972, on a vast piece of land lying adjacent to *Brindavan*, near Whitefield. This building was planned by *Bhagawan* as a unique, architectural gem, comparable in its magnificence to the one, which houses the women's college at Anantapur. It had been designed as a reservoir of *gnyana*, promising to transform the land into a place of peace and prosperity. "Parents, politicians, and teachers are all responsible for the extent, to which the educational system has deteriorated," Baba said. "In education, as in all sectors of modern life, borrowed ideals, imported systems, and fickle loyalties have brought disaster in their train. Everyone is engaged in offering advice or criticism, but none in actual execution to set an example. When the students of this college become leaders and teachers, the number of persons able to voyage happily, on an even keel, over the turbulent sea of life will increase. Injustice, untruth, and unrighteousness will be recognized as disgraceful and demeaning social evils, instead of being tolerated and even appreciated. Truth, justice, love, and grace shall soon return to Earth. The re-organisation of education is one of the means towards this end," Baba declared.

His People In Delhi

On 25th March, 1972, *Bhagawan* arrived in Delhi for a ten-day stay. Baba often begins His discourses to the mammoth crowds before Him with the benediction, "I am most happy to share your *ananda* and to find you sharing My *ananda*." Those ten days were spent in sustained ecstasy and inexpressible, divine delight. After His return to *Prasanthi Nilayam*, Baba spoke to a gathering of devotees on the Delhi visit thus: "The longing of My people in

Delhi was so poignant, that it took nearly half an hour for Me to alight from the plane. Lakhs of people presented themselves before My residence and clamoured at all hours of the day and night for *darshan*. Unless one group moved on, there was no room for the next to get *darshan*. I had to climb up to the terrace, so that the huge concourse could get a glimpse of Me... Drawn by the *ananda* that the *darshan* gives, masses of people from Meerut, Jallundher, Patiala, and some other distant towns and villages gathered for *bhajan* and the discourses. On 1st April, I agreed to go to Kurukshetra during the hotter hours of the day, since I did not like to disappoint the Delhi crowds and deprive them of *darshan*. There, Gulzarilal Nanda had arranged a meeting of ascetics and students at the university campus. But, there were three lakh people waiting for Me on that ground that was familiar to Me as a field for corrective teaching. I warned the *sanyasis* (ascetics) of the corrupting influence of institutionalism and hierarchism. I told them to keep away from the contamination of political involvements.” Jogendranath Joshi, an eye witness of the Kurukshetra meeting, writes, “Until Baba arrived, thousands of students were surging in confusion and evidently getting increasingly restless and unruly. But, as soon as He ascended the dais and looked around, the wild emotions were soothed; apparently menacing hordes were instantly transformed into bridges of peace.”

The Triumphant Entry

The U.S. Ambassador at Delhi, Professor Keating, was so impressed by the reverence that motivated the Delhi crowds, that he said, “I cannot grasp the full impact of Indian culture through the study of books, nor can I vouchsafe for the authenticity of the scriptures of this land... but, when I see in the capital city of this land, in the seventh decade of the 20th century, a phenomenon like this - five lakh ardent men and women milling round to get a heartening glimpse of this five foot personality - I feel that I can hear the heart-beat of this ancient people.”

Khushwant Singh, then editor of **The Illustrated Weekly of India**, wrote thus on this unique wave of adoration that stunned the bustle of Delhi into silence: “A traffic jam is a rare occurrence on Delhi roads, as kerbs are broader than in any other city. But, here it was - a traffic jam with cars and buses snarling up all avenues within a radius of two miles, the focal point being the house, where Sri Sathya Sai Baba was staying.” Baba explained it as the natural manifestations of the longing for light and love. He deprecated expressions such as '**Triumphal Entry**', '**He Took Delhi by Storm**', etc., which the journalists used, as also the word 'invaded' used by Ariel in his column: “Last week, Delhi was *invaded* by one of India's

most renowned mystics and seers, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who received a welcome from the classes and the masses, more rapturous than most welcomes Ariel has witnessed over the years.”

Baba said at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, “We went to Meerut one evening, but the gathering was so vast and thickly packed, that the car could not proceed to even within a mile of the dais. We were advised to return to Delhi, but the moans of the multitude persuaded Me to appear before them on the platform. I sang a few *bhajans*, which the huge gathering repeated after Me, line by line. Having satisfied their thirst, I got back to the car as mysteriously as I had ascended the dais. I have been telling you, since six or seven years that the day, when millions will gather to benefit from the *Avatar*, is approaching close. I advise you to garner and to treasure all the *upadesh* (teaching) and bliss that you can today, so that you can sustain yourselves, ruminating on the sweet memories of the experience.”

For Baba, as for the millions, it was love, light, and bliss every moment. The News Chronicle reported an incident, which symbolises the divine love: “Baba’s car was moving at quite a speed near India Gate, when He suddenly asked the driver to stop. Everyone was surprised at this. Baba got down, crossed the road, went to an old man in tattered clothes sitting on the pavement, and bending down before him, materialised a ring, which He Himself put on one of the man’s fingers before returning happy to the car.” Sri Ramanujam of Newsweek fell in with a scooter driver named Ashok Kumar, who had resolved to give up his evil practice of overcharging his customers the moment he had Baba’s *darshan*. The impact of the divinity cleansed his heart of vicious greed. Another incident worth recording happened, when Baba was at the American Embassy with Professor Keating. He materialised a ring and put it on the Ambassador’s finger, but the recipient was rather unhappy since it was quite loose. Noticing the embarrassment, Baba said, while sitting at the table for tea, “It will be tightened. You may ask how? Just as it came unexplained, the ring will also be tightened by itself.” When he rose after tea, Keating found, “It was tight.”

Baba Invaded

Instead of Baba invading Delhi, He offered Himself to be invaded! He addressed a gathering of the capital’s elite, at Kamani Hall and another of over one hundred and fifty thousand citizens, at the play grounds of the Modern School. He spoke to members of the *Seva Samiti* and the *Seva Dal*, who were engaged in various service activities as part of the spiritual upliftment process recommended by Him.

Back at *Brindavan*, Baba decided to initiate another great movement for teaching the wayward world that God is not a tyrant up in Heaven, but a way of life.

Shower Of Light In Summer

He planned the month-long ‘Summer Course on Indian Culture and Spirituality’, in order to instil into students the qualities of humility and reverence. Three hundred students from various colleges all over India, as well as seniors from the Sai College stayed in a camp and went through a spiritually oriented curriculum, which centred round our heritage of moral and spiritual wisdom, intensive practice of positive secularism, and the study of the lives and messages of mystics and saints of all creeds and countries. More than all, *Bhagawan* Himself graciously took on the role of author, producer, director, preceptor, participant, provider, and instructor. Meera Bharani, a student at the course, said, “We were inspired to adopt nature as our teacher, life as our school, and service as our task.” Anita Bahl, another participant, said, “*Bhagawan* was the most taxed teacher at the camp. He talked to us every evening and on some days, in the morning hours also. He spent most of the day with us - watching, consoling, warming, cajoling, and clarifying. He personally supervised every detail of the daily schedule - the recitation of *Om* (the Primordial Sound) in the early hours of the day, the *nagarsankirtan*, the classes, and the daily *bhajans*, besides conducting question-answer sessions every Sunday. We asked Him, ‘Where does the soul reside?’ ‘How should one meditate?’ ‘How is one to engage in action - *karma*, without being involved in consequence?’ ‘How does one practise *pranayama* (breath-control)?’ and so on. He listened with compassion and analysed our problems in order to still the waves of doubt in our minds, through His highly illuminating expositions. He filled our hearts with the gift of grace. None of us can ever be the same again.”

The array of intellectuals, who had arrived from all parts of the country, included *pundits*, professors, vice-chancellors, writers, judges, administrators, artists, and poets, all of whom were thankful and happy for this opportunity provided to them. They, too, felt the impact of divinity and benefited from the unique experience.

On the valedictory day, *Bhagawan* told the students, “You are all bright and beaming with inspiration, imbibed from the atmosphere of peace and self-control, the vision you have gained of your own reality, the sense of mission you have acquired, the inner resolutions you have formed, and the invigorating lessons you have assimilated. Now, cherish with reverence what these elders have taught you out of their love for you. Go back happily, with the

courage born of self-confidence. Share your *Ananda* with your parents, friends, companions, and teachers. I shall be with you, wherever you are; you can never be alone and helpless, hereafter.”



House of Seshamaraju

The Mother's Role Is Over

On 6th May, when the summer course was progressing ahead full steam, mother Eashwaramma cast off her mortal coil at about 8 a.m., at *Brindavan*, in the very presence of her son, the Divine *Avatar*. She was happy and in good spirits, till the last. When I paid my respects to her the previous night, I had found her surrounded by children. She was then narrating stories about *Puranic* heroes and the children kept insisting for one more story, before they unwillingly crept into bed.

The passing away of the Mother did not cause even a flicker in Baba's demeanour. The left half of the mausoleum at Puttaparthi, wherein lay the body of the Father, had been demarcated to serve as the tomb of the Mother. So, Baba had the sacred body sent with the few volunteers to Puttaparthi, where it was buried that same evening. The sudden death plunged the village in gloom, as residents of *Prasanthi Nilayam* bewailed the loss of their *Prema mata* (loving mother). The women devotees had been orphaned by the death. They led the long line of mourners, who were invoking the Lord through *bhajans*, to grant them strength to bear the loss. Meanwhile, at *Brindavan*, every item in the schedule of the camp remained undisturbed. "Duty-Devotion-Discipline," Baba always emphasises. The few, who knew what had happened, dared not spread the news without the specific permission of Baba, for whom death was but a curtain drop, a wink in the wakefulness of the eternal, a foot-step to be followed by another in the soul's march to its source. Even when Father passed away at Puttaparthi, the event did not disturb the normal routine at *Prasanthi Nilayam*. Baba's

emphasis on duty and discipline as the two banks of the stream of devotion, was seen in action that day, the sixth of May.

On 20th July, Baba inaugurated, at Puttaparthi village, the 'Eashwaramma High School', a fitting memorial to the universal affection, with which Eashwaramma had evoked the goodness dormant in thousands of rural and urban women and children. Baba declared, "This village will certainly be uplifted, when more of its children receive higher education. The new teachers, who will reside in the village, will spread both knowledge and the enthusiasm to earn it."

Prema Putras

The conference of the Sri Sathya *Seva Dal*, comprising about 3000 members from all over India, met at *Prasanthi Nilayam* in the fall of 1972, only a few days prior to *Dasara*. *Bhagawan* received them as His *prema putras*, children fostered with (His) love! He wanted them to lead the resurgence of spiritual yearning among the youth. He encouraged them to develop faith in Sai, for each *dal* or petal can be alive and active, colourful and fragrant, only if it is attached to the torus. He directed them to practise the teachings of Sai and to be shining examples, revealing their worth to the world. The lesson that one must learn from the *yagnya* that lasted seven *Dasara* days, is, Baba said, that, "Yagnya alone gives *jaya* (sacrifice alone can confer glory)." During the festival, on 17th October, *Bhagawan* announced that the auditorium at *Prasanthi Nilayam* - the most beautiful and spiritually vibrating hall in the East, with soul-inspiring sculptures and paintings - would be called Poornachandra, in memory of the late Poonamchand Kamini, whose dream it was, which was realised through Baba's grace.

The Birthday celebrations followed in November. *Bhagawan* conferred valuable boons on the thousands, who had gathered at *Prasanthi Nilayam* - the divine *darshan*, the revitalising smile of recognition and compassion, the gift of sweets from His own hand, and more than all, the message of the *atman* to be enshrined in the heart.

The Mew Is Heard

One incident, which occurred on the 23rd of November, deserves to be highlighted in the Sai chronicle. About sixty devotees had arrived from far-away Gauhati, the capital city of Assam. They had travelled in a special railway coach for seven days, before they reached Bangalore and they had, before them, another week-long ordeal to get back home. Baba appreciated

their devotion and gave them *darshan* and a short, spiritual discourse at the prayer hall. He filled their hands with the precious gift of *vibhuti*. He saw in the group a girl, named *Lakhi* and He gave her *vibhuti* a second time, saying, “This, for the cat.”

The cat was Minkie, whom she had rescued from the city drain on a rainy day and brought home to keep warmed and fed. The kitten was not, however, welcomed by her elder sister, who was a nurse in the biggest hospital in the city, but who could not stand cats. She blamed Lakhi for bringing the horrid thing and keeping it as a pet. One night, when a few guests had arrived for dinner, the cat stole into the kitchen and ran off with a bite of fish. This enraged the lady so much, that all her bellicose adjectives exploded in one burst at Lakhi’s face. Lakhi could bear it no longer. She caught Minkie by the neck and spanked her severely with a longish stick. The poor thing yelled in pain. Suddenly, every picture of Sai Baba in the house - there were sixteen of them, hanging with garlands after the Thursday *bhajans* - fell on the floor! The guests ran out of the house into the open courtyard, for they were sure that an earthquake had struck.

But, the lady noticed that only pictures of Baba had dropped; all others were intact on the walls! It was then, that she realised that Baba had given a sign to save the cat. She shouted to her sister, “Lakhi! Stop! Stop! Don’t kill it! Baba is angry with us!” Lakhi placed Minkie on the table. She was in tears and her sister too was sobbing. The cat tried to allay her pain by shaking in quick quivers. The guests had come back by now and they too witnessed the struggle of the cat to regain her poise. Lo and behold! When Minkie shook herself, puffs of fragrant *vibhuti* emerged from her fur and fell thick on the table! The fragrance announced that *Bhagawan* had blessed the cat.

Six months later, on 23rd November, when Lakhi was present with many other devotees from Assam, at the *Prasanthi Nilayam* prayer hall, *Bhagawan*, in His infinite compassion, remembered Minkie, the unwelcome cat and sent her His most valuable *prasad*.

He instantly detects every denial of love and warns us, when we miss our way. His hand reaches beyond the horizons of space and the chronologies of time. He teaches us, by example, to wish well for every form of life, be it man, beast, bird, or plant. His love has no limit, for He is in all.

Christmas, '72 was a festival, during which Baba further elaborated the concept of Cosmic Christ. He traced the expansion of the Christ consciousness, right up to Christ’s declaration, ‘I and my Father are One’ and said that, this was the acme of *adwaitic* (non-dualistic)

experience. Baba said, in addition, “This is the truth of Jesus and also, of every one of you. You are all, fundamentally, the Cosmic Christ.”

On 5th January, 1973, Baba addressed the ASC (S) army personnel at Bangalore. He seldom misses an opportunity to bless the members of the armed forces, for He likes them to know, more and more, the glory of the land that they have vowed to defend. He instils inspiration and courage in their hearts. Since He can and does accompany each one of them, however far or near, His grace is much sought after by soldiers. On 14th January, Baba advised a large gathering of devotees, “Fill yourselves with awe and reverence at the handiwork of God, the manifestation of His power, love, and wisdom that is called the ‘universe’, and upon which the great expanse of space, the huge nebulae, the stars, the satellites and comets, the birds, beasts, insects, and plants, all contemplate. They can give enough instruction and inspiration to you.”

In January, Baba was at Guindy, Madras, to unveil a monumental pillar at the temple, where He had installed an image of the Sai Baba of Shirdi, 25 years earlier. On the sides, at the base of this pillar, are inscribed *Bhagawan's* directives for the regeneration of man.

Kakkara Halla Linga

Since the biggest shed (there were only three, then) could not hold even half the number of pilgrims, who came to *Prasanthi Nilayam* for *Sivaratri*, *Bhagawan* quietly motored to the Bandipur forest on the border of Karnataka. The warden of the jungle brought news that there was a quiet spot on the Kakkara Halla stream, with a patch of dry sand. So, Baba and the few, who were chosen by Him, drove in a van into the forest. A herd of twelve elephants had been spotted minutes earlier, but had discreetly made itself scarce. As *Bhagawan* alighted from the van, He stood and broke a stalk of jungle grass, about an inch and a half long, and another about half its length, and bound them together in the middle, with a bit of stalk skin. It became a cross. He was about to drop it into Hislop's open palm, but He desisted. “No! I must give you another,” He said. Holding the grass cross before His face, He blew upon it. It became a wooden cross, having the same dimensions, with a small, silver icon of Jesus on it. “This is the wooden cross, on which Jesus was crucified; this is the correct image of Jesus on the cross,” He said and gave it to Hislop, who was kneeling and in tears. (Later, he got the wood examined and was informed that it was at least twenty centuries old. He had the silver icon photographed and the photographs enlarged. He was surprised to note that there were marks of sweat on the brow and signs of froth at the corners of the mouth. It had all the sings

of pain heroically borne). Then, Baba moved down the bank of the stream and sat on the sand with those who had accompanied Him, including the warden, guards, and a few tribals attracted by these mysterious happenings in their part of the world.

From the sand that was heaped as a raised bed, Baba created a translucent *lingam*, five inches long and four inches across, seated on an eight inch high base. "Straight from Kailash, where it was being worshipped. See the sandal paste. The *kumkum* dot, the *bilva* leaf," He said. He transformed the sand into an icon of Shirdi Sai Baba, an idol of Lakshmi, and another of Durga. And finally, He created, before the wonder-struck gathering, a casket, which was full to the brim with *amrit* (nectar) - sweet beyond imagination and with a divine fragrance. Even the tribals, who had huddled around him, received their share of *prasad* from His hands.

The *lingam* was at *Brindavan*, the next day and Baba allowed a large number of devotees to participate in the *puja*. I could recite the *Rudraadhyaya* from the *Vedas*, in praise of Siva, during the ritual ablution of the *lingam*. And I can still recall the thrill of my pouring on the *lingam* the holy water of the Ganges, transported by Baba with a wave of His hand, from the very source of the river in the Himalayas.

The Land Of Valour

Baba responded to the prayers of the residents of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh, first visiting the town of Mogha near the country's border. He was there on the 15th and 16th March. He inaugurated the Muralidhar Hospital, where more than two hundred thousand people had gathered for His *darshan*. "It is remarkable how the news of *Bhagawan's* arrival spreads at such short notice and with such great speed, in every direction, by word of mouth," said Sri Sohan Lal, who had witnessed the phenomenon. Baba advised the devotees, "Punjab has earned a reputation for valour. It should make a name for spiritual courage, which comes from faith in God. Pray to God, asking Him to endow you with an intellect that does not waver and a mind that is balanced."

Baba left Mogha for Shimla, by car. Forty thousand people had gathered on the ridge, many from the suburbs and the homesteads in the villages lying amidst the mountains. Shimla had not seen such a massive assembly in living memory. Baba told them that though man had probed outer space and explored the deep, he had yet to learn to be at peace on Earth. Man wants peace and happiness, but he does not know how to acquire them. He runs after petty desires and short-lived pleasures. "There is a surfeit of preachers, but a shortage of practitioners," Baba said. He advised and directed the people to concentrate on fundamental

gains, rather than superficial ones. He gave two discourses the next day - one on the ridge and the other at the grounds of 'Woodville', His residence. On another day, *Bhagawan* paid a brief visit to Kufri and Phagu, past the snow-covered road. A magnificent view of the silver-robed Himalayan peaks can be had from these hamlets. Though the snow was knee-deep, about 200 men and women followed Him. Baba picked up a little snow and changed it into a pair of gold earrings, for a tribal girl. He blessed many with *vibhuti* and an old lady with a ring. The visit of the Lord to Himachal Pradesh marked a turning point in the lives of many. Groups of seekers from many of its towns and villages continue flowing into *Prasanthi Nilayam* to be in His presence for a few days.

At Delhi, a *pandal* (an outdoor auditorium), which could seat more than two hundred thousand people, was found inadequate on some days. *Bhagawan* was present there, during morning and evening *bhajans*, moving amidst the thousands and showering grace on the sick in the form of curative *vibhuti*. He also addressed a select gathering of ministers, academicians, and others at *Vignyan Bhavan*. He spoke to them on the urgency of moral regeneration and of the role of the individual in the process. *Bhagawan* was very liberal with His time and conferred the fortune of personal conversation and counsel on hundreds, who yearned for the chance.

Next, *Bhagawan* motored to Jaipur, instead of going by air as had been earlier planned, thus allowing thousands to have *darshan* as He drove by. At Jaipur, *Bhagawan* laid the foundation stone for the Sri Sathya Sai College for Women and for a temple. He also addressed a gathering of 50,000 on the need for selfless service.

From the 28th to the 30th March, Baba was in Bombay, making a short visit to Poona on the 28th. He addressed a packed assembly of two lakh Bombayites, at the Vallabhbai Patel Stadium. Next, He flew by a chartered plane to Rajkot, in Gujarat, to bless the Raj Kumar College, during its centenary celebrations and to open the Digvijaya Singh wing of the college buildings, to commemorate the late Jam Saheb of Nawanagar. "The youth need colleges, for there, they can learn to live and move with others of their own age, coming from different social and economic backgrounds. They can learn tolerance and cooperation, and realise their talents and virtues," He told the gathering.

Sivam

On the Telugu New Year Day, Baba was at Hyderabad for the inauguration of the holy '*Sivam*' *Mandir*. "Let the New Year bring you *ananda*. You can get it by serving the poor,

the disabled, and those who earn their livelihood by strenuous, physical labour,” He said. Baba blessed the juveniles at the Remand Home, in Hyderabad. “I like children. I take great care of them, insisting on discipline, reverence to parents, moderate food, and allotment of time to study, prayer, and meditation. I also recommend some form of service,” He said.

The main topic, on which Baba focussed His discourses in the summer school, was the *Moha Mudgara* or *Bhaja Govindam* of Shankaracharya. In July, Baba was again in Bombay to visit the Central School for the Deaf and the Sathya Sai Service Centre at Koliwada, a hamlet of fishermen, which had been adopted by the *Seva Samiti*. He also attended a *Bala Vikas* programme, featuring the children of mill workers at Worli.

The *Dasara* message was one of “sacrifice, detachment, and renunciation” through positive and constructive activity. “Do every deed as an act of worship to Him; let every thought be a longing for Him; make every word a hymn of thanks giving for His benevolence.”

Bhagawan has been repeating, in His discourse, the *Vedic* exhortation to the Youth to “revere your parents as God,” for reverence is fast disappearing in Indian families. He emphasised that the home is the earliest and best school, where one’s most enduring skills and habits are imbibed. It is the place, where one’s heart should always be, wherever one might physically wander. We love our country, because the tombs of our fathers, the temples of our God, the fields which have fed us, and the rivers we have bathed in, all exist therein. To demonstrate the value of reverence, Baba inaugurated the Birthday festival by His visit to the mausoleum of the Parents, where His 'sisters and brothers' joined Him along with their children and grandchildren. Every act of His is a lesson to us.

Baba And Godavari

The year 1974 witnessed a miraculous event in Rajahmundry, a small town on the bank of the Godavari River. Rajahmundry is a town that revives nostalgic memories of ancient glories, sheltering many religious and cultural institutions, and entering contemporary history once every twelve years, when lakhs of pilgrims from all over India travel thither for a holy bath in the river. *Bhagawan* willed that an All India Conference of Office Bearers of the Sathya Sai Organisations be held there for three days. Over 6000 delegates attended the conference and the *gurus*, who taught *Bala Vikas* children, comprised an additional 750 persons. *Swami Karunyananda*, the life and soul of all service activities in the Godavari districts, who had discovered in Sathya Sai Baba the God that he had been seeking, was certain that devotees of Baba in the delta region of the Godavari would participate wholeheartedly, to make the

conference a phenomenal triumph. From every village, young men arrived at Rajahmundry before the New Year. They put up *pandals*, levelled the grounds, dug drains, and raised dining halls and kitchens, singing *bhajans* all the while. They filled the stores with provisions, until *Swami* Karunyananda insisted on “no more,” and many villagers returned disappointed and sad that their offerings could not be accepted in the pool. Women streamed into the kitchen and took up the task of preparing elaborate menus. Large quantities of milk, curd, and *ghee* (clarified butter) arrived at the campus in buses, reaching Rajahmundry town from every corner. The delegates were guests of the Godavari region and the hospitality bordered on worship. It was a revelation of the deep roots that the Sai message had taken in their hearts and how it had blossomed as love and service. *Bhagawan's* discourses helped integrate the office bearers into an effective instrument for the revival of *dharma*. He also blessed the *Bala Vikas* movement, describing it as the basic activity of the Sai movement and the *gurus* as its most useful pioneers. *Bhagawan's* presence, during all the three days of the conference, induced pilgrims to come to the Godavari from places as distant as Calcutta, Bhopal, and Patna.

Prasanthi In Villages

On 3rd February, 1974, *Bhagawan* visited the village of Kannamangala, about six miles from *Brindavan*. He announced that He had started a college in that region, so that students hailing from its villages could become leaders of the ideal of total revival and reconstruction, which He called *Janata Kalyan* (peace and prosperity for the people). He advised the students to revere the village and to live there with their kith and kin. “Encourage the formation of the *Bala Vikas*, the *Seva Dal*, the *Mahila Vibhag*, and the *Seva Samiti* in your region,” He said. The visit to Kannamangala was indeed historic, for *Bhagawan* has since visited more than ten villages in that area. He has renovated temples, provided shelters, expanded school buildings, tapped underground water, and deepened existing water wells. He has helped promote literacy and has laid the foundation of moral reform by awakening the conscience of the people.

Bhagawan directed the 4000 *Seva Samitis* in India to adopt a village each and to serve its people with love and understanding. The Old Boys Association of the Sathya Sai colleges, called ‘The Kingdom of Sathya Sai’, is shaping itself into an efficient and sincere instrument, for continuing this *Seva* (service) in the villages. *Bhagawan's* grace has reached the villages around Puttaparthi, in the form of medical and educational facilities.

Sivaratri '74 was celebrated by *Bhagawan* at *Prasanthi Nilayam*. A shed, which could seat over 20,000 people, had by then risen on the grounds. Speaking about the *lingam* and its mystery, Baba said, "The *lingam* is that, which has neither beginning, nor end, that, towards which all beings move, and that, in which all beings merge." The atmosphere at the *Nilayam* was vibrant with awe and adoration, awaiting the arrival of the *lingam*.

Thousands prayed as one, when the first pangs began to show on Baba's face, announcing the great event. A heavy, unreasonably large oval, the symbol of the Siva principle, was persuaded by their sincere yearning to take birth in Baba's physical body and gradually rise along the gullet, to emerge from the mouth and drop into His Hands. Holding it aloft for everybody to see, He announced that it was the symbol of cosmic space, the Space-Time-Causation continuum, in concrete form. It represents both the cause and the final effect. It had a luminous *trisul* inside it. Ecstasy shone on every face. There was no tear of regret for the past, no sigh of anguish for the present, no grimace of anxiety for the future. All were at once alight with delight. Then, they heard the voice of *Bhagawan*, "Cherish this vision of the emergence. Nourish the *ananda* that gushes in your hearts. I assure you that you have indeed been rendered immortal. You need not pass from birth to death again." No one in that mammoth assembly could have been the same, when he rose and walked away. It took days of ministration by *Bhagawan* to send the longing, lingering devotees home.

In 1974, Baba visited Bombay twice - in early March and in mid-May. In March, He blessed a rally of 2,500 *Bala Vikas* children, addressed a gathering of teachers from the university and various colleges, and inaugurated the extension projects of the Industrial Training School and the Agricultural Polytechnic, at *Dharmakshetra*. Speaking during the rally, He said, "Parents, today, are not competent to guide their children. They utter lies, accept bribes, indulge in gambling, and spread scandal. They use foul language and boast aloud. Children must make elders be ashamed of their habits." In May, He presided over the Annual Day of the *Dharmakshetra* School and flew to the town of Ratnagiri, in answer to the prayers of devotees there.

After 27 Years

On His way back from Bombay in March, *Bhagawan* spent two days at Sandur, in the Bellary District of Karnataka. He inaugurated one of the factories, set up by the *Raja Saheb* to exploit the mineral wealth of that area. The *Raja Saheb* welcomed Baba, who had last graced the erstwhile kingdom 27 years ago. He related how, in 1949, when he gave up the reins of the

State, Baba had assured him, “Don’t worry. You will found an organisation bigger than the State of Sandur!” And Baba had now come to bless that organisation.

The summer course in May-June was widely acclaimed as a must for young people, who were about to confront the comedies and tragedies, the follies and frivolities of the human situation, for it strove to equip them with the knowledge of the sages and seers of every land, and bring them into contact with the *Avatar* of the age. On 19th June, two days before the close, Baba answered a question that was baffling analysts - Who is Sai? He revealed Himself to the extent our dull and dithering reason can accept. “I have come to unite all mankind into one family and to affirm and illumine in each of you, your *Atmic* reality... Do not crave from Me trivial, material objects. Instead, crave for Me and you will be rewarded,” He declared. No wonder, General Cariappa, former Commander-in-chief of the armed forces of India, then called upon the thousand participants for three full-throated cheers of, “*Jai Sai Dharma*,” which echoed all around.

The *Dasara* festival commemorates the victory of the gods over the demons, of light over darkness, of knowledge over ignorance. So, the thousands, who throng to His presence, are involved in disciplines, which help them advance towards that victory. The Women’s College at Anantapur staged the play, 'The Bishop’s Candlesticks' and the boys’ college at *Brindavan* (Bangalore) staged a Telugu play ‘*Pandava Vijayam*’. Both plays were based on the sovereign cure that selfless love and devotion can effect. The *Bhagavata Bhakta Samajam*, a group of musicians and speakers drawn together by the bond of brotherhood and the common purpose of fostering 'the perennial philosophy of theism', which holds three-day sessions of its activities, comprising *Vedic*, *Puranic* readings, devotional songs, folk dances, dramas, and musical recitations, was affiliated to the Academy of *Pundits* by *Bhagawan*. They added many attractive items of educative and entertainment value.

It was during the Birthday festival in 1974 that Baba spoke strongly against the use and abuse of funds. He has always been against public appeals for money and has warned devotees against both, asking for and giving such donations. He declared that nothing should be brought for Him, because He needed nothing. “Those who bring or advise others to bring, will be kept away,” He said.

In March, 1975, *Bhagawan* visited Delhi, spending a week to confer *darshan* on the multitudes there, besides making short visits to Amritsar, Chandigarh, and Shimla. He made a visit to Jaipur, to see the progress made by the Sathya Sai College in that city. Then, He

boarded the plane to Bombay, where He unveiled the 40-foot-high pillar erected on the *Dharmakshetra* hill, depicting the harmony of religions. He was at *Prasanthi Nilayam* on 20th March, where thousands were waiting to be blessed by *darshan* of the divinely wrought, *Sivaratri lingam*. On the 25th, He blessed, by His presence, the Sathya Sai College for Women at Anantapur. He advised the residents, “Women students and teachers must be very vigilant that they do not attract the eyes and tongues of men by their dress, movement, or behaviour. Be a little behind in fashion, it does not matter; but, do not outrage the traditions and conventions of our culture.”

With Cows to Gokulam

On 29th August, the Birthday of Lord Krishna, the pages of the *Bhagavata*, which describe His boyhood, were re-enacted at Puttaparthi. The cows, buffaloes, and camels, and also *Sai Geeta*, the elephant, were taken in procession from *Prasanthi Nilayam* to their new home, about a kilometre away. Rural pipes and drums led the line, *Sai Geeta* followed in regal splendour, and the cows, with their attendant *Seva Dal* members, came next. Calves, frisking, jumping, and butting, were held in check by the college students, while the immovable buffaloes stood and stared, until they were pushed and pulled forward. Students of the women’s college and others from *Prasanthi Nilayam* followed behind, singing *bhajans*. Sai Krishna was also there, with devotees singing around Him in joy. They had witnessed, three days earlier, another page of the *Bhagavata* come alive. Incessant, heavy rains had brought the Chitravati into the village and she swelled into swirling anger. Indra, the God of rain, appeared to cast his anger on the cowherd village again, but unlike as in the *Bhagavata* days, this Krishna did not lift a mountain on His palm to shelter man and beast. He disappointed the peaks by walking up to the open terrace of the East *Prasanthi* flats and cast a look at the turbulent waters seeking entry. That was enough. The flood began to recede steadily. During the *Dasara* festival, *Prasanthi Nilayam* was quiet, except for a few extra ceremonies that the inmates were allowed to observe. For, *Bhagawan* could not, in His boundless love, impose on the devotees, however eager, a ten-day *Dasara* stay and another ten-day stay on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Advent, scheduled from 14th to 24th November.

Slice Of All The Maps

“All Roads Lead to Puttaparthi” was the headline in the daily papers. Special trains, reserved coaches, omnibuses, trucks and tractors, scooters and cycles, horse-drawn vehicles and bullock carts, all unloaded thousands of pilgrims in a continuous flux, at the *Nilayam*. From

overseas, thousands alighted at Bangalore and taxied to the place. The prophecy that Baba would be an orange speck in the distant eminence, well-nigh came true. Besides the construction of seven gigantic sheds, hundreds of *ad hoc* shelters hastily contrived, and scores of tents and *pandals* were permitted to fill every patch of available space in and around the township. Five thousand members of the *Seva Dal* stayed on duty night and day, cooking, serving, sweeping, cleaning, guarding, guiding, and helping. Teams of doctors were stationed in temporary clinics and at the hospital. Kitchens for serving eastern and western food were set up.

A rally of *Bala Vikas* pupils (about 1,000 selected from every State) was held. These children had the privilege of marching past *Bhagawan* Himself. More than a thousand *Bala Vikas gurus* attended a two-day conference, which was inaugurated by *Bhagawan*. For the world conference of office bearers, 8,000 delegates came from over fifty nations.

On the 18th, the imposing and inspiring ‘*Gopuram*’, built by devoted hands in the South Indian style of temple architecture, was inaugurated. Baba had the ancient temples of Puttaparthi rebuilt, including the Gopalakrishna temple associated with its history through the ages. That day, all the new, silver idols of the deities installed in the temple were placed on a huge chariot and taken in procession through the village - a great day in the annals of the holy hamlet. The *Vedic* rite of *Purushottama yagnya* was also part of the Jubilee celebrations. The final ceremony of offering the last oblation in the sacred fire, delighted the huge gathering on the Jubilee day.

The world conference was an inspiring experience. Devotees from a multitude of nations and affiliated to various religions, humbly walked up to *Bhagawan* and offered garlands of flowers. Edgar Mitchell, the astronaut who had watched the tragedy of the human race from the moon and remarked, “When will civilization make man realise mankind?” could have derived faith and hope that day, at *Prasanthi Nilayam*. The huge concourse offered *Bhagawan* the solemn pledge of loyalty to His teachings. They promised to cultivate truth, peace, and love, and progress along the path of duty, devotion, and discipline.

On *Sivaratri*, in 1976, Baba announced, while hoisting the *Prasanthi* flag to mark the inauguration of the festival, “The *lingam* that emerges from the Universal Absolute, *Brahman*, is the cosmos - first conceived as a wish, later formed as an idea, and finally adopted as a will. The cosmos is the Will of Siva concretised. You too are, therefore, willed by Siva and formed by Siva from Himself.”

God's Vesture

During the last week of March, *Bhagawan* flew to Hyderabad and stayed at *Sivam*. The elite of the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad were invited by the Sathya Sai *Seva Samiti* to share the grace of *Bhagawan*. The meeting was presided over by Shri Mohanlal Sukhadia, then Governor of Andhra Pradesh. He said that the task, for which *Bhagawan* had incarnated, was to “put humanity back on the rails”. In His discourse, Baba emphasised, “There is no East or West distinguishable on the globe. All mankind is one. The cosmos is energy felt as matter. Man relies on his sensory experiences and on the inferences that he draws from those experiences. Therefore, he lacks the knowledge and awareness of experiences beyond the sensory world.” On the Telugu New Year Day, *Bhagawan* addressed a vast gathering of devotees at ‘*Sivam*’. He blessed the *Seva Dal* members, who had established all over the cities on that day, no less than a hundred First Aid Centres, for rendering service to the ailing and the distressed. He inaugurated a boarding school for children on Castle Hill, where a historic building had been acquired by the *Samiti* for the purpose. The school is run on the lines laid down by *Bhagawan*, who insists that children must learn humility, service, and reverence, imbibe our ancient, cultural heritage, be disciplined and devoted, participate in *bhajans*, and take only *satwic* food, even while mastering the prescribed, academic curriculum. Dedicated teachers serve the children, adoring their assignment as the ‘worship of Sai’. Referring to the arrogant vandalism of modern man, which has led to the pollution of rivers and oceans, the advance of deserts into arable areas, and the desecration of forests, *Bhagawan* said in a discourse on 6th May, “Nature is God’s vesture. The Universe is a university for man. Man should treat nature with reverence. He has no right to talk of conquering nature, or exploiting the forces of nature. He must proceed to visualise in nature its God. All are but temporary, short-term tenants in God’s estate.”

Bombay had the good fortune of welcoming Baba on 12th May, the anniversary of the inauguration of *Dharmakshetra*, which also happened to be sacred Thursday and luckily enough, the triple holy day of the Buddhists - the day Gautama was born, the day He became the Buddha, and the day of His *Parinirvana* (Liberation).

The Blue Mountains

The 1976 ‘Summer Course on Indian Culture and Spirituality’ was held at *Nandanavanam* in Ootacamund, in the Nilgiri Hills. It was scheduled to last fifteen days and the participants, who numbered about two hundred, were selected from the Sathya Sai colleges. One feature of

the course was that the role of lecturers was assigned to the senior students, who spoke on the *Vedanta*, the *Gita*, the *Purushottama Yagnya*, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Hanuman, the *Bhagavata*, etc. after deep study and reflection, with clear understanding. Dr. S. Bhagavantam pronounced the project “a resounding success.” Subsequently, the students spread out for social service to the city bus stand, railway station, and the market area. Their *sadhana* of cleaning the area was so efficient, that the Municipal Council passed a resolution, expressing its grateful appreciation and communicated it to the organisers.

When the camp was concluding, *Bhagawan* disclosed to the students at a special meeting, details about His school days and His relations with His parents, teachers, and school-mates, and with the brother, who was His ‘guardian’. As He was describing the role that He had planned for the students seated before Him and exhorting them to cultivate such qualities as fortitude, detachment, sympathy, humility, and reverence that He Himself had held forth as a living example, even as a child, He waved His hand and created a silver plaque with the map of India embossed on it, which had Puttaparthi, Bombay, Bhubaneshwar, Madras, Delhi, Calcutta, Shillong, Hyderabad, and other cities marked on it by means of brilliant gems embedded in the silver. *Bhagawan* announced that those were some of the places, from where the Sai message would be propagated by them in coming years. *Bhagawan*’s discourses were mainly on the strategy of Lord Krishna in relation to the Kaurava-Pandava conflict, as depicted in the Mahabharata. Since we have Lord Krishna with us, now and since the conflict between the two forces of *dharma* (righteousness) and *adharma* (unrighteousness), symbolising *daivic* (godly) and *asuric* (demonic) tendencies, was even today confronting mankind, *Bhagawan*’s analysis of His methods and motives in the epic was part of His present message itself.



Manasa Bhajare

Sri Sailam

While at Ootacamund, Baba motored down the *ghats* (slopes) on the Kerala Coast to the historic town of Calicut, famous as the town, where Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer, had landed in 1498 A.D. Thirty miles north of Calicut, on a hill that is embraced by the sea on three sides and which was named ‘Sri Sailam’ by Rabindranath Tagore, who spent some days there, the Sri Sathya Sai Trust in Kerala had planned to construct a *vidya peeth* (public school), to provide education on Sai lines. *Bhagawan* graciously laid the foundation stone and blessed the project. More than 30,000 people had gathered to be blessed by His *darshan* and *sambhashan* (speech).

Gurupurnima, a time when spiritual aspirants all over the world welcome their preceptor into their hearts, found *Bhagawan* at Puttaparthi. The students and teachers of the high school, which had been established there to commemorate Mother Easwaramma, who bore the *Avatar*, were blessed by *Bhagawan* on that auspicious day. The state Minister for Education declared that it was a significant step forward in *Bhagawan’s* programme of increasing facilities, for educating rural folk. *Bhagawan* proceeded to Puttaparthi village, where a new

hamlet of a hundred houses had been built for the *harijans*, whose hutments had been washed away by the angry floods of the Chitravati, some six months earlier. *Bhagawan* told the huge gathering of devotees present that every living being is a cell in the cosmic body of God and that castes that are described in the *Vedas* as forming the limbs of God, form an integral part of the whole. He said that, worshipping the feet of God is best done by serving the poorest and lowliest among men.

On all the ten days of *Dasara* festival, 1976, *Bhagawan* spoke on the mind, its vagaries, its potentialities, and on the *sadhana*, which can straighten and strengthen it. In the midst of the busy schedule of the *Vedic yagnya*, *Bhagawan* found time to meet more than three hundred district presidents of the Sathya Sai *Seva* organisation, who had journeyed thither from all the states of India. They had two sessions with Him, during which *Bhagawan* stressed the need for discipline and gave them advice on many aspects of their duties and responsibilities.

This *Dasara* was rendered memorable, when *Bhagawan* defined what He characterised as the ‘**Sai Religion**’, while elaborating upon the impact of the *mati* (mind) on *mata* (creed). “The religion that feeds and fosters all religions and emphasises their common greatness is the **Sai Religion**,” He said.

Global Bhajan

During the Second World Conference, held during the Golden Jubilee week at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, a cardinal decision was taken by the devotees that a twenty-four-hour *bhajan*, emanating from devout hearts gathered in more than 8,000 centres, in over forty-five nations from New Zealand to Iceland and from Taiwan to Trinidad, would girdle the globe. The day for this universal prayer was fixed as the Saturday-Sunday, immediately preceding the birthday of *Bhagawan* every year. To a *bhajan* gathering at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, Baba said, “*Bhajan* must be as continuous as breathing. In fact, the breath is ever engaged in *bhajan*, for it is constantly repeating the fundamental *mantra*, ‘*Soham*’ (I am That). Twenty-four hours is just a wink, when measured against a life-time. Your life is a song on the glory of God. Sing it from your soul, sing it aloud, sing it in chorus, so that the atmosphere polluted by greed, hatred, and envy can be purified by the holy vibrations.”

All the villages around Puttaparthi now look forward to the Birthday week. For them, this sacred occasion is heralded by *Rathotsvam* (the chariot festival), in which the idols of all the deities worshipped in the temples of Puttaparthi are taken in procession through the crowded streets of the village, to the delight of everyone - men, women, and children - whatever their

caste or creed. On the Birthday itself, *Bhagawan* proceeds to the *samadhi* (tomb) of His parents and distributes food and clothes to the villagers.

On His birthday, in 1976, *Bhagawan* declared that miracles are the spontaneous and natural expressions of *Avatarhood*: “Rama means, ‘He who confers joy’; Krishna means, ‘He who attracts’. Every act of Mine, conferring joy or attracting the heart, becomes a miracle in your phraseology. The *Avatar* comes to reform and reconstruct, and His ‘miracle’ invariably has this result. The *chamatkara* (miracle) has as its aim, the *samskara* (refinement) of mankind. How is that achieved by the *Avatar*? Everyone so drawn is persuaded through love, to love all (since all are the same *Atman*, encased in distinct bodies) and to transform that love into *paropakara* (service). As a result, their minds get sanctified, their intellects clarified, and their hearts purified. Thus, they are able to realise their core, the *atman*, which is but a wave in the ocean, the universal, eternal, absolute *Paramatman*. This is *sakshatkara* (realisation), the goal of human life.”

Every December, on the fifth day of the month, the Sri Sathya Sai *Seva* organisation celebrates ‘Medical Service Day’, each centre drawing up its own programme, according to the needs of the area and the resources - human and material - that it can command. Gifts are made of oxygen cylinders to hospitals, wheel-chairs for the physically-handicapped, and *bhajan* cassettes and books for the blind, besides projects of medical check-up for slum dwellers and rural folk that are initiated on that day. In 1976, *Bhagawan* blessed those who gave and those who received. He sounded a warning against the indiscriminate use of medicines and medical drugs. He advised the people to resort to the cheaper and often, more effective methods of fasting or dieting, *yogasanas* (postures prescribed by *yoga*) or physical exercises, and desist from such deleterious habits, like smoking and drinking. “Anxiety, worry, and tension have to be overcome in order to gain and preserve health,” He said.

Large numbers of Christians from the East and the West come to spend Christmas and New Year in the immediate presence of *Bhagawan*, for as they have found, this is the only place, where “peace on Earth and goodwill among men” can be experienced. “Christ is only another name for the *ananda* principle in the heart of man,” Baba said. “Meditate on Him and seek His love for all living beings. Let Him be born in all His divine splendour in your heart. Then, you can celebrate Christmas in humble thanks-giving and sincere adoration, with penitence and prayer. Do not desecrate the day with drink and dance, revelry and gluttony,” He said to the gathering of devotees on the New Year Day, 1977. He created a medallion that had Mary and the child Jesus on one side and Joseph on the other. It showed the sanctity of

Mary and the sturdy simplicity of Joseph. It was indeed an exhilarating moment.

Sivaratri, 1977 was celebrated at *Prasanthi Nilayam*. *Bhagawan* called upon the devotees to, “strive, for that is your duty; struggle, for that is your assignment; yearn, for that is the path.” He exhorted them to overcome sloth, dullness, and prejudice, which hide in the darkness that they create, the beauty of the unity of every individual consciousness in the Divine. “All I’s are only reflections of the One I,” He explained. Meanwhile, a crystal oval, the *Sivaratri lingam*, emerged from within Him, interrupting the *bhajan* He was singing to enthuse the gathering. He held it before the gathering of astonished devotees. “It is the symbol of emergence of the five primordial elements,” He clarified. “The *lingam* is the essence of all attributes and names. It is the formless with form, the nameless with name, the primal emergent from the Divine,” He explained. Next morning, He announced the unpleasant news that He had decided against continuing, in subsequent years, the celebrations of *Mahasivaratri*, which was drawing from all over the world countless numbers of pilgrims, eager to benefit from *darshan* of the Divine manifestation and to look on the ‘symbol of the cosmos’, created by Siva Himself. But, seeing that thousands, unable to get even a near glimpse, were returning disappointed every year, after journeying long distance over sea and land, spending large sums of money, and suffering much hardship, *Bhagawan*, out of His infinite mercy, directed that in the coming years, they might celebrate the ‘Night of Siva’ in their own native places, where He would certainly be with them.

Walter Cowan Block

On 28th April, the Cowan Block of the hostel at the *Brindavan* campus was inaugurated by the President of India, Sri B.D. Jatti, himself an ardent devotee of *Bhagawan* ever since the days, when he was in the ministerial cabinet of Karnataka. The hostel was built within the campus itself, because *Bhagawan* could not deny the students of His college the proximity to Him that they ardently prayed for. Elsie Cowan was present at the function and expressed her immense joy at the name of *Saraswati* (the goddess of learning), which Baba had given to the hermitage to commemorate her husband, Walter Cowan, whom He Himself had resurrected. “We too, who reside in this hostel, are awaiting resurrection,” said a student in his exultation, that day. The President was elated at the increasing pace of the Sai era in education. He welcomed the Sai colleges, which emphasise moral and spiritual progress, highlight a variety of skills, and promote projects of social service. He praised all those students, who had won high academic distinctions and at the same time, mastered with equal enthusiasm the techniques of farming, animal husbandry, dairying, and canteen management, besides

yogasanas, elocution, music, nursing, histrionics, and photography. Architecture is said to be the art of perpetuating song in stone; the Cowan Block is indeed a *bhajan* in brick and mortar. One cannot but sense the presence of both penitence and grace, in the dormitories, corridors, and halls. “Fill your heads and hearts with light and love, rather than mere facts and figures,” says Baba. The hostel is reservoir of both the light of knowledge and the delight of *Seva*.

Since some years, the sixth of May, the day the mother of the *Avatar* bade farewell to the world, is known the world over as Easwamma Day and is dedicated to the service of the children from *Bala Vikas* groups, chumming with children from the slums in games and play, visiting children’s wards in hospitals, and singing *bhajans* in homes meant for the retarded, ailing, and delinquent children. Like rays of light, they carry the sparkle of joy into other’s gloom. They also offer the elders and present toddlers the pictures they paint, the models they make, the pets they play with, and the floral designs they assemble. They sing and dance, they mimic, recite, and enjoy themselves.

The Ramayana

The summer course in 1977 was based on the Ramayana, the epic reservoir of *dharma*. The first seven days were devoted to an intensive study of various versions of the Ramayana, in the languages of India as well as those of nations to the south and south-east of India. *Bhagawan* discoursed on the ideals embodied in the heroic personalities, described in the Ramayana. Over 40 students from Sai colleges spoke to the large concourse of participants, with a large sprinkling of learners from overseas, on the saints and the philosophers of the world. For thirty days, the students, boys and girls from colleges of India and abroad, lived in the *Brindavan* campus, away from the noisy and polluting distractions of the city, in an atmosphere of devotion and dedication, of prayer and meditation, of love and service, of mutual help and encouragement. *Bhagawan* would be amidst them in the lecture hall, at lunch and at dinner, during their hours of service in the villages around *Brindavan*, and during the elocution and quiz competitions on Sundays. As many students confessed, they experienced both “Immensity and Eternity”. On the final day, when the students were sobbing in sorrow, Baba comforted and consoled them with gifts of grace, assuring them that since they had installed Him in their hearts, He would ever be with them, guarding and guiding, wherever they may be. “Never forget God... never believe the world as reality... never be afraid of death,” He told them at the valedictory session.

During the ten days of *Dasara*, 1977, *Bhagawan* elaborated on *shanti* (inner peace) and the

means of getting established in it. His discourses traced the faults and failings that foul the body, the mind, and the faculty of reason in man. He analysed the habits and traits that disturbed and depressed the emotions of man and prescribed the exercises, by which physical, mental, emotional, and occupational equipoise could be gained. He also referred to the conflicts created by ethical and philosophical schools, as well as by fanatical loyalty to particular forms and names of the one, omnipresent God.

The seven-day, *Vedic* rite of *Gnyana Yagnya*, which forms an important part of the *Dasara* festival, was inaugurated by Sri Govind Narain, the Governor of Karnataka. An indication of the surge of devotion to the *Avatar*, which binds human hearts 'though they come from the ends of the Earth', was the joint recital of songs on Baba, both in English and Sanskrit, by Ida Marion St. John from California and Gita Orescan from Germany. On *Vijayadashami*, the tenth day of victory (*Dasara*), *Bhagawan* allowed a few poets to recite their verses, composed in various languages. Mrs. Zeba Bashiruddin, a professor of English from Hyderabad, sang a few of her mellifluous, Urdu poems on Baba.

Mention must also be made here of the announcement that was made that day, about *Bhagawan* taking under His benign guardianship a number of educational institutions of the *Loka Seva Vrinda* in Karnataka, to be run on patriotic and spiritual lines by a band of His own devoted teachers. The Vrinda was orphaned by the death, in a car accident, of its founder and promoter, Sri Madiyala Narayana Bhat, an educationist who had sought to reinforce the secularist curriculum laid down by the State, with the spiritual ideals of duty, devotion, and discipline.

The Wedding Knot

Dasara at *Prasanthi Nilayam* fills devotees with reverence for the heritage they live in. The Birthday inspires them to reshape their lives, as desired by the divine incarnation. The week ushered in with a big bang of blessedness. Baba had made it known that indigent parents from the villages around *Prasanthi Nilayam* could celebrate the weddings of their children, without incurring any expense. He would be the priest, parent, and Providence. The call was heard by parents of all castes, who had been knocking at the doors of astrologers and money-lenders. When Baba Himself was the High Priest, no astrologer need be consulted about the future of the wedded couples. When He Himself was Providence, no money-lender need be approached to get the funds needed for celebrating the wedding. Hearing this, young men hurried to the homes of prospective brides and saw to it that their parents did not let go of this

miraculous chance to have the marriages celebrated in Baba's presence.

One hundred and thirty four couples were registered at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, in a few days. Baba gifted a wedding *sari* each to all the brides, much to their surprise at receiving this costly present. The grooms got *dhotis* (men's wear) and *angavastrams* (cloths slung over the shoulder) with borders of *zari* (brocade). They were also given silk shirts, stitched to size by tailors brought to the *Nilayam* for this very purpose. They were then taken to the *Kalyana Mandap* (a structure raised for the purpose of auspicious events or functions) on the outskirts of Puttaparthi village and seated in rows under a decorated *pandal*. Girl students from the Sathya Sai College in Anantapur acted as 'ladies-in-waiting' for the brides and boys from the Sathya Sai College in Bangalore were the best men for the grooms. *Vedic* hymns were recited by *Brahmin* priests, during the wedding rite. The couples garlanded each other, symbolic of union in wedlock. Baba gave each groom a *mangalsutra* (auspicious thread worn by married women) and as it was put around the neck of the bride and knotted, He sprinkled on the heads of the couple, grains of rice. *Bhagawan* gave each bride another *sari*, besides bangles, *kumkum*, and *haldi*, which are all a must for her in wedded life. He also gave each couple plates and cups for their new home. Then, they poured handfuls of rice on each other's heads - a rite to ensure prosperity. The *sari* and *angavastram* ends were knotted together to symbolise the union of hearts for the joint pilgrimage ahead.

The 134 couples, then, slowly made their way in procession to the *Mandir*, with folk dance, pipe, tom-tom, and *bhajan* parties in the lead. Later, along with their kinsfolk, they all had a wedding feast at the *Nilayam* itself, oblivious of any differences of caste, or economic, or educational backgrounds. It was a heartening experience for all those who have the welfare of mankind at heart. It was a festival of love, an object lesson for all those who have faith in the overpowering impact of love. Now, a large number of *Seva Samitis* are arranging, under their own auspices, simple weddings for poor villagers.



Mandap constructed over the rock

Fury Of Wind And Water

Another event that preceded the birthday was the 8th All India Conference of the Sai *Seva* Organizations. While the celebrations were in progress, it became known that a terrific cyclone had hit the Andhra Coast. A tidal wave over 20 feet high had swept over the coast and spent itself about thirty to forty miles inland. The devastation, inflicted by both wind and water, was enormous. Tens of thousands died, caught by the waves. A large number of cattle lost their lives and coconut groves over several square miles were toppled. Scores of villages were washed off the face of the Earth. The few who survived were confronted by disease, despair, and decimation. *Bhagawan* directed the *Seva Dal* from Andhra to rush to the area, even while the festival was progressing at the *Nilayam*.

Truckloads of cloth, rugs, garments, and whatever could be laid hold of were got ready to be transported by devotees to the affected areas. More than eight lakh rupees poured into the bank for relief work. Four relief camps were quickly established in the afflicted areas, along with a complement of trained *Seva Dal* members, both men and women, including teams of doctors. Remote spots, which had been isolated by the floods, were selected. I witnessed a massive transport of provisions and materials, in the form of head loads, by devotees. They

had to wade through slush and mire, braving the stench of rotting corpses and carcasses. Indeed, the first task was to bury or burn the dead, lying in heaps on the ground and caught in trees and bushes. Kitchens, which provided food for over five thousand forlorn victims, kept working for more than a month, in four strategic centres - Kattamajeru Gudapalem, Adavuladeevu, Ganapavaram, and Barrankula - in the region lashed by the furious elements. From some kitchens, cooked food was taken to even more remote places and the victims were fed, wherever they were found. Children were given milk and special foods. Besides these, the *Seva Dal* erected hundreds of hutments to enable people to continue their normal occupations of fishing and farming. They were given sets of kitchen utensils and cooking vessels, as well as garments, reed mats, and rugs. *Bhagawan* assured the children, who were orphaned by the calamity, that He would be their guardian. When the relief centres were closed, the exhausted *Seva Dal* workers gladly noted that the faces of the village folk around them were lit with gratitude, contentment, and devotion towards *Bhagawan*. In order to avoid such colossal loss of life in future, *Bhagawan* directed the *seva* organisations to build at each place, where they served, a community hall for the people, which would serve as a shelter whenever wind and wave rushed furiously onto land.

When the holy day of *Sivaratri* approached in 1978, the people remembered the previous year's announcement by *Bhagawan*, regarding the cancellation of the ceremony. But, the prospect of such deprivation was so painful, that thousands would not at first believe it. So, they continued to stream into *Prasanthi Nilayam* in time for the occasion. Rumours were afloat that *Bhagawan* would be at *Brindavan* that day. Maybe, *Sivaratri* would be celebrated at *Brindavan*? Or would it be at Hyderabad? But, *Bhagawan* did not oblige. He was in the Nilgiri Hills and returned only two days later.

College Campus

The magnificent row of buildings, which comprise the Sri Sathya Sai College near *Brindavan*, was opened at a joyous and colourful function by *Bhagawan*, on 19th of May, 1978. The Karnataka Minister for Education, Sri Subbaya Shetty, inaugurated the library building with the *Pragnyana Pradarshan* on the first floor. The *Pradarshan* contains an impressive collection of charts, drawings, and pictures, showing phases of *japa*, *dhyana*, *yoga*, and *puja*. It has photographs and models of the holy places of India. Books of all major religions and portraits of saints, mystics, and thinkers of all faiths adorn the place. The sayings and teachings of *Bhagawan*, explained and illustrated, find a place of prominence. To be among these records means being reminded of the inevitable journey to God - that oft-

forgotten goal becomes clear once again.

The auditorium was inaugurated by Srimati Govind Narain, while Sri Govind Narain, the Governor of Karnataka, inaugurated the 'Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality', which commenced on the same day. The discourses during the first week were all on the *Bhagavata Purana*, which is about the former *avatars* of the Lord, including Krishna.

Bhagawan said that, the youth of the country suffered the imposition of pointless and purposeless curricula. They were being shaped, in colleges, into recalcitrant unemployables and sent out into the world with begging bowls, called degrees & diplomas. They saw through foreign eyes, thought along borrowed concepts, and held only film stars as their ideals. They had become rootless saplings, drifting with every whiff of wind. Their patriotism was not even skin-deep, for they had no knowledge of, or love for, their traditions and culture, their poets and saints, their fellow men and homeland. Dr. Benito Reyes, President of the World University in Ojai, California, who attended the course and stayed with the participants, commented in high appreciation on the benefits derived from it by Westerners, who had no knowledge of the depth and vastness, the value and validity of the spiritual message of India, so vividly perceptible in *Bhagawan*. He quoted T.S. Eliot and asked, "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" and answered, "It is here."

The 665

No sooner had the summer course ended, than the organisers were persuaded to accept another assignment, which was more spectacular and more fundamental - managing at *Brindavan* a ten-day orientation course on spiritual education, for 665 teachers from the elementary schools of Andhra Pradesh, deputed for training by the State government. The government had planned a well-nigh revolutionary project of recasting the elementary schools (for children between the ages of six and twelve years) in the entire state, providing special emphasis on prayer, music, dance, painting, modelling, and parent cooperation with the teacher, so that the school house became a house of work, worship, and wisdom, of love and service, of spiritual discipline and *yoga*. Dr. Chenna Reddy, first as Governor of Uttar Pradesh and later, as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, knew about the *Bala Vikas* classes, conducted by trained *gurus* of the Sri Sathya Sai *Seva* Organisations, and had watched the children grow into self-reliant, co-operative, and service-minded youth, revering parents, elders, and teachers. So, he prayed to Baba to give the 665 teachers an orientation course,

holding the camp in the college campus at *Brindavan* itself, so that they may benefit by the impact of His grace and from exposure to the simple, unaffected band of students, whom He had trained as examples of His message.

The teachers were chosen at random from the outlying villages of every district. They had no time to prepare for the journey into a vastly different linguistic and climatic region, the state of Karnataka, nor were they aware of the discipline, the do's and don'ts, spontaneously honoured at the *Brindavan* campus. But, the ten-day stay was amazingly alchemic. Baba entered their hearts and made them soft and pure. Several deep-rooted habits, such as smoking, eating harmful foods, and arguing aloud, were jettisoned without a tear, while a sense of dedication was added to their professional skills. They began to feel like patriotic warriors, who were engaged in driving away the demons of sloth and selfishness from schools, restoring to children their heritage that they had been denied so long. *Bhagawan* had planned lectures by devoted teachers, in the morning hours. He formed ten groups of thirty teachers each, who met on alternate days to discuss among themselves the feasibility and necessity of the suggestions that arose in these lectures. The reports of these discussions were placed before *Bhagawan* in the evening and *Bhagawan* would choose some outstanding conundrum that required further analysis and clarification by Him.

Bhagawan also personally supervised the teachers' boarding and lodging, and inquired about their health and requirements. He gave woollen rugs to those who had not brought any with them, sets of books to some, and cassettes of His *bhajans* and discourses to others, who had access to cassette players in their villages. He posed for photographs along with teachers and trainees from each district and also, arranged for each one of them to receive a free copy on the day the camp ended. Most of the teachers desired to visit Mysore and Puttaparthi, besides going round Bangalore itself, but they could not afford the cost. So, they appealed to the Government of Andhra Pradesh to loan them the money, which they all agreed to repay out of their salaries. When He learned of this, Baba Himself arranged for buses and saw to it that they were loaded with hampers of food and plenty of fruits, with which the teachers could regale themselves while on the road.

The teachers were filled with admiration at the intelligent and hearty response they received from the student volunteers, deputed to attend to their needs. They concluded that it was the love that *Bhagawan* embodied and showered on those whom He chose that had moulded the students in His college into young men, of whom the nation could be proud. When the teachers left the campus and the presence of Baba, they were all in tears.

The Face Of Divinity

Towards the end of the course, on the eighth day, the trainees had the singular good fortune of listening to a talk, given by Dr. Frank G. Baronowski of Arizona University, on the uniqueness of *Bhagawan's* aura. This speech equipped them with faith in the divinity of Baba - a precious possession that would fortify them throughout their lives. Dr. Baronowski said, "I was not brought up in any belief, though I am a Christian by birth and a Roman Catholic. The scientific community in my country finds it difficult to accept God. 'It is not scientific,' they assert. The aura that *Swami* projects is not that of a man. The white was more than twice the size of any man's, the blue was practically limitless, and then, there were gold and silver bands beyond even those, far beyond the building, right up to the horizon! I am risking my reputation, when I make this statement. Two days ago, right outside this hall, I looked into His eyes. They had a glow in them. It was clear to me that I had looked into the face of Divinity. If ever I can use the phrase, 'I have seen Love walking on two feet,' it is here."

On 14th August, 1978, *Bhagawan* formed the Loka Seva Institution into a new Trust, the Sri Sathya Sai Loka Seva Trust, of which He agreed to be the President. This He did at Muddenahalli, where too there are schools and hostels maintained as part of the Loka Seva complex. *Bhagawan* concluded the formalities of the transfer and change of name. He later addressed the members of the Trust, teachers, and students, "This holy institution was established by Narayana Bhat quite early in his life. He was ever eager to offer pure and unselfish service, so he planted the seed, which has now grown into this tree. We have arrived at the stage, when we can eat the ripe fruit, but this tree has also to be well cared for by us."

The Mosque

The Muslim festival of Ramzan in 1978 was a landmark in the history of Puttaparthi, for the Muslims of that village celebrated Id in the mosque that *Bhagawan* had built for them. It is a simple and spacious mosque with an ambience of spiritual fragrance. Professor Bashiruddin of Osmania University expressed the gratitude of the Muslims of the region and described to the vast gathering how the impact of *Bhagawan's* teachings had made him a more understanding practitioner of the message of the Holy Koran. Janab Fakhruddin, convener of the Village Muslim Committee, offered thanks to *Bhagawan* for this gift of love, saying, "We had earlier to walk four miles to Bukkapatnam, through sun and rain, slush and sandy river bed, to recite our prayers." *Bhagawan* told the Muslims that the real significance of the

Ramzan fast was to be near God and detached from sensual desires. He also said that, the Ramzan month was one, during which the Holy Koran was communicated to Muhammed. The message of *Bhagawan* is that the truly religious will neither deny the validity of any particular religion or group of religions, nor declare that salvation can be secured through one path only. So, He encourages all those who have faith to march forward along their chosen paths, whichever religion they may follow or be born in, since all spiritual paths lead to the same goal.

Baba's grace is boundless and universal. So, people from all lands and followers of all creeds gather at His feet. Several sects and communities of India, who have special festivals to commemorate their regional deities, also discard age-old boundaries and conventions, and gather in thousands, wherever Baba may happen to be, feeling such celebration to be truly meaningful in His presence. The Onam festival of the Malayalam-speaking Keralites - Hindus and Christians - is held by thousands year after year, with all the orthodox observances. *Bhagawan* has thrown new light on the legend, which forms the background of *Onam*. What was for long a season of folk play and dance, has now taken on the habilitment of a spiritually-elevating, *sadhana* week.

Prolong Your Life Span

Dasara 1978 began as usual with the hoisting of the *Prasanthi* flag over *Prasanthi Mandir* and the celebration of the Annual Day of the Sri Sathya Sai Hospital in the evening, that same day. *Bhagawan* touched the hearts of the massive gathering of devotees present, when He gave them the most worthwhile reason for preserving and promoting their health. "The one grand reason for maintaining health, which I am urging you to do, is that you have yet to witness and delight over many more *Leelas* and *mahimas* (expressions and manifestations of divine qualities), far surpassing those you have witnessed so far, and many more wonders, victories, and triumphs. You can thrill with ecstatic delight, when you witness these. So, guard yourselves carefully. Maintain good health and keep your hearts ever filled with joy," He said.

During the discourses related to the *Vedic yagnya*, which lasted for a full week, Baba expounded the meanings of various scriptural passages. The verses from the *Gita*, which He prescribed for repetition while saying grace before every meal, were given special emphasis by Him, for they remind one of the immanence of God in the food made ready, in the fire that was used for cooking it, in the cook, in the one who ate it and in the activities, which the eater

could fulfil as a result of the strength that the food conferred on both his body and brain.

Dasara is an occasion, when thousands from all over the country and abroad see for themselves the triple ideal of Sai education - Duty, Devotion, and Discipline - practised by the boys and girls of *Bhagawan's* colleges. They can listen to these students speak profoundly on a variety of topics and share their own intimate experiences of love and service towards Sai and towards all those upon whom He bestows His grace. They can also be audience to plays, choirs, and orchestral music, by students from all parts of India and from places as different and far apart as Hawaii, Fiji, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Libya. Integration of mankind is no more an arm-chair dream; it is being realised here.

Save Villages From Cities

Twenty-five thousand people gathered at *Prasanthi Nilayam* for the Birthday festival, in 1978. *Bhagawan* emphasised that it was not because of the Birthday that so many people had assembled, but it was because they assembled that the Birthday was celebrated! "I have no interest in publicising the date, on which this body, which I willed for a purpose, appeared among mankind. I want each of you to celebrate the day I am enshrined in your hearts, as My birthday," He said. To those who wished Him a 'Happy Birthday', He replied that, "This is a superfluous wish, for I am always happy."

The festival included a musical recitation by students, with the college orchestra providing excellent accompaniment to a narration of the story of the Sai *Avatar*. Baba exhorted everyone to transform 'daily living' into 'truly living', visualising God as the very breath of life. *Bhagawan* had called delegations of *Seva Dal* units (comprising men and women living on Sai ideals and trained for service to the distressed, the disabled, and the diseased) from all over India. He directed them to engage themselves more in rural areas, where the evils of city life were becoming rampant. Villagers are misled; they imagine the city-dwellers to be happier amidst cinema houses and cars, immersed in exotic and intoxicating life styles. They do not realise that their physical, moral, and economic stamina is being corroded by gambling and drinking, by noise and slogans, and by the rowdiness that thrives on such life patterns. "Save them from moral and physical pollution," He commanded. When one of the district conveners suggested that each *Seva Dal* member should always carry with him a mini first-aid box, so that he could serve people more often, Baba modified the contents of the box, saying, "Carry in it a few tablets of discrimination and detachment, an ounce or two of sense-control, a packet of love, and a bandage strip of fortitude. Only then can you effectively

render first-aid to people, suffering from a stroke of ego or a bout of greed, a jaundiced vision or an allergy to serving others.”

On 28th November, 1978, Baba laid the foundation-stone of the College of Arts, Science, and Commerce, at *Prasanthi Nilayam*. In the northeast corner, *Bhagawan* laid the first line of stones, after sanctifying the spot and placing there nine precious gems, created by Him in the palm of His hand. Baba wills that every college must have an auditorium as magnificent as the college itself and also, a special building as impressive as the rest, for the library. He considers the library to be a fundamental part of every educational institution. He selected Sri Ramanathan Chettiar of Madurai and the Rajmata of Navanagar, for laying the foundation stones of these two allied constructions.

Isa-Sai

Christmas brings thousands into the presence of Baba, for they find in Him the teacher, who can reveal the true glory of Jesus and lead them along the path illumined by the son of God. Baba told them that day, “Carols and candles, readings from the Bible, and staging plays about the incidents from the life of Jesus are not enough.”

When Jesus declared that the bread of the Last Supper was His flesh and the wine His blood, what did He really mean? He meant that every being alive, with flesh and blood, was He Himself and ought to be treated so. That is to say, every living being is divine. Therefore, no distinction should be made between separate physical bodies as good or bad, friend or foe, we or they. Baba also revealed that Jesus’ actual name assigned to Him by His parents was Isa. And Isa, when constantly repeated, echoes Sai! Both words mean Ishwara (God). Baba said, “In the Tibetan Monastery, where Jesus spent many years, His name is recorded as Isa, which means ‘Lord of all living beings’.”

The Tamils celebrated their New Year on 14th January, 1979, so Baba flew to Madras to bless them on that holy day and to inaugurate the construction of a *Dharmakshetra* (an arena of righteousness) in that city, which was to be called ‘*Sundaram*’, to complete the series, which had started with ‘*Sathyam*’ in Bombay and continued with ‘*Sivam*’ in Hyderabad. The festival also has the overtone of a harvest celebration, as the farmers of Tamil Nadu offer gratitude to the bullocks that helped them grow grain and the cows that gave them milk. They boil the milk on ceremonial hearths and allow it to boil and spill over, as a symbol of abundance and happy sharing. The Telugu New Year Day was celebrated in March and Baba heightened the joy of the celebration, by being present at Hyderabad for a full week. He

called upon the city-dwellers to serve the villages, to which they owed much, by helping the farmers and artisans to combat poverty, disease, and exploitation.

Meanwhile, on 30th January, 1979, *Swami* entered the west coast harbour town of Mangalore in Karnataka State, to proceed to Alike, the headquarters of the Sri Sathya Sai Loka *Seva* Trust, which runs two huge, educational complexes for children, mostly from rural regions. One complex is at Alike itself in the midst of the valley, nestling among the spurs of the Western *Ghats*. The other one is at Muddenahalli, on the foothills of the mountain range around the Nandi Peak, in the plains to the east. Alike is a dream come true, a vision vivified by faith and hope, as if divine grace had shaped itself into its dormitories, playgrounds, libraries, classrooms, and gardens - a hermitage, where the heart of the late Madiyala Narayana Bhat throbs in the activity of the increasing band of devoted teachers, an academy with palm groves, whispering 'Sai Ram' to every breath of wind.

Led Into The Light

Baba's discourses dispelled the gloom that had descended upon the district, when its patron, Narayana Bhat, was killed in a car accident. He restored joy in the hearts of the students (numbering over a thousand), the more than sixty teachers, several well-wishers of the project (who had cooperated with Narayana Bhat, its founder, and stood by him through thick and thin), the grateful parents and guardians of the thousands of boys and girls, whose careers had been shaped by the Loka *Seva* institutions, the old students, who were rendering service in various fields of activity, and the farmers, traders, and workers from the village and plantations lying in the region. Baba likened Alike to a place of pilgrimage, when He noted that, "You pay sincere attention to the development of the children under your care and transmute them into worthy children of India." Before returning to *Brindavan*, Baba visited Puttur and Chokkadi villages near Alike, Mangalore, and Manipal, in the same coastal district. At Manipal, the centre of a popular educational complex built around well-equipped medical and engineering colleges, Baba found at 11 p.m. at night, a gathering of at least fifteen thousand people waiting for *darshan*. Such was their longing to have a glimpse of the Lord and listen to His voice.

The 'Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality in 1979', laid emphasis on the *Bhagavad Gita*. For one full week, attention was concentrated on this universal scripture, which propounds and elaborates upon the three paths of *karma* (action), *bhakti* (devotion), *gnyana* (knowledge). *Bhagawan's* daily discourse provided simple and satisfying

commentaries on the philosophical principles underlying the teachings of Lord Krishna to His diffident and deluded warrior-friend, Arjuna. *Swami*, like Krishna Himself, exhorted the student participants to do their best, without calculating the odds, and leave the rest to God. He declared, as Krishna had done on the battlefield, that victory is the reward for the brave and that bravery is drawn from the *Atman*, the Inner Spring. Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer of the Supreme Court of India, while inaugurating the month-long course in the presence of *Bhagawan*, said, “It is time that we wean our colleges from becoming houses of vice and violence, with students getting addicted to drugs and cultivating only materialistic desires. Baba’s balm of *prema* must penetrate *karma*, kindle *gnyana*, and sublimate into *dharma*.” He spoke on the inadequacy of science and its inability to restore peace, morality, and brotherhood. He stressed that India must discover her soul and listen to the voice of sages. *Bhagawan* pointed out that leaders of today had no will to promote moral and spiritual excellence in their people, while the people themselves had no urge to warn their leaders of the disasters that lay ahead, when this foremost duty was neglected.

Swoosh!

Denise Eversole, who was among the two hundred overseas students at the course, speaks about its impact on her thus, “What is it like at the summer course? Let me throw out some adjectives to see if I can highlight its essence: packed, hot, uncomfortable, thrilling, awesome, pure essence, inspiring, stretching, blissful, catalytic, cathartic, revitalising, transforming, beautiful... Here we were at the feet of the same Soul, which was the historic Krishna, who first communicated the *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna about five thousand years ago. As Sai Baba explained to all the students the true meaning of spiritual life and how to live it, I found every question I’d ever had completely answered.”

Karen F. Blanc summarises the message conveyed by Baba, “All life is a meditation. Formal prayer and what you think of as meditations are means, not ends. They are good and are meant to help prepare the mind for concentration. But, along with such spiritual exercises and practices, there must be examination of individual and collective attitudes. Instil and cultivate in yourselves love and respect for all religions. Return home and do God’s work, wherever you are, with conviction, confidence, and enthusiasm. If life ever becomes difficult, remember these evenings and think of Me, call on My name, and I give you this promise that I will always heed your call. You will never be alone again.”

Karen went on to describe a thrilling miracle, which happened on one of the evenings. The

participants had many a chance to thrill at miracles that occurred whenever they were in Baba's presence. "But this was a big one, really first class," said Karen. "Maynard Ferguson, the world-famous jazz artist, gave a concert for us, about twelve hundred people, one night at the auditorium of the college. Baba was seated in the middle of the stage and Maynard Ferguson was standing next to Him on the right. He played Indian classical music set to jazz, with Baba tapping away at the beat gently, with His hand. Then, Ferguson played an incredible trumpet solo, with all his heart. Baba stood up and made a large circle clockwise, with His right hand. Swoosh! Out of the air, in front of everyone, Baba materialised a solid gold medallion, suspended from a chain and placed it around Ferguson's neck. There was no movement in the auditorium. Not a flicker. It was as if time stood still. Overwhelmed, Ferguson wept like a child, just as we sat there with tears in our eyes and a sob in our throats.

Why was it so beautiful? Maybe because we all knew at that moment, without question, what we had once known as little children, but had long since forgotten. There is a part in us all, at the very core of our being, that wants to believe in angels, that good triumphs over evil, that Jesus did really walk on water, and that Moses had once parted the Red Sea... We want to believe all that and, regardless of what we say, we want to stand by the good guy... and we ourselves want to be good. That is why we wept and that is why it was so beautiful. The medallion was not a magician's trick. It was made for us all. It was so that we could all know, once and for all, that 'It is so, as it is written.'"

As soon as the summer course ended, Baba returned to *Prasanthi Nilayam* with a large number of students from various colleges, who desired to spend a few more days in His presence, at the 'International Temple of the Sai Avatar'. There, a Sathya Sai college was inaugurated on 1st July, the first-year classes being held at the Easwaramma High School building itself.

The Buds Blossom

The *Avataric* mission of restoring humanity to man and raising him to godhood are being translated into action by *Bhagawan*, through educational reconditioning. He has blessed a worldwide project, which supplements the state-directed, institutionalised, secular education. It is called *Bala Vikas*, which means 'Blossoming of the Child'. Children in the developed countries (and by contagion, in the developing nations also), are exposed to the ills of the machine age, the clash of isms, the conflict of races, obsession with war, the dominance of violence, an over indulgence in sensual pleasures, and the open flouting of all morals. The

Bala Vikas routes back the child to its age-old culture, so that it may grow strong and straight. It instils a sense of reverence towards parents, elders, and teachers, who are repositories of learning. It encourages self-knowledge, self-reverence, and self-control, while enveloping the child in the warmth of divine love. Children grow up under the watchful care of teachers, whom Baba has blessed with the sacred title, *guru*. The teacher, upon being conferred that title, becomes bound to remove, as Lord Siva does, the weeds of evil from the tender mind, to sow, as Lord Brahma does, seeds of courage and compassion, and to foster, as Lord Vishnu does, good thoughts, good speech, and good deeds, elevating the profession of a teacher into a task carried out by the Holy Trinity. Baba has developed schools, called *Vidya Vihars* (education through joy), where children are fostered after being admitted as whole-time inmates. When the children enter their teens, they are taught elementary texts on spiritual discipline, besides being introduced to the techniques of *yoga*, social service, choral service, meditation, etc. These classes are referred to as ‘pre-*Seva Dal*’.

High schools that have been set up by Baba in several places, pay special attention to the development of character and to programmes of *sadhana* and social service. Then, there are the colleges, where the most impressionable years of adolescence and youth are spent under the gracious guidance of *Bhagawan* Himself. “Students are My hope, the source of My delight. They are what I live by,” says Baba.

His Kingdom

During the *Dasara* celebrations in 1979, students of different religions, from the Sri Sathya Sai College in Puttaparthi, presented themselves in their ceremonial costumes and described, to the great delight of the vast gathering, the main principles of each religion. A Sikh from New Delhi, a Zoroastrian from Bombay, a Christian from Hawaii, a Muslim from Libya, a Buddhist from Sikkim, and a Hindu from Kabul were the participating students. When Baba stood in the centre of the group as they finished, all were pleasantly surprised that Sai, the sum of all religions and the goal of all *sadhana*, had condescended thus to teach them the unity of faith. The students of Sai colleges have mastered the art of coordinated labour. They have presented orchestras and plays on Sri Ramakrishna, Shankaracharya, and Jesus, besides having set the Ramayana and the Sai stories to music. *Bhagawan* is, of course, the invisible and also, almost always, the visible source of all their achievements. While inaugurating the first anniversary of the association of old boys of the Sri Sathya Sai College at *Brindavan*, Baba directed them to utilise all their resources and talents in the service of the villages around *Brindavan*, after a keen study of their urgent needs: “Students must spring like tiger

cubs into the arena of the villages and cleanse them of pollution. They must teach and train the illiterate residents of the villages to live happily and with dignity. They must strive along with the villagers and lead them forward.” Baba also said on that occasion, “I am encouraging these boys to be examples of the strength and equanimity that can be gained by constant practice of My message. I am ever prompting them to speak and recite, sing and enact this message, so that it is installed in their hearts. Whatever I do or get done, whatever I say or direct others to say, it is to emphasise, clarify, or exemplify this message - the Atmic Reality of man.”

Bhagawan's message and the master projects planned for its realisation drew many educationists, administrators, scientists, communication experts, and psychologists to the colleges He has founded. Seminars on spiritual and moral guidance were held at the *Brindavan* College. Summer schools brought together college professors from all over the country, besides overseas countries, including Singapore, Philippines, Fiji, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, and U.S.A. *Bhagawan* conversed with groups of vice-chancellors, headmasters, professors, scientists, and technicians, unravelling to them the insidious causes of the universal malaise and revealing the curative measures urgently needed. As a result of the impact of these conversations, the Sathya Sai Study Circle was formed in Bangalore to probe into the defects of the educational system and for restructuring and reforming it on Sai guidelines. *Swami* assured the group, “I promise you that I will be with you and take an active part in guiding the activities of the Study Circle.” Truly, the *Avatar* has no rest! But, as *Bhagawan* says, “Had I needed rest, I would not have incarnated.”

During the Birthday festival week in 1979, two thousand *Bala Vikas gurus* met at a conference in *Prasanthi Nilayam*. *Bhagawan* blessed them and enlightened them on the problems that they have to encounter, and promised to reveal to them the solutions, whenever they prayed for light. The play ‘Jesus’ was presented by the students on 22nd November. The costumes, the sets, and the actors appeared so authentic, that the audience of twenty five thousand responded with a continuous ovation, lasting several minutes. Jesus Christ was very accurately portrayed as the Son of God with mercy, power, and love in His voice, gestures, and reactions.

Siva On The Spot

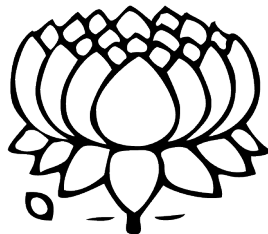
Devotees, who sought the home where *Bhagawan* incarnated as Sathyanarayana, the home of the parents Pedda Venkappa Raju and Easwaramma, were, for years, shown an empty patch

of land at the end of a rubble track, in Puttaparthi. They were very sad that no holy structure marked that spot, after the *Prasanthi Mandir* and the temples of Ganesa had come up on the outskirts of the village that was immortalised by the birth, childhood, and boyhood of the greatest *Avatar* in human history. They pleaded with *Bhagawan* and prayed in unison. So, a simple, but charming temple was constructed there, in which Baba installed an idol of Siva on 22nd November, 1979, fulfilling the long cherished desire of millions.

The *Avatar*'s decision to declare the cloistered village, Puttaparthi, still lacking even in several basic amenities, as the hub of the *Sai dharma chakra* (wheel of righteousness) raised around the *Mandir* rows of three-storeyed residential flats, banks, shops, and a bus station. Besides these, it has added to itself a resplendent suburb with ornamental arches at both ends, containing rows of magnificent structures comprising the elementary and high schools, and the College of Arts, Science, and Commerce, besides a hostel for over a thousand students.

In June, 1980, *Bhagawan* visited Jammu and Kashmir, the northern-most state of India, famed through the centuries for the artistic genius of its people, for its mountain ranges which are the source of several rivers, and for the harmonious blending of cultures and races. He spent ten days amidst the people, until it became difficult to decide who loved the other more - the people of the state or *Bhagawan*.

The march of love continues - fresh, full, and free.





Chapter 3

The Call And The Echo

The Promise

“I have My work to do; My devotees are calling Me,” Baba had declared when He was fourteen years of age.

With that, He had walked out of school and home into the garden, where He exhorted the huge gathering to worship the feet that were to lead mankind from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality. At sixteen, He announced that His mission, during this incarnation, was to confer bliss on all beings everywhere.

Pointing to the bold, bald hills on the outskirts of Puttaparthi village (then a confused jumble of mud huts around a few brick houses, scarce five minutes from the Stone Age, as Schulmann described it), *Swami*, when He was seventeen, confided to the *pujari* (priest) Lakshmiah, “The Sai *Pravesh* (Advent of Sai) will convert that region into *Prashanti Pradesh* (a region of perfect peace). Upon that hill, there will rise a grand *bhavan* (hall). (It was inaugurated seven years later). At that time, hundreds (why hundreds?), thousands (why thousands?), lakhs (why only lakhs?) - the whole of India will be there. The whole world will come and wait for *Sai darshan*.” *Pujari* Lakshmiah could not believe his ears. He protested and said, “No, I cannot believe this. How can this happen?” Baba replied, “You will have to believe it, when you stand where we are now, trying to catch a glimpse of Me standing on the porch of that grand *bhavan*.” Lakshmiah is alive to this day, trying to catch a glimpse standing on the same spot!

What is the nature of the ‘strategy’ that *Swami* employs to draw such huge gatherings? On 23rd November, 1975, the 50th birthday of *Bhagawan*, devotees from forty-six nations of the world, from New Zealand to Iceland, offered their sincere homage to *Bhagawan*. Why do so many people travel such long distances at such a great expense of time and money, braving

the inconvenience of foreign food and living habits?

Of course, He has no compulsion, no urge, nor even a need to frame a strategy. He just acts; it is we, who label these acts as 'strategy'. He calls us to proceed from 'I' to 'We', a call which must attract, because it is a call which echoes from the depths of one's own self. *Bhooma eva sukham*: 'In vastness alone is happiness,' proclaims the *Upanishad*. "Expansion is life; contraction is death," says Baba. He leads us to the vastness, the 'We', and how He does it is the strategy. 'Subrahmanyam' (*Su-Brahman-yam*) is the refrain of the heart pounding valedictory *bhajan* that He instructs us to sing. It preaches the *Brahman* path; *Brahman*, That is the Divine; That is both immanent and transcendent; That is beyond the reach of words and the flight of imagination. The path involves the discipline of all-inclusive love and the acceptance of ever-expanding kinship, until the entire cosmos is subsumed. Baba says, "All beings exist, become aware, and are delighted, because God willed so, God who is *sat-chit-ananda*. So, no single being is exiled from His grace. God is omnipresent and no being can shut Him out."

"I have come," says Baba, "in order to repair the ancient highway leading man to God... I have come in response to the prayers of sages, saints, and seekers, for the restoration of that road." Therefore, streams of afflicted men and women, groups of *sadhakas* as well as curious seekers of truth, and even such individuals, who have attained relatively higher stages of realisation, proceed to wherever Baba is, certain of His assuring smile and alleviating conversation. In His presence (and even far away from it, whenever we recollect the blissful moments), we feel elevated - even the lowest and lowliest of us - for, He reminds us that we are a part of Him, as divine as Himself. In fact, we are *Divyatmaswarupas*, embodiments of the Divine *Atman*, as He invariably addresses us.

The Nth Degree

We know that we have secured in Him a pace-maker for our hearts. Under His benign guidance, we rise to the nth degree of fullness. He says, "I am God; you are also God. But, while I am aware, you are still unaware. That is the only difference." As Shankaracharya had done 1300 years ago, He is telling us to experience *Soham* (I am He) and *Sivoham* (I am God). Ignorant persons jeer, when Baba holds up the mirror to reveal the divinity that is latent in us. One such person remarked, "Baba is trying to escape criticism for his assuming divinity, by taking us also into his 'Divine' fold and transforming us into willing accomplices of his impersonation!" But, the belief that all beings are parts of the one divinity is as old as

the *Vedanta* and as universal. Bayazid, the Sufi saint, said, “I went from God to God, until they cried for me in me. O Thou I!” Hui Neng, the Buddhist mystic, said, “When not enlightened, Buddhas are no other than ordinary beings; when there is enlightenment, ordinary beings at once turn into Buddhas.” Eckhart, the Christian mystic, declared, “The seed of God is in us, the seeds grow into God.”

Thousands are drawn to His presence through His power, His wisdom, and His love. Sai Baba means ‘the Divine Mother and Father’. Baba has the unlimited love of the Mother and the unsurpassed power and unalloyed universal wisdom of the Father. How can man withstand the impact of such a unique incarnation?

All Who Need

Unlimited love! On the gateway tower (*Gopura*), on the inner gateway arch, and on the altar inside the prayer hall, one can see the sacred symbol of one’s own religion, amidst the equally revered symbols of other faiths. No question is asked and no brow raised by anyone, who belongs to the Sai family, when you declare yourself to be a Hindu or a Buddhist, a Parsi, a Christian, a Muslim, or even an atheist. The only question asked and the only thing, with which Baba is concerned is how earnest, how distressed, how compassionate, and how self-controlled you are. He created a cross for the pilot of the twin-engine aircraft, which took him from Entebbe to the wild life sanctuary at Serengeti, in East Africa. In the Bandipur forest, He put one dry stalk of grass across another and blowing upon it, converted it into a wooden cross with a silver Christ, for Dr. Hislop. He gave Professor Bashiruddin a silver locket, with Allah inscribed on it in Arabic. On Bakr Id day, He showed a group of Arab pilgrims at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, the huge gathering of fellow Muslims kneeling that very moment, before the Kaaba in Arabia. He spread His palm before their eyes and they could see the sacred scene on it. There are many Jews, like Dr. Sandweiss, paying homage to Him thus, “I believe Baba to be an incarnation of God. It appears to me, now, that all those stories in Hindu, Christian, and Hebrew literature are not symbolic: there really is a spiritual level of reality that can make itself manifest.”

Buddhist monks have built in Ceylon and Malaysia, Sai prayer halls and centres of service. He performs the *Navajyoti* rite and through that ceremony, initiates Parsi boys into spiritual exercises. The parents are grateful to Him for this act of grace. No one is a stranger, no one is kept aside or aloof, just because he is too young or too old, recalcitrant or incorrigible. His is the sunshine that disinfects all faiths and cults. He has declared that He will hold and lead, by

the hand, those who stray away from the straight road and miss the realm of peace, joy, and love. He does not outlaw atheists, for He says, even they do love something - animal or plant, person or sect, ideal or ism. That love, He says, is God. They too would not like being called liars, but like others, delight in speaking the truth. This homage they pay to truth indicates that they revere God, who is truth. Erasmus, the 16th century Dutch philosopher, declared, "Wherever you encounter truth, look upon it as Christianity." The atheists appreciate beauty and are charmed by it. God is beauty and thence arises the attraction it exerts on them.

Baba does not try to mould men in the crucible of any cult. He does not prescribe any single spiritual exercise, or peddle any patented panacea to cure the ills of men. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavily-laden, and I will give you rest," is the message even now. They come with broken hearts, damaged illusions, and unfulfilled ambitions. They bring their burden of real and imagined pain. After meeting Him, they pray, "We cannot ask Thee for aught, for Thou knowest our needs; in fact, Thou art our only need." And having spoken thus, they stay. Whereas most *gurus* are interested only in the *mantras* and exercises that they prescribe for people's grievances and the fees or gifts that they are offered in return, Baba is interested only in us, whether we undertake *sadhana* or *Seva* of any kind, or not. Moreover, since the divine spark is enshrined within man in five caskets (the physical, the vital, the mental, the intellectual, and the felicitous), one encased within the other, Baba tends to them one by one, with affectionate care, to enable us to reflect on the splendour of that Spark.

Baba says, "I never ask you to earn Me; I want only that you need Me." Under the tender care of this physician, psychiatrist, guide, teacher, and friend, we become aware of untapped springs of courage, fortitude, aspiration, and adventure within us. Baba also directs our thoughts and activities towards society - the society in which we were born, which reared us and equipped us with a vision to face the future and to fulfil our obligations. Schumacher has said, "Although there are constant temptations to forget it, we all know that our lives are made or marred by our relationships with other human beings. No amount of health, wealth, fame, or power can compensate us for our loss, if these relationships dissolve. Yet, they all depend on our ability to understand others and their ability to understand us." Baba declares that there can be no fulfilment of our lives, until we ourselves have concern for, confidence in, and compassion towards others.

Baba's infinite love, wisdom, and power produce an indelible impact on each of us, sometimes in a moment, when we stay in His presence to imbibe the message that He radiates. Paul Roberts writes in *Vogue* (Christmas number, 1976) on the few minutes he spent

in His divine presence, thus: “Baba, the remote and powerful figure I had watched in awe for months, hugged me like a long-lost friend and in a surpassingly loving way, began to tell me my worst faults. Indeed, He told me things no one could possibly have known, answered every question I would have asked, and gave advice, which I still treasure. I felt and still feel inexplicably closer to Him, than to anyone else in the world.”

R.K. Karanjia, editor of *Blitz*, who described himself as a sceptic, a critic, and a Marxist, who had in the past, openly questioned and criticised Sathya Sai Baba, was able (like many other critics, sceptics, and Marxists) to meet Him and gain a cordial interview. He writes, “The encounter was a fantastic, almost shattering one. He went on to amaze me with knowledge of the most intimate developments affecting my life and work.”



Easwaramma High School (See page 34)

A Gap, A Gasp

Dr. Samuel Sandweiss, the psychiatrist from San Diego, California, narrates, “After my initial visit to Sai Baba, I began to experience an inner awakening, as if a once-familiar, but closed-off centre was opening up and I was becoming reacquainted with a part of myself that I had long ago forgotten. I identified the experience as one of devotion and wondered whether such a centre lies dormant in all of us, awaiting release through some personal, spiritual experience. This awakening or unfolding was for me a source of great joy and with it, came a deepening feeling of my love for Baba and for people in general.” Baba has Himself revealed that this happens in His presence: “Each of you feel a gap within you, a thirst, an urge, a divine discontent, a call to which the response from within is weak and vacillating. This has persuaded you to travel long distances to Me, braving obstacles and discomfort for the sake of securing peace, strength, and guidance.”

Ghandikota V. Subba Rao of the U.N.O writes, “Meeting Him is an intensely personal, emotional, and uplifting experience. The temptation to glorify Him, to wax lyrical over the spiritual greatness and magnificence of Sathya Sai Baba is difficult to resist.” Sribhashyam Appalacharya from Kakinada town, a repository of ancient, scriptural wisdom, writes, after staying for a few days at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, “*Bhagawan* is a *Veda*; what He says, happens. *Bhagawan* is a *Shastra*; what He does is exemplary. He elaborates the truth with many a metaphor, simile, and story, as a *Purana* does; His words are the highest poetry, for they confer bliss and liquidate the littleness in man.”

Dr. F.J. Gould of the University of Chicago reveals, “He perceives the individual’s needs with unbelievable insight. He perceives, defends, breaks them down in some swift way. He studies behaviour and its determinants... He somehow transfers the individual from one context to another. Many devotees of Baba have perceived His influence through changes in their own lives. New things become important; new values become prominent. To speak in a more technical language, the individual’s utility structure changes.”

The Conjuror Confesses

Dr. E.B. Fanibunda from Bombay is a dentist and also an amateur magician, well-versed in the theory and practice of conjuring. In 1954, he published a book on a series of original and effective methods, which practitioners of magic, mind-reading, etc. could adopt. In appreciation of his proficiency, he was given the ‘Linking Ring’ award by the International Brotherhood of Magicians, U.S.A.

This is his account of how he reacted to Baba: “There were about a dozen people waiting in the sitting room of Mr. Munshi’s house. Baba was due to come out of the inner apartments in a little while. The author (he writes in the third person) stood unobtrusively in one corner of the room. Baba entered the room and everybody stood up. Everyone was elbowing and pushing the other to get close to Him. Baba, however, came and stood near the author, so near that the author was almost touching His left side. By this time, the author’s practised eye had already given Baba’s gown the once over. Nothing was detected. Someone from the crowd asked for *vibhuti prasad*. This was the moment the author was waiting for. Baba pulled up His right sleeve, almost up to the elbow and in the process, turned His right hand over. The author could see there was nothing in the palm. Quickly, the hand went round in circles a few times and the *vibhuti* appeared between His fingers, which were partly closed to hold it. The *vibhuti* was given to some people. The author wished that Baba would now

materialise some more, so that he could also get a little bit for examination. Lo, behold! Baba's hand went round and round a second time and some more *vibhuti* appeared from nowhere. This time, the author held out his hand and received His 'visiting card'. The author immediately knew from his past experience that the *vibhuti* was materialised without any sleight of hand or trickery. He did not now require any further demonstrations from Baba, to convince him that He did possess supra-human powers, for which the author had no explanation to offer and still has none." (1976).

In the *Yoga Journal* from Holland, Sharon Warren writes, "The following morning, when I went to attend *bhajans*, I happened to have an aisle seat. Baba strolled to the women's side that day and as He passed, He stopped beside me. He then gestured with His hand with that special majesty, which always means a divine materialisation, and then, there was the sacred ash, pouring from His fingertips and into my palms. He said, '*Vibhuti... eat.*' It was like a dream. My heart was so full of love, devotion, and gratitude, that it just overflowed. I felt I could not hold any more. I was aware that He knew my need and that was so comforting. I have been blessed to experience love throughout my life, from many different relationships, but nothing could compare with the purity of the love I experienced, when this transpired. It transcended any human relationship I had ever known."

I And Thou

The fascination that draws the object to the subject is, if we may so name it, a move in His strategy. Vivekananda said, "God is both, the subject and the object. He is the 'I' and 'Thou' (the *twam* and the *tat*). How, then, are we to know the Knower? The Knower cannot know Himself. The *Atman*, the Knower, the Lord of all that exists, is the cause of all the vision that is the universe, but it is not possible for Him to see Himself, know Himself, except through a reflection. You cannot see your own face, except in a mirror. Similarly, the *Atman* cannot see Its own nature, until It is reflected... The perfect man, the *Avatar*, is the highest reflection of that Being, who is both, subject and object. You now find why *avatars* are instinctively worshipped as God, in every country. They are the most perfect manifestations of the Eternal Self. That is why men worship incarnations, such as Christ and Buddha."

We are *Sathyam*, *Sivam*, and *Sundaram*. The deep calls on the deep; the blue responds to the blue. We see ourselves reflected best in Baba, who is in fact the most sublime manifestation of *Sathyam-Sivam-Sundaram*. When we forget ourselves and start wandering into the wilderness of falsehood and vice, He comes, so that we may recognise our glory in Him.

Ed Fleure writes, “Baba’s life is dedicated to the task of uplifting humanity, to awaken us to our spiritual heritage, and to give us courage and faith. Our stay with Baba was a supreme bringing-up. Love is His greatest miracle. From morning to night, Baba is constantly giving to and serving others. It was *Maharajji*, who had kept enquiring when we were leaving his *ashram* to go to Baba. When at last Baba gave us leave to return, He blessed us, ‘Be friends with God.’ Surely, this was a new style of blessing. Friends with God? How can that be?

When we came back to *Maharajji*, He gave me a Hindu name. And lo! It was the name of a friend, companion, and class fellow of Sri Krishna - Sudama. So, I had to practise the constant presence of God as my friend.” This remark of Baba and its actual confirmation by a saint in the Himalayas proves that Baba has no wish to by-pass the form you might have accepted and adored. He could have renamed Ed Himself, but He encouraged him to return to *Maharajji*, the *guru* he had ‘found’. But, since He knew that ‘behaving as a friend’ was the way for him, He saw to it that the name selected for him by *Maharajji* was Sudama. Of the nine paths mentioned by the sacred texts on *bhakti*, the path of *sakhya* (friendship) is next only to the last and highest path of *atma-nivedanam* (self-surrender).

Methodology Revealed

Once, when Baba was asked about His ‘methodology’, He said, “I have no methodology, or machinery, or strategy in the accepted organisational sense. My methodology is a simple one, based on conversion by love and the machinery is one of human co-operation and brotherhood. Love is My instrument and My merchandise.” He says that He can best be described as *Prema Swaroopa* (Embodiment of Love). What are called miracles are fundamentally manifestation of that love. It is love that prompts Him to speak to each seeker in a language that he can understand - Swahili in East Africa and Adi to tribals from Along. It is love that persuades Him to heal the physical and mental wounds of man. It is love that illumines the darkness of our hearts and corrects the crookedness of our habits and attitudes. The miraculous cure by Baba of terminal diseases and the saving of life in countless instances of accidents and disasters, are all expressions of His love.

He materializes holy ash in order to arouse faith and gives gifts of rings or lockets to protect the wearer. This He does out of overpowering compassion and love. J. Jagathesan, the Malaysian devotee, who is also the author of the book, *Journey to God*, writes, “The greatest miracle of all is His transformation of the hearts of countless men and women, to make them tread the path of godliness and goodness. Agnostics now sing in praise of God, drunkards

have turned from searching for the spirit in the bottle to the divine spirit in man, drug addicts, who found transient escape and bliss in this 'modern' scourge of mankind, now seek the permanent bliss and peace that only God can give, and millions of ordinary men and women, who used to listlessly pray as a matter of ritual or habit, now find a new meaning, a new dimension to their prayers - whomsoever they may pray to or to whichever religion they may belong - for, they are now convinced that God does exist and that His grace can be obtained through *bhakti*, through *sathya*, *dharma*, *shanti*, and *prema*, and most of all, through selfless and loving *Seva* to others, regardless of race, religion, caste, or colour and without any thought of reward." The love that He plants in all those who need Him (and who does not?) reaps a huge harvest of humility, reverence, generosity, fraternity, and freedom.

Cousin Losing His Mind

Sandweiss speaks of a cousin of his, Jerry by name, who was a professor of mathematics in the eastern States, "Looking at the question from a purely mathematical standpoint, Jerry felt, it was indeed probable that an *Avatar* might presently exist, so he joined a group that was going over to see Baba...

My cousin, during the first interview, asked Baba to produce something for him. He had bought a cheap ring in Greece and was wearing it on his little finger. He wanted Baba to transform this ring into something else. Baba declined. Jerry felt let down... He began to examine his own sanity... Baba called Jerry for an interview again, the next day. When he came out, Jerry was in a usually bright and receptive mood, his face radiant. Jerry, it seems, pleaded again with Baba to do something with the ring and took it from his finger. Baba said that was not His wish. Jerry continued to plead. Finally, Baba took the ring in His hand, blew on it, and returned to Jerry an altogether different ring, which, needless to say, fitted his finger perfectly. This had obviously shaken him... The transformation that few minutes with Baba produced in Jerry was indeed a greater miracle. A woman in the group asked for someone to help carry her bags and Jerry spontaneously volunteered. 'I never do this,' he said, 'I must be losing my mind!'

The conquest of the mind is the consequence of years of *yogic sadhana*. Baba says, 'You are imprisoned in your ego. Though you should try to liberate yourselves from this bondage quickly and safely, most of you do not seek from Me the key to this liberation. You ask Me for trash and tinsel, petty little cures and gains. Very few desire to get from Me the thing I have come to give - liberation itself. Even among the few who seek liberation, only a minute

percentage sincerely stick to the path of *sadhana* and from among them, only an infinitesimal number succeed.’ Jerry had taken, after his exposure to Baba, the first step in liberation from the prison of his ego.”

Dr. Dhairyam writes, “In the present world crisis of character, *Bhagawan’s* grace will certainly act as a powerful catalyst. It will bring about a transformation among the people of the Earth, who are presently so diverse in spiritual development. Among those who are transformed, one finds non-believers, escapists, drug addicts, and agnostics, as well as highly evolved *sadhakas*, well-versed *Vedic* scholars, renowned scientists, artists, poets, and *pundits*, as also simple, ordinary folk, who delight in His divine discourses. *Bhagawan* accepts and welcomes them all as His children. He is compassionate to the sinner, comforting to the distressed, and a guide to the agnostic and the confused, whom He leads by the hand into the realm of light.”

Awakening During Dreams

Dreams are also part of the Sai strategy. He has appeared in the dreams of many, who were unaware of Him and has drawn them to Himself. Karen Fromer Blank dreamt that a person with a huge crown of hair came to her and said, “Stay with your Hilda.” “Hilda who?” she wondered. Five years later, she discovered Hilda Charlton, Baba’s devotee. The discovery transformed her life. Now, she has written a book, entitled ‘Dear Hilda’!

John Prendergast of the California Institute of Asian Studies has written an article ‘*Swami Dreams*’, focussing more on their instructional value and less on the paranormal processes.

He says, “The overall aspect of these dream experiences with Sai Baba is difficult to gauge, but my own relationship with Baba has deepened immeasurably. I would characterize the primary influence as being the opening of my spiritual heart, of beginning to balance the intellect with the values of love and compassion. Between the spring of 1977 and 1979, Sai Baba has appeared to me, during the dream-state nearly forty times. These have profoundly affected my spiritual awakening and the quality of my relationship with Him. Sai Baba has said that, it is impossible to see Him in dreams without His willing it. My own experience of active guidance, chastisement, healing, and ecstatic states conferred by Him, during the dream-state tends to confirm this. My relationship with Sai Baba is, in fact, more intimate in the dream, than in the waking state... As the dream-state relationship grows and deepens, my own inner strength and confidence grows and manifests itself in the waking state. In addition to this waking reality, the distinction between the two realities has softened. Increasingly, the

two blend, so that dream-images rise in the waking mind, like distant clouds.”

Willie Kweku Ansah of Accra (Ghana) writes, “Soon after this (the Sathya Sai Centre’s invitation to devotees to enrol for a trip to Puttaparthi), I started seeing *Swami* in my dream. The first night, I woke up with a rather vague feeling that I should think of going to Puttaparthi. I discarded the thought immediately. The next dream was more detailed and lengthy. I saw myself in front of a tall building, which had protruding platforms on the first floor. *Bhagawan* was on the ground floor and I was doing *namaskara*. At this time, I did not know that to dream of *Bhagawan* was a privilege and not an ordinary occurrence. I dismissed the dream as my silly imagination. In my third dream, I saw only the face of *Bhagawan* for an instant or two. I was forced to wake up in a sweat and with a clear command to go to Puttaparthi.

I gave my name to the Planning Committee, without an inkling of where the money for the trip would come from. I need not have worried. Within the next few days, I made, through a friend, three times my normal, annual income for no compelling reason. So, the matter was settled. All other arrangements went through without a hitch. Need I also mention that some of the persons I travelled with I had already seen in my dreams. We arrived at Puttaparthi on 21st November. The last thing on my mind were my dreams. A friend decided to take a round of the prayer hall and as we made the turn, I stopped dead in my tracks. My friend asked what the matter was and I uttered something incomprehensible to him. But, what had stopped me was the fact that my dream was staring me right in the face, with all its details - the protruding platform, the architecture, and the colours.

One surprise followed another, when private interviews were granted in a room on the ground floor and I did my *namaskara* exactly where I had dreamt it. However, all these surprises were nothing compared to what I experienced, when I went to bid farewell to *Bhagawan*. ‘When are you coming again?’ He asked. I was not expecting the question, as the very thought of being so lucky as to come again was far from my mind. I was, therefore, flushed and in delighted confusion, blurted out that I did not know and that this time, I came, because I had a dream... *Bhagawan* interrupted in a tone, which seemed as if He was irritated; I was accounting something He already knew. ‘I know, I know,’ He said and patted my back. Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* (1,38) says that, the aspirant gets guidance through dreams, but even he does not mention that the *guru*, if he is an *Avatar*, can frame dreams for us and figure in them himself, furnishing timely guidance.”

A Book And A Journey

Baba says, “No one can come to *Prasanthi Nilayam*, unless I call him.” The dream is one of the means He uses to draw people towards Himself. Lawrence Galante from New York writes, “I enrolled at Hoftra University to study more of my profession, *Tai Chi*, and the related philosophy. Then, I awoke one morning from a vivid dream. In this dream, the title of a book was clearly visible to me with the cover layout. It was entitled, ‘Sai Baba: Contemporary Mystic, Master, and God’. Then, it dawned upon me, ‘Why not? Why not write my thesis on contemporary mysticism and use Sai Baba as my subject?’ I cleared it with the university... I decided that I could not write about Him, unless I first saw Him and confirmed these miracles for myself. I also realised that I might just go to Him and find out that He was a fake. If so, I had reasoned, I could still write a thesis to expose a colossal fraud. That would also do. (Baba says, ‘Come, see, experience, examine, and then, believe.’)”

But, how do I get to India? My bank account was nil. I turned to Sai Baba and addressed Him, saying, ‘If You want me to write this, then You must provide the money for me to get to India, because I am broke.’ Within 48 hours, I received a cheque in the mail for a thousand dollars, from the city of New York, a sum that was owed me for several years and which I had been trying in vain, for some time, to collect... I remained with Sai Baba for two months. Daily, I observed Him attending to the multitudes that came to Him - healing the sick, materialising objects, and giving them away as gifts to devotees. Everything that Baba taught me was good and all of His endeavours were beneficial. He also gave me permission to write about Him, which is what I am doing now. Sai Baba does not work in secrecy. His activities are an open book for all to witness and draw their own conclusions from. Baba often says, ‘My Life is My Message.’ I pray that I may receive more and more His message.”

Baba has declared very often that He wills the dream as a means of communication with the dreamer, in order to grant him courage, confidence, and clarity of thought.

Miss Occah Seapaul of Trinidad has also been directed by Baba to publish in a book, her talks on His message to several groups of devotees on that West Indian island. Receiving His counsel in a dream is as mandatory as a personal command. According to Aurobindo, “The *Avatar*, or divinity, acts according to another consciousness - the consciousness of the truth above and the *Leela* below.” Baba told Dr. M.S. Ramakrishna Rao of Vishakhapatnam, when he enquired about the authenticity of a dream, in which Baba had rendered him the clarification of a spiritual problem, “When I appear in a dream, it is to communicate

something to the individual. It is not a mere dream as is generally known. Do not think that these incidents you experienced in your dream are stretches of your imagination. I was giving answers, thereby, to all your doubts.”

H. Narayana Rao, while in bed in the intensive care cardiac unit at the K.E.M. Hospital, in Bombay, awaiting implantation of an artificial pacemaker, dreamt that visitors were streaming into the ward. Among them was Baba, who stopped near his bed and spoke in His soft, reassuring voice, “My son! I know how much you are worried about the artificial pacemaker and the operation. Do not worry in the least. From now on, your pulse will gradually improve. Count the days from today and on the eleventh day, which will be Saturday the 17th, you can go home.” And in spite of the doctors putting forward various other proposals, he was discharged exactly on the 17th, with his heart quite normal.



Wooden cross on which Jesus was crucified, given to Hislop (See page 38)

Properties

When I read a letter from Professor Kausal of Kurukshetra, in which he had mentioned that he had resigned his job, after being advised by Baba in a dream to do so, I was reminded of another devotee, who withdrew a petition he had filed in a civil court. His claim to some property was so strong, that he fought his rival through all the labyrinths of law, in spite of all the tension involved and the massive sums of money he had to spend. The suit had possessed him and he was refusing to reconsider. But, Baba appeared in his dream and ordered him to

give up his mislaid attachment. “Properties are not proper-ties,” said Baba with a strange emphasis. Kausal writes, “The dreams are effective, vivid, personal, and peace-giving. I cannot brush them aside, especially since Baba later confirms them and continues the advice He vouchsafes during the dream-session.”

Baba urges people by means of dream appearances, to come to His presence. He smoothens the difficulties that deter them from undertaking the journey and encourages them to enter the spiritual path towards self-realisation. We have already seen this stratagem of His love, in the accounts given by Willie Ansah of Accra and Lawrence Galante of New York.

Dr. Sandweiss writes of another interesting instance of Baba’s compassion, “Lila and I were discussing Sai Baba and she became intrigued. She read a book about Him and began to consider the possibility of meeting Him herself. She was then deeply in debt and there seemed to be no feasible way for her to get the money, to go to India. Her husband, Homer, an inventor, had no steady income at that time and had not been able to sell an invention in over five years. Yet, as highly unrealistic as the trip did seem, she made plans to go and obtained her vaccination certificate and passport. Then, some strange things began to happen. One day, feeling particularly depressed, she had an unusual dream, in which Baba appeared, His eyes twinkling with fun. Soon afterwards, Homer hit upon an invention. After a swift and improbable chain of events, some people became interested in it and his financial position suddenly and quite unexpectedly improved - the first time in years that this had happened. Lila now had enough money for the trip, just a week before take-off and being completely prepared, she found herself jubilantly boarding the plane with us.”

It is beyond doubt that Baba plans, designs, and structures the dreams, through which He initiates or deepens His impact on people. Ponder over another incident related by Dr.Sandweiss, involving Jeff from California.

Dr. Sandweiss writes, “In the interview room, where we all sat, Baba was smiling and rocking back and forth blissfully. He turned to Jeff, the fellow next to me, and said casually, ‘I’ve come to you twice, in dreams.’ Now, as a psychiatrist, I have certainly never heard of a colleague talking this way to a patient. Psychiatrists deal with dreams all the time, but to say, ‘I’ve come to you twice, in dreams,’ would be somewhat disconcerting for the average patient... Baba began to describe and interpret one of Jeff’s dreams and it became quite evident to me that He had in some way fashioned the psychic experience of this man, had actually created dreams for him, and visited him in another dimension of reality. Everything

that Baba said was confirmed by Jeff. Here was the greatest psychiatrist I had ever seen!”

Sri Jagathesan once asked Baba, towards the end of an interview with Him, “*Bhagawan!* Why don’t You ever come in my dreams?” “Baba,” he writes, “bent down lovingly and replied, ‘Okay, from now on, I will come in your dreams on Wednesdays.’ I regard Tuesday as holy day, because a *vibhuti* materialisation from His picture in my house, first occurred on Tuesday, 8th June, 1976. Recognising this, Baba laughed and without my asking, amended His statement the next moment, ‘No, No! Tuesdays, eh?’” And on Tuesdays, the dream brings Baba into his view as an unfailing gift of grace.

Once, during a visit to *Brindavan* (Whitefield) along with Dr. Sandweiss, Elsie Cowan excitedly knocked at his room very early one morning, saying, “I am feeling very close to Walter this morning.” When Walter had cast off his mortal coil at Tustin, California, Baba had telegraphed to Elsie, “Walter arrived here in good shape.” Elsie told Sandweiss, “I feel that Baba and Walter have paid me a special visit. I’ve been wide awake since six o’clock and full of energy.” When both of them reached *Prasanthi Nilayam* that evening, Baba called them in along with a few others and, in the midst of the conversation, He suddenly said to Elsie, “Walter and I paid you a visit this morning.” “Yes, Yes!” said Elsie, “At six o’clock. I felt so filled.” “No, five minutes to six!” He corrected her. And Sandweiss adds, “I began to see Baba less as an omnipresent controller of great forces, than as a manifestation of pure love. Clearly, His love for His devotees motivates His actions.”

Baba has often said that being in this body, as distinct from the ‘Shirdi’ body, He feels it is not enough, if a few needy humans get spiritual guidance from Him: “It is necessary to draw all and sundry and provide them with succour and sustenance. I must give them what they want, until they begin to want what the *Avatar* has come to give.” Shirdi Baba appeared in dreams to give warnings and counsel; He spoke in symbols and veiled phrases; He helped solve mundane problems and personal tangles; He invited to *Dwarakamai*, through mysterious intimations, *sadhakas* and service-oriented souls, suffering and suspicion-afflicted persons, and awakened their latent, inner urge towards self-realisation by a mere look, a touch, a smile, or a pinch of sacred ash. This same strategy is unfolding on an even grander scale in the Sathya Sai era. Now, the world has to be awakened and shaken out of its arrogance and schizophrenia by revelations of truth and declarations of love. While in ‘Shirdi’ form, the declaration of being an *Avatar* was made in the comparative privacy of conversation. In the Sathya Sai manifestation, the declaration that He is all the names and forms, through which mankind has adored God down the centuries, was made at a World

Conference in Bombay, before twenty-five thousand listeners and many times subsequently, when hundreds of thousands were present. Through films, tapes, books, and oral testimony, the uniqueness of this Divine Phenomenon and His wisdom, power, love, and compassion are drawing increasing love and adoration, which has united millions into one ever-growing family of mankind.

Pride Punished

Arthur Osborne once said that, Shirdi Sai Baba was ‘incredible’. Dr. S. Bhagawantham announced that Sathya Sai Baba is ‘inexplicable’. I have to conclude that He is ‘inscrutable’, for He is the very embodiment of the divinity described in the following story from the *Upanishads*, revealing Its glory and power.

The Universal Absolute, *Brahman*, conferred victory on the gods in their war against the demons. The gods were saved from thralldom and became mighty once again. But, in their pride, they ascribed their success to themselves; they traced it to their own prowess. To make them aware of their dependence on the source of all power and wisdom, It appeared before them as a pillar of light, even while they were celebrating their victory in drink and dance, revelry and rejoicing. Noticing this strange Phenomenon, the gods were curious to know what it was and why it was interrupting their noisy spree. They sent the god of fire, *Agni*, to investigate it and report. The Phenomenon accosted the god, who replied, “I am *Agni*. I can burn all things that come in contact with me.” The phenomenon invited him to burn a tiny stalk of dry grass, which It placed before him. But, however forcefully and gigantically he fell upon it, he could not burn it. So, he returned to the gathering of gods, crestfallen and humiliated. The god of wind, *Vayu*, next ventured to challenge the Phenomenon to reveal its identity and its intentions. He too had to eat his boastful words, foiled by the blade of grass. Indra, the lord of the gods, was incensed by the overwhelming powers of this column of light, but he too had to swallow his pride and realise that a god as feeble as he had no right to confront that mighty Source of Glory.

Baba had declared even in His teens, “Not only today, but at any time hereafter, it will be beyond the capacity of anyone, however hard he may try and by whatever means, to assess My true nature.” Critics and commentators do not realise that in the realm of the sacred, any explanation is a limitation, a hesitation, a desecration.

The Halo

Scholars and scientists, isolated in their conceit, have for over four decades, set out to expose Him as a fraud, a juggler, and a trickster, but failed to tarnish even the hem of His robe. In this age, when the senses are the final criteria of knowledge, when passion rules the brain and prejudice pollutes the mind, a phenomenon shedding light, showering love, and embodying truth automatically becomes a target for doubt, suspicion, and denigration. Every wayward preacher comes to find in Him a challenge that he is powerless to understand and accept. He is an unpleasant and unwelcome reminder to the half-baked persons, who are disembodyed by modern universities, of the inadequacy of the intellect and the infirmity of the senses. How else are we to interpret the presumptuous assertion that the “halo around Baba rests entirely on the miraculous production of material objects, which appeal to and excite the wonder of credulous people”?

Let Shri M. Rasgotra explain to us what that halo rests on: “We all emerge from the encounter with Baba in interview, exalted and radiant, as if Baba has stripped us of our motley cloaks full of patches, and fitted us out in love’s pure raiment for a fresh journey, towards a new destination. The transformation begins almost at the first moment of contact and the process of ceaseless and irresistible uplift never slackens thereafter.”

Shri B. Ramanand, while describing a wedding that was celebrated at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, during which he had witnessed Baba for the first time, writes, “In five minutes, we felt He was one of us; He talked to us, as if He had known us intimately all along. This intense humanness, this wonderful camaraderie He has for all persons whom He meets, this remarkable quality of being one with the people around Him, this super-abundance of good humour, joy, love, and affection to all made a powerful impact on me.”

Baba says that His much-debated miracles are as insignificant before His true purpose as a mosquito, when compared to the mighty elephant. We pay homage to Baba, recognising the waves of gratitude that surge around His feet from hearts reinforced by the impact of His love, minds cleansed by the splendour of His grace, intellects made healthy and wholesome by imbibing His wisdom, and bodies strengthened and straightened by the inflow of His compassion.

Richard Bock of Los Angeles, who was advised by Ravi Shanker and Indra Devi to approach Baba in the spirit of a pupil going to a *guru*, writes, “I remember going through a period, when I wore a *japamala* (rosary) with 108 beads as a sort of badge. Baba came over to me,

looked at it, and said, 'It's heavy for *Om*.' He meant that I was showing off. So, I realised it was nonsense. Like everybody else, I did *namaste*, when Baba came into the room. He came over and hit my hands, saying, '*Jhutha bhakti*.' When I found out later that it meant 'false devotion', I realised that I didn't know what I was doing. What He was getting across was that until you feel it in your heart, don't go through a ritual. The next thing was that everybody wanted to touch His feet. So, I figured that was something I too should do. When I tried to touch His feet, He said, 'No.' I realised, then, that I was doing it, because everybody else was doing it, that I myself didn't have any inner motivation at that moment, to touch His feet."

I Want You

Like the *Upanishadic* god of fire, Arnold Schulman too belittled the Sai Phenomenon, in spite of a tour of India that included a visit to *Brindavan* and a few minutes with Baba. That experience was enough for him to conclude - and be happy in the discovery - that mystics in India were clever exploiters and their disciples ordinary 'psychopathic compulsives'. Baba has declared, "Those who deny Me are blinded by ignorance or pride, so they need even more compassion and grace. Those who stay away, I shall beckon back." Baba, from whom nothing can be hidden and for whom nobody is distant, became aware of this blinkered tourist's belief. Schulman was mysteriously 'possessed' by an idea - to write a book on Baba - which he tried his best to explain away, circumvent, rationalise, and deny; still, it would not leave him alone. He told himself that it was insane, impracticable, and impossible, but it refused to loosen its hold on him, persisting in its emphasis. Three months later, when he was able to secure an interview, Baba told him, "I *asked* you to write the book, not because I wanted your book. The book is publicity. I don't need publicity. I wanted you, you, you!" And He sent him back to America, wiser and happier, the veil of supercilious ignorance regarding mystics and their disciples removed from his now clearer vision.

Like the *Upanishadic* god of wind, Samuel H. Sandweiss. M.D, renowned psychiatrist, proceeded towards the Phenomenon in full confidence that he could easily prick the bubble of its bombastic magnificence. He writes, "I would go as a scientist to study and understand the psychological realities of a situation shrouded in mysticism, only to prove that miracles do not exist." Sandweiss approached the Sai Phenomenon and soon returned, like the god *Vayu*, to his companions, who were drinking and dancing, unaware of the reality which was directing their destiny. Sandweiss had decided to meet Baba, when he heard extraordinary stories about Him from Indra Devi, to whom he had gone for consultations regarding *yoga*. Baba, even

when physically present at *Prasanthi Nilayam* or *Brindavan*, arouses ardour and yearning, awakens curiosity and interest, stimulates thirst and restlessness, assures comfort and cure, and alerts and admonishes in dreams and through visions. Each one, who moves to His presence with hope and confidence, has a story to tell, each more fascinating and reassuring than the other.

Pardon me if I present myself as the insolent Indra, who in 1948, was too impertinent to put up with the 'miracles' of Baba, yet was too curious to tolerate Him without a personal examination. I was then famous in the Kannada speaking region of India - the state of Karnataka - as a humour writer and I had a large reading public admiring me as the Stephen Leacock of that language. I then aimed my humour at Baba, 'the Phenomenon'. The word 'Sai', in Kannada, means 'die' - it is expletive, a command to extinguish life. "How can a person calling on us to address him as Sai be adored in Karnataka?" I quipped. Besides, I had gulped, without discerning, the dictum spread by the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission that the performance of miracles is a very unspiritual exercise, which drags the *sadhaka* into the depths of worldliness. So, I hastened towards Baba in the hope that He could be exposed and explained. Like Indra, I returned after the encounter with my prejudices corrected, my myopia cured, and my pride pulverised. I am engaged, ever since, in enthusing all people to follow the message of Baba and in adoring Him as the saviour of mankind. Those who venture to defy or deny Him ultimately return to remain in His presence with folded hands and supple minds, meditating on His form, reciting His name, and elevating themselves to divinity.

The Documentary

When Arnold Schulman heard himself ask Baba, "Are you God?" Baba replied, "How can an ant measure the depth of the ocean, or a fish discover the truth of the sky?" This answer stuns our reason dumb. But, every act of Baba does the same.

After thirty-one years of having known Him, I feel that to doubt the authenticity of the following experience of Indra Devi is a sacrilege to Sai: "I looked up at the picture of *Bhagawan* and prayed, '*Bhagawan*, please take me to Puttaparthi for Your birthday.' Two days later, a young man, who had come to the Sai Centre at Tecate, phoned, '*Mataji*, could you go to India tomorrow, if Warner Bros. pay your trip? They want Baba's permission to make a documentary film on His life.'" She was met at the airport by someone from the company. When she came to *Prasanthi Nilayam* with the proposal, I felt elated at the

prospect of the film. She was very much there, during the Birthday festival and she carried Baba's response to the request back home. But, when she contacted Warner Bros., who had arranged and paid for her trip, "No one knew me there," she writes, "nor about the trip, nor the film, nor *Bhagawan*. The red-faced executive told me that he would investigate and let me know. Years have passed and I am still waiting to hear what he has to tell me from his inquiry!"

Muriel Engle writes from San Diego on the Pacific Coast, "Ruth has a teaching job in Mexico. She is busy going back and forth. She attends *bhajans* on Thursdays at Santa Barbara, but is still a sceptic. Her health problems have been tormenting her since long. She has bouts of extreme pain for several days at a stretch. One evening, in her little room, she suffered from terrible pain and in her desperate agony, she was crying out, 'Oh, is there someone to help me? Anyone? Why am I suffering this? What shall I do? Oh, help!'

Suddenly, she felt a gentle touch on her arm. She stopped shouting and as she turned, there stood Baba beside her bed. 'Don't shout so,' He said, 'I am always here.' Then, He disappeared. And along with Him, the pain too had gone. This is another instance of His omnipresence." Baba says, "There is only one God and He is omnipresent. He has no favourite dwelling place, or chosen followers, or special groups of devotees. Call - He answers, He manifests, He blesses."

Letters To Him

Professor S. Bashiruddin of the Osmania University, while driving down with Baba from Ooty, in the Nilgiri Hills, asked, "*Swami*, if a devotee sends a letter or a telegram to Your Bangalore address, but You happen to be at Ooty, Bombay, or any other place, would it be redirected to You, if it is marked 'Urgent'?" Baba answered, "A letter or a telegram is a mere carbon copy. If the thought in the letter or telegram is sincere, it need not be delivered to Me. The moment the thought is shaped in a devotee's mind, it reaches Me and the necessary guidance is transmitted."

When a few university men, belonging to a blatantly propagandist and rationalist association, wrote to Baba, insisting on an examination of His credentials, Baba said, "Sai is not a subject for a university examination; He is an object for universal examination."

Joel Roydon had no respect for Baba, who was worshipped by his wife. So, he astonished his friends, when he announced that he was flying to India with her, to meet 'the wild-haired character'. When asked what he proposed to ask Baba for, he jocularly replied that he would

ask for a rainbow in the sky. “No magician can ever pull a rainbow out of his sleeves,” he jested. When he reached Puttapparthi and sat on a rock atop the hill, to enjoy a smoke, “We saw a rainbow go straight up the eastern sky,” Joel writes, “never curving, and within seconds, it had reached its peak. As quickly as it grew, it dissolved itself from the bottom up!” Next, when he was called by Baba for an interview, the question with which Joel was greeted was, “So, how did you like the rainbow?”

Aldous Huxley says, “The divine mind may choose to communicate with finite minds either by manipulating the world of men and things, in ways which the particular mind to be reached at that moment will find meaningful, or else there may be direct communication by something resembling thought transference.” Denise (*Sai Vahini*) Eversole wrote in the daily paper, *Movement*, in California, about her visit to a Sathya Sai Baba shrine in South India: “*Vibhuti* pours from Baba’s photographs and two small, enamel medallions of Baba exude a jasmine-scented, sweet nectar called *amrita*. A large jar daily fills up with this syrup and the photographs are scraped clear. Both these manifestations of Baba’s grace are given freely to all visitors. We received large containers of each and watched carefully as more, and yet more *vibhuti* and *amrita* formed and poured from the blessed objects. Nearby the Kaveri River, a short walk from the temple leads one to a pair of stone feet. From the feet oozes an oil with the most enchanting fragrance. This we wiped on our scarves and kerchiefs, and whatever else we had, and watched as more oil oozed up from between the toes. It was my fourth visit to this shrine, but I never tire of witnessing these evidences of God’s omnipotence.”

Since Coming Back

In April, 1972, Elsie and Walter Cowan returned from India to California. To a Sai group, Elsie announced, “We have come back from India, my husband and I, brim-full of the most astounding news that can happen to anyone. It is so fantastic, that many of you may doubt it, because hardly any of us can imagine the great importance and the tremendous power of this great, high God, who not only walks the Earth, but cares for all the planes from Earth to eternity. Walter died at Madras; Sai Baba resurrected him!” A few months later, Walter Cowan wrote to me, “I am really feeling fine. Would you believe that I have gained about thirty pounds since coming back?” Inscrutable, but true.

Examiner And Examinee

Here is another story from Mexico: “A dozen families live on our hill in Mexico, which

slopes down to the Pacific Ocean about 300 feet below. Most of the people are retired Americans. There are one or two Mexican families, also. The hill itself is not of solid rock, but is sedimentary ocean floor uplift, comprising a mass of sand, boulders, clay, seashells, etc. A recent, vertical cut for a new highway weakened the hill. In September, 1976, it started sliding towards the ocean. Before long, two houses had fallen and other houses broke into half. The authorities ordered all remaining houses to be evacuated, because government geologists had declared that all the houses would be destroyed by the earth movement. At this critical juncture, I was scheduled to leave on a tour of Sathya Sai Baba centres. We prayed to Baba to save the houses of our small community.

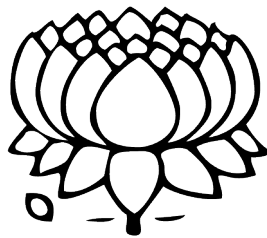
Throughout the tour, I remained anxious about this occurrence, but on my return, was relieved to find all the remaining houses intact as before. The geologists were measuring the hill each day and were unable to discover why part of the hill was stationary and had not moved even a fraction of an inch. Of course, they did not know about the prayer, nor that we had affixed a picture of *Bhagawan* to a window directly facing ocean side.”

John Hislop, who wrote me this letter, has published a book, entitled 'Conversations with *Bhagawan* Sri Sathya Sai Baba'. Baba tells Hislop, “It is perfectly all right to ask all these questions and clear all your doubts. You are examining *Swami* and *Swami* is giving the answers. But, when all this is finished and the next time you will have come around, *Swami* will be the examiner and you will have to be ready with the right answers in your mind and heart.”

“Before going to Sai Baba, I told Indra Devi that everything but the miracles I can accept,” writes Richard Bock, “Those bothered me, because I had read the '*Ramakrishna Kathamrita*', which says that you have to be aware of *siddhis* (ascetically acquired powers), for they can lead you astray. So, I felt that showing off this power was somehow egotistical and was not the highest level of expression. Therefore, I had doubts as to His motives in displaying them. But, when I got closer and began to experience them, I realised that they were so natural to Him and the reason behind them so sound, that I could see He was coming from a different space. He was not becoming something - that He already was - so, there was nothing that could spoil Him... For a Westerner, it usually takes something to blow his mind off the material world that he is entrapped in and the idea that everything can be figured out scientifically. So, Baba creates something out of time, breaking what usually look like scientific natural laws and creates a so-called miracle.”

“The thing that blew my mind was what happened, when Indra Devi asked Him if she could have some more of the ‘healing ash’, because she had given away all of her first supply to people. He said, ‘Yes,’ and as I was watching, He moved His hand in a circle and then, held up both hands as if to receive something. Then, an urn, about four inches high, appeared in mid-air and plopped into His hands. I saw this and said, ‘That’s not sleight of hand, that’s not up His sleeve, that’s something else.’ He took off the top and spilled all the ash onto a piece of paper. Then, He poured again and another urnful of ash poured out, so that in total, He had poured out double the amount of ash that the urn could possibly hold. Next, He put half of it back in the urn and distributed some to the people nearby. What was left He put in a little handkerchief bag and gave it to Indra. He touched it and said, ‘Now, this will be an inexhaustible supply and you won’t run out of it.’ Well, she has had it for ten years, now and it is still flowing. And she has given it to thousands of people. After that experience with Baba, whether or not God exists is no longer a question in my mind.” This is what Richard Bock related to an interviewer from the *Movement*, in September, 1979.

Baba is so compassionate, that He designs a new strategy for every individual He decides to reform or transform. At one and the same time, in all parts of the world, increasing number of people experience His grace by means of an ‘inner voice’ or intuition, during silent spells, or amidst the clank of crowds, or through His direct manifestation in physical form - conveying warnings, revitalising faith, and clearing doubts. A telegram which in fact was never transmitted, a letter which was never posted, or a phone call which was never dialled can reveal His affection and awaken, assure, or advise a person struggling in the dark, ultimately revealing the hand of God beckoning him to *Prasanthi Nilayam*.





Chapter 4

Words With Wings

Sanathana Sarathi

ON *Sivaratri* day in 1958 was inaugurated the monthly magazine, designed to communicate the message of *Bhagawan* to the world. He named it *Sanathana Sarathi*. These two words taken together spell the function that Baba has taken upon Himself. *Sanathana* denotes His being the very source of all this ‘becoming’. In a written message to Shri R.R. Chatterji of the Sathya Sai *Seva* Samitis, Calcutta, announcing the mission for which He has assumed this human form, Baba made a declaration, which nobody since the days of Lord Krishna had the good fortune to listen to, “There was no one to know who I am, till I created the world at My pleasure, with one word. Immediately, earth and sky were formed, mountains rose up, rivers started flowing, sun, moon, and stars sprang out of nowhere to prove My existence. Came all forms of life plants, insects, beasts, birds, and men. Various powers were bestowed upon them under My orders. The first place was granted to man and My knowledge was placed in man’s mind.”

Sanathana means ‘timeless, eternal’. He is *Sanathana*, now limited in time and space, so that He can be availed of by us. The *Upanishads* speak of embodied beings as chariots, which are drawn along by the senses (horses) through the objective world. Safety lies in choosing a knowledgeable *Sarathi* (charioteer) and installing him with unimpeded authority, in the chariot. By taking upon Himself the role of the *Sanathana Sarathi*, Baba has revealed that He is the eternal Inner Motivator in all - recognised or unrecognised, acknowledged or ignored, respected or slandered. “My knowledge was placed in man’s mind,” He says. But, the mind allows itself to be covered by veils, so that pure knowledge becomes warped or is denied.

The first issue of the magazine contained a message from Baba, wherein He spoke of the high purpose, which it had set out to fulfil: “From this day, our *Sanathana Sarathi* will lead to

victory the cohorts of truth - the *Vedas*, the *Shastras*, and similar scriptures of all faiths - against the forces of the ego, such as injustice, falsehood, immorality, and cruelty. This is the reason why it has emerged. This *Sarathi* will fight in order to establish world prosperity. It is bound to sound the paean of triumph, when universal *ananda* is achieved.”

Poems

Baba is ever conscious that He is the Cosmic Principle that has transformed Himself into human form. He is the Goal, the Guide, and the Guardian, whom every being seeks. He gives expression to this truth in His discourses and writings. As a poem to His discourses, He sometimes sings, in either Telugu, or Sanskrit, a short verse, which lifts the veil of mystery hiding Him from our eyes and in a flash, makes us aware of some facet of His plan to rehabilitate man. He declared, “The same Vishnu, who rewarded Dhruva with material and spiritual glory, and saved Prahlada from the cruelty of those who sought, through torture, to break his faith in the Lord, that same Gopala, who showered grace on the impoverished and famished Kuchela is here now, the embodiment of Wisdom and Bliss, the ruler enthroned in the hearts of good men, the compassionate monitor of all those who stray away from the right path.”

On one occasion, He sang another poem, which had spontaneously blossomed on His lips, “Why does the sun rise and set every day, without delay or disruption? Why do the stars that light the sky to the delight of all eyes, hide their splendourous faces, when the day dawns and never even slyly peer to tell us where they are? Why does air always be around, giving us the breath of life? Why do these streams and rivers roar, murmur, gurgle, and gossip over rock, pebble, and sand, as they meander along towards the parent sea? How is it that the billions that constitute mankind, though they are caskets treasuring images of the same Entity, remain distinct from each other in appearance, achievement, aspiration, and attitude? This is the answer: Know that I am the One, who has ordained that these be such and shall behave so.”

The Five Elemental Aspects

The *Upanishads* declare the tests to decide the genuineness of *Bhagawan's* incarnation, thus: “For fear of Him, fire burns; for fear of Him, wind blows. Indra, the mighty god of gods, also stands in awe of Him. Death hastens towards or flees away, as He directs.”

When a greedy forest fire advanced towards Chuchuma Ranch on the U.S-Mexico border, where stood the Sai *Yoga* Institute of Indra Devi, her prayer to Baba turned the fire back by a

sudden twist of wind, when the flames had reached within yards of the ranch. Shri K.A. Raja, Lt. Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, writes that a huge bamboo cluster within yards of his official residence at Tezpur, caught fire and was exploding merrily, immediately adjacent to the thatched huts of some Nepalese workmen. Mrs. Raja hastened to the scene and called aloud to Baba to soften the fury of the flames. The latter relates, "The fire extinguished itself in a few seconds; not even a dozen fire engines could have done that job." Similarly, Baba has many a time prevented rain by a mere gesture or oral command, when it had threatened to drench the thousands gathered to have His *darshan* and listen to His discourse.

The president of a coach factory near Madras had made a commitment to deliver about 25 coaches, as the first instalment of an agreement between the Government of India and the government of an overseas state - a prestigious assignment that was secured in spite of overwhelming competition from countries in the front line of industrialised nations. But, troubles dogged him at every step. He was very unhappy that he would not be able to load the coaches onto a Japanese ship that had already left Bombay for Madras to take the cargo on board. He prayed to Baba to save the reputation of his factory. Baba said, "The ship will be delayed; hurry on with your work." The ship faced a fierce storm off Cochin and had to undergo some repairs at Colombo. When it finally did reach Madras, the port was too full to allow it into the docks. When, at last, it was ready to receive the coaches, they were waiting, spick and span, to be carried overseas. *Bhagawan* can initiate or pacify storms, when He wills. He welcomes into the realm of death those who clamour for release and brings back from the gullet of death those who were gobbled, while they had yet to play the role He had in mind for them. The words emanating from Him are, therefore, divine commands, which can charge us with an immense potency and purity and change us into reservoirs of love and light.

Come Again

On another occasion, preliminary to the hoisting of the *Prasanthi* flag at the *Nilayam*, the following poem was sung by Baba: "The Cowherd Boy, the son of Nanda, has come again among you, embodied as *ananda*, so that He may collect His playmates... The same Rama has come again, with a great deal of *aram* (leisure), since now there is no burden of imperium, no dynastic responsibility; He has come again to give His erstwhile followers the chance of service. The same Sai has come to you from Shirdi, to be in the midst of His erstwhile companions and comrades. Once again, the same all-comprehensive, omnipresent Principle named Vishnu has come in this comprehensible, cognisable, human form, so that

you may benefit from Him. He has come without His instruments and weapons, for He has willed to forge them here itself.” Baba has herein asserted that He is the self-determined human expression of that Super Intelligence, that Absolute Will. He says, “For you, birth is an anxious moment; childhood is fraught with anxiety; living is a series of anxious moments; livelihood is earned through a chain of anxious events; old age and death cause dire anxiety; even joy brings about the anxiety that you might lose it soon; all activity is saturated with anxiety. But, barter all this anxiety for only one anxiety - how to win the grace of Sai - and you will be free from the big brood of worry and unrest.” His prologue-verses often deal with devotees, telling them how steady faith alone can earn eternal peace: “Compassion in the eyes; sweet words on the tongue; nectarous gleam on a smiling face; joy ever residing in the heart; reassurance in every gesture of the hands - that is Sai. Do not lose hold and give up the Saviour, who has come to you.”



Swamy in Rajahmundry (See page 42)

Hold Fast

Ponder over the significance of this verse He sang years ago: “Something you have held,

while seeking to hold something, hold on to it most firmly. Something you did ask for, though asking is not needed; persist till the gift is granted. Some desire you have entertained in your mind, though there is no need to desire; still, knock at the door, until it opens and your desire is fulfilled. Either I must grant you the thing that you crave for, unable to withstand your yearning, or you must realise its very absurdity and conquer that worthless yearning.” True to the declaration He made at the First World Conference that He is all names and forms, by which man has ever tried to describe God, the annunciatory verse He sings on days dedicated to Rama, Krishna, or Siva would often be about the identity between Him and the Deity that is being adored. On a *Sivaratri* day, a few years ago, He proclaimed, while standing before a festive gathering of twenty-five thousand people, “This day, Siva has come into the view of mortals - Siva, dwelling in the village of Parthi. He carries on Him matted hair, the Ganges flowing from it, the eye in the centre of the brow, the dark-complexioned throat, the serpent wrist-lets, the tiger-skin around the waist, the red dot on the forehead, and the *pan* (betel)-produced redness on the lips.”

When He led a party of about a hundred and fifty devotees to the famous Himalayan shrine of Narayana, He addressed them at Haridwar before starting on the mountain trek, saying, “Yours is a unique chance: going to Narayana *with* Narayana.”

The Unseen Force

Once, Baba sang a verse, in which He declared that He is the Unseen Force that regulates the movements of celestial bodies and all forms of life, and designs the destinies of each of us. This was when He inaugurated the All India Conference of Sai organisations held at Madras. If the Will is all-powerful and eternal, it can, of course, come down and move as a man among men. At another time, He said, “There are three types of men: those who seek happiness for themselves first, with no attention paid to others; those who consider others first and thereby, derive happiness; and those who will try to prevent others from being happy, even at the cost of their own happiness.” To a group of Americans, He once gave a message that was different in emphasis. “You are the smiling flower,” He wrote, “You are the twinkling star. What is there on the earth and in the sky that you are not? Then, why need you desire? You are the God of the universe. You create the universe and after playing with it for some time, draw it into yourself and are the same again. What you really are is Truth–Consciousness–Bliss.” Baba insists that everyone be made aware of the goal of life, which is to pass from the stage of ‘I am in the Light’ to the stage ‘the Light is in me’, on to the ultimate truth that ‘*I am* the Light’. When you are the Light, there can be no darkness, no desire, no

fear, no hatred, no ego.

In the following message to children, Baba is simple and direct, as if they were really sitting around Him, their eyes wide open in wonder:

Dear Children,

You have been born in this most glorious country, Bharat and have grown up here. Unless you learn to know its history, its holy traditions, the lives and teachings of its men of wisdom and piety, what else is there for you to learn?

Light the lamp of morality and righteousness, the lamp that once shone bright in this land. Let its light illumine the world.

Messages

In a message to students, He has asked, “Can the goal of life be just this? To struggle amidst the waves of joy and grief that rise and fall in the visible, objective world; to be carried along the swift current of desire, gathering food, shelter, comfort, and sensual pleasure and finally, to flounder on the rocks of death?” In another message, He emphasises a basic truth: “Seeking a high standard of living, instead of a high level of living has played havoc with human society. A high level of living insists on morality, humility, detachment, and compassion; a competitive race for luxury and conspicuous consumption is not encouraged. Now, man has become a slave of his desires and finds himself helpless before the urge to earn pleasure and luxury. Being too weak to keep his baser urges under control, he cannot arouse the divinity that is latent in him.”

Baba has said that in this incarnation, He is the supreme teacher. "*Aham Satyabodhaka* (I am the Teacher of Truth)," He says. He teaches at all times, in all places, and by all means. He showers love and wins you; He withholds love and cures you. Once, He administered a mild admonition to some devotees, who had expected a continuous flow of ‘plums and roses’. Then, He enlightened them: “Do you delight, when I allow you to be near Me? The next moment, I might cause the sorrow of separation. Do you feel that Sai takes delight in your tears? Just then, I might make you laugh till your sides ache and continue to grant you joy, again and again. Do you feel a sense of elevation, when I praise you a little? That very moment, I may prick the bubble of your pride by means of ridicule. Do you feel secure, when I tell you not to fear? The next moment, I might inflict pain and appear indifferent, when you pray for relief. I do not allow you to go back, nor do I allow you to go forward! I madden

your mind and smother your ego. Find out how anyone can move away from this charming Sai, the embodiment of Love and Light. Find out the reason why He is indispensable, in spite of this dual role.”

In this message, He has revealed that every act of His, every flash of anger or twinkle in the eye, every smile or curve of the brow has a deep significance for the recipient. Many such messages are composed in verse extempore and sung by Baba, expressing the mood of the moment and answering unspoken thoughts and questions that agitate the mass of people gathered to hear Him.

“When you have before you the wish fulfilling tree,” He sings, “Why do you desire to foster inferior trees? When you have for the asking, the cow (*Kamadhenu*) that yields all that you need, why do you seek the common cow for milk? When you have the Meru mountain rich in gold and silver, why do you run about frantically in search of petty gains? When you have with you the Sai Who gives liberation, why do you crave for lesser joys that dissolve again into grief?” Most of Baba’s discourses are a commentary on some such basic idea, enshrined in poetry and song.

A group of Americans once prayed for a message to take home with them to the States. So, Baba in His own attractive calligraphy, wrote, “The fruit has to be sweet, though the rind can afford to be bitter. It is the juice and its sugar content that count; put away the rind of anger, malice, envy, and greed and assimilate the sweetness of the fruit, so that sweetness can develop within you... Be a lotus: The lotus is born in slime and mud, but rises up through the water and, lifting its head above it, refuses to get wet, although it springs from water. Be like the lotus or the lily - unattached.”

Baba teaches us by means of His letters, discourses, books, and articles. He writes in simple and elegant, colloquial Telugu or English prose. The message is always extempore, His ideas receiving expression as mellifluous poems and songs showering exquisite delight. His script is reminiscent of charming, monastic artistry; the lines are straight and parallel, resembling floral garlands spread out upon a paper. Poetry and melody shine through each sentence and behind each phrase and clause lies a form that is clearly human, though it carries divine wisdom. Thus, Baba’s message enables mankind to benefit from the grace and wisdom that He has come to confer.

The Mother Feeds

Baba speaks of Himself as the mother, yearning to feed an unruly child, who, in its ignorance,

refuses to eat what will cure its hunger. The child has to be coddled and coaxed, wheeled and petted, even caught unawares sometimes, by means of a story or a song, to induce it to accept the food it needs. Baba's immeasurable love persuades Him to pack a medical dose in a sweet smile, a panacea in a palatable parable, or a profound thought in syrupy joke.

Let us dip into the books that Baba has given man, in order to draw him to the feast that He has prepared for his hunger. A number of scholars, cynical of matters beyond their ken and proud of their academic achievements, receive these books by post (sent mysteriously by Baba Himself), or through some inexplicable source. These become for them invitations to the Presence, fresh and fascinating as they are.

Baba has said that, if He were to be identified by one characteristic more than any other, He could most aptly be called *Prema Swaroopa*, the Embodiment of Love. The very first *vahini* (stream) that flowed forth from his pen to fertilise the mind of man, was the book *Prema Vahini*. Narada, the great exponent of love as a spiritual discipline, defines that path as *satasmin parama prema swaroopa* (it is of the nature of supreme devotion or love to That). The love is described as supreme, because it is full and free, with no conditions, no trace of bargaining, no taint of fear. Once such love is practised and experienced, all distinctions drop, duality ceases, and only the Truth remains.

The Gopis

Baba quotes the love of the simple milkmaids and cowherds of *Brindavan* towards Krishna, as the best example of this *parama prema*. Krishna Himself appreciated it thus: "They long for Me so deeply, their thoughts, words, and deeds are so imbued with Me, that they have no sense of time or space, no consciousness of their bodies and their needs. They are so absorbed in Me, that they are like rivers that have merged in the ocean and lost their individual names and distinctions." Shankara, the great philosopher-saint, wrote of *bhakti*, "*Swaswaroopa anusandhanam bhaktiriti abhidheeyate* (the constant contemplation of the Reality, which is one's innermost core, is *bhakti*)." Baba elaborates on this truth, "The *Atman* is the inner core, it is the Reality that has to be contemplated upon... When Krishna advises Arjuna to surrender all activity to 'Me' and to take refuge in 'Me', it is but an exhortation to spend every moment in the awareness of the real Me, the *Atman*, the *Swaswaroopa*."

Baba says in *Prema Vahini*, "Only through love can faith become steady; only through faith can knowledge be gained; only through knowledge can *parabhakti* (complete devotion, self-surrender) be ensured, and only through *parabhakti* can the Lord be realised."

“*Gnyanadevatu Kaivalyam,*” says the *Gita* (Knowledge alone can confer freedom). *Bhakti* clarifies the vision, cleanses the mind, strengthens self-control, and purifies thought, so that the Lord may be reflected clear and complete in the heart. Regarding the age-old controversy on the relative status of the paths - *bhakti*, *karma*, and *gnyana* - that lead to God, Baba writes, “I do not agree that *bhakti*, *karma*, and *gnyana* are separate. I do not place any one before the other, nor will I accept a mixture of the three. *Karma* is *bhakti*; *bhakti* is *gnyana*. A piece of candy has taste, weight, and shape; the three cannot be separated. Each bit has all the three; we do not find shape in one bit, weight in another, and sweetness in the third. When the candy is placed on the tongue, the taste, the weight, and the shape are simultaneously experienced. Similarly, *gnyana*, *karma*, and *bhakti* may be truly experienced only as one whole.” *Karma* is love in action, *gnyana* is love experienced, and *bhakti* is love universally shared. Thus, Baba dismisses in one stroke all disputations about the superiority of any one of these disciplines over the other.

Cups Of Many Shapes

Baba has silenced traducers of idol worship, too. He says that no one can adore the nameless, formless Absolute Principle, without sacrificing one’s alloy in the crucible of devotion to that same Principle, in a mentally cognisable and acceptable form. “No one can be a *Nirguna gnyani* (knower of the Attribute-less) without being a *Saguna bhakta* (worshipper of the Attributeful),” He says. “*Iswara anugrahadeva pumsam adwaita vasana,*” says Shankara (It is only through God’s own grace that one can comprehend Him as being without name and form). In *Prema Vahini*, Baba says, “Idols serve the same purpose as metaphors and similes in poetry. They illustrate and illumine the divine.” He has also said that, idols are only artistic and attractive containers, which people use for quaffing the nectar of divine effulgence. “You cannot quaff it without a cup. One person may like to drink the delight in a ‘blue Cowherd Boy of *Brindavan*’ cup, while another may relish it in a cup depicting the ecstatic ‘Cosmic Dancer’ of Kailash. The choice may depend on either hereditary predilection, or on personal choice, or on a wave of spiritual awareness. Whatever the reason or the shape of the vessel, it serves the same high purpose - to help imbibe the joy, the power, the love, the wisdom, and the splendour of the one Divine Entity.

In the *Bhakti Sutra*, Narada has said that, a *bhakta* (devotee) has no worldly worries, for he has surrendered himself to the Lord. Baba writes, “This does not mean that he would sit quiet. Service of man, for the *bhakta*, is service of God, for he sees God in every man. Free from the alternating waves of likes and dislikes, worry and exultation, the *bhakta* sees the

divine as the motivator in himself and in others. He is ever-engaged in good deeds, for such is his basic nature. In whatever he does, thinks, or speaks, he promotes *lokasangraha* (the welfare of mankind). He has no worry or disappointment, because for him, it is God, who provides, performs, proposes, plans, and dispenses.”

While the monthly serials of ‘*Prema Vahini*’ in the *Sanathana Sarathi* were percolating like fresh water into desiccated hearts, another series of Baba’s articles was published in the same magazine to remove the weeds of doubt growing wild therein. They were collectively entitled ‘*Sandeha Nivarini*’. Even in His teens and twenties, Baba took delight in prodding those who gathered at His feet, to ask Him questions on spiritual matters. These became the cues for dissertations, short and long, with many an interspersed parable, poem, or song, to lead the questioners from darkness to light.

Questions Answered

I remember many such question-answer sessions, taking place on the Chitravati sands. Dayananda Sagar (a lawyer), Vittal Rao (a sylviculturist), V. Hanumantha Rao (a civilian officer), and a few others were prolific interrogators. Many brought their doubts before Baba and prayed for solutions. There were *pundits* and *sadhakas* from Venkatagiri, Yerpedu, Vyasashram, Thiruvannamalai (Ramanashram), Pondicherry, Kanhangad, and Varkalai Narayanaguru Ashram. They returned happy and restful, for their problems received Baba’s clear analysis, deep diagnosis, intimate unravelling, and effective remedy. There was, one day, a hoary monk from Rishikesh, who asked Baba, with a touch of nonchalant conceit, how to escape the coils of *maya*. Baba answered, “*Maya* does not exist, until you look for it. Don’t look for it, it won’t affect you. The image of your face is inside the well, only when you peep to discover whether it is there.” The monk confessed to me later that it was a reply he had never received so far and it had solved for him a doubt that had haunted him for years.

In ‘*Sandeha Nivarini*’, Baba says, “I am happy, when anyone asks Me about things he has not understood. Of course, you have every right.” Then, he asks the pupil, “But, are you reflecting on the answers I give and practising what has been told to you with the conviction born of faith? What am I here for? Is it not for explaining to you things you do not know? Ask me without hesitation or fear. I am always ready to answer. Only, the enquiry must be earnest, emerging out of a genuine desire to know and to practise what is good.”

It can be revealed now that the ‘*bhakta*’, who visits Baba with questions - personal, philosophic, and religious - in every chapter of *Sandeha Nivarini*, is a creation of the divine

pen. Baba reveals through this character, His infinite compassion towards the *Samsayatma*, the person afflicted with doubts. He poses the problems and provides the answers. He writes, “*Bhakta!* I converse with you about every point you place before Me and allow many to take part in this conversation. The sun’s light falls upon the mirror, the light from the mirror upon the walls of bungalow, and the light from the walls upon the eye. Similarly, this *Sandeha Nivarini* has been planned in order that the illumination of My teaching may fall upon you and thence, on the pages of the *Sanathana Sarathi*, so that the effulgence may illuminate the world and bring light and harmony into the heart of mankind.”

The next book to be serialised in the pages of the *Sanathana Sarathi* was *Dharma Vahini*. Baba says, “*Dharma* is like the river *Saraswati*, flowing unseen beneath the deeper levels of human consciousness, feeding the roots of activity, filling the springs of thought, cleansing the slushy eddies of feeling. When the river runs dry, or is clogged by greed and hate, the *Avatar* comes to let in a torrent of grace and restore its fresh, free flow.”

Buddha declared that *dharma* is the very basis of good life. He insisted that everyone should surrender to its dictates, so that the misery that is ever at the heels of life may be avoided. Ashoka, the historic emperor, sweetened every law of his empire with *dharma*. He inscribed on rock and pillar his exhortations: “Hitherto, my people and my forefathers went on *viharayatras* (pleasure trips); hereafter, I propose only *dharmayatras* (pilgrimages). Hitherto, they gave *dana* (charity, usually in the form of money); hereafter, they must give *dharmadana* (the gift of the knowledge of *dharma*). Hitherto, they sought *digvijaya* (conquest of territory); hereafter, I exhort them to relish *dharmavijaya* (the triumph of righteousness).” Ashoka knew that *dharma* sustains, strengthens, and saves.

“Why should man take to the path of *dharma*?” asked Schopenhauer and then, replied to himself, “To preach morality is easy; to lay the foundation for morality is not.” Faith in God, who rewards the good and punishes the bad, was a stout bulwark of *dharma* for ages. But, secularism has undermined this faith. Baba, however, in *Dharma Vahini*, has installed *dharma* on an unshakable foundation as the unity of all life, indeed, of creation: “Whoever conquers the ego and overcomes the natural tendency to regard the body and its furniture as his true self, is surely on the path of *dharma*, for he would soon discover the truth behind all this scintillating multiplicity. He would realise that the objective world is like a gem studded veil over *Brahman*, which is the one and only truth. *Sarvam khalu idam Brahman* (All is verily *Brahman*). When man is aware of this truth, there will be no ‘other’; all will be ‘you’. Since you love yourself most, your love will flow in full measure towards all and encompass

the living and the non-living.” As a Red Indian Chief wrote to the president of the United States of America, in 1855, “Every part of this Earth is sacred to my people - every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the woods, every clearing, and every humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people.”

Dharma has to be built on this deep understanding of the depths of being. “Build your life,” says Baba, “on the *atmic* plinth, the faith that you are a wave upon the Ocean of Bliss, a spark of the Cosmic Intelligence.” Then, He asks, “When you worship an idol, what is it that you really do? First, a form of God is imprinted on your mind. After that, you meditate on His power, grace, and omnipresence and project these qualities upon the idol, thus enabling your consciousness to transcend it and become unaware of the lithic substance before you. In the same manner, imprint onto your consciousness that form of God, which delights you most and fills you with illumination, and project that form on every man, beast, bird, and insect, on every tree and plant, on every rock and rill; this *sadhana* will make you true, good, and beautiful.” This is the fundamental norm: *Atmic* awareness - the unceasing remembrance of the One appearing to be many. And to the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” often asked by those wearing I-glasses, Baba answers, “You *are* your *brother*; his health is your health; your holiness is his. There is no difference or distinction. If you swim, he swims, if he sinks, it is you who sink.”

The Source Of Power

Baba does not agree with the dictum, ‘Knowledge is Power,’ for knowledge may induce conceit, competition, and conflict. Instead, He always emphasizes that ‘Character is Power’ and elaborating upon the basis of character, He quotes the *Bhagavad Gita* (Ch.12, verses 13-19): “The man of character hates none, is kind and compassionate, free from egotism, treats pleasure and pain with equal unconcern, behaves ever with forbearance, is ever content, self-restrained, and steady in his conviction of the unity of the universe. He has no feeling of harassment from the world, nor does he in any way harass the world. He has no trace of anger, fear, anxiety, or exultation, nor is he bound by the chains of infatuation or vengeance. He neither craves, nor grieves, but passes unscathed through good repute and bad, welcoming both heat and cold. He is satisfied with fortune, be it good or bad, and has no home, which he is loath to leave.”

Seva has two invaluable consequences: the negation of the ego and the experience of kinship. Baba reminds us that even charity is cruelty, unless one heart meets another in warm

fraternity. The fragrance of love and the sweetness of sincerity must sanctify every act of *Seva*.

Baba teaches us in the book *Prasanthi Vahini*, how *dharma* can lighten the travails of family life and how social life can become healthier and happier, through the regulation of relationships according to *dharma*. Masters and servants, elders and youngsters, teachers and students - all can benefit, if *dharma* prevails.

But, the ancient academies of *dharma* have now become hotbeds of greed and jealousy. “Beautiful groves and fields are becoming thorny jungles with no viable path,” says Baba. He lays down in some detail, how parents can preserve and promote the culture of this land and save *dharma* from pollution. He pleads for a revival of the status of the village temple, as a reservoir of *dharma*. He says, “It can, if maintained on ancient lines, circulate sanctity and vitality through every vein and nerve of the social organism.”

Prasanthi

It is always richly rewarding to delve into the significance of the names that Baba sometimes gives to people or things. His residence at Puttaparthi, constructed in 1948-50, was named ‘*Prasanthi Nilayam*’ (the Abode of Supreme Peace). All beings have to obtain it, sometime, somewhere; each has to build it for himself, with His guidance and grace. Baba has cautioned the humanitarians and the philanthropists of this era that people today do not yearn for toys and trinkets, which feed avid appetites; they yearn rather for the glory of God, peace on Earth, and goodwill among men. They need calm contentment, rather than loud sensationalism. W.M. Dixon said in his Gifford Lectures, “In the new Garden of Eden, there will be roads and water supply, unlimited picture houses, unstinted soft drinks, excellent sanitation, slaughtering, and the best of schools, wireless installations, free concerts, and lectures for all. There will be no far horizon and invincible hopes. We shall cease to think of birth and death, of the Infinite, of God, and the sublime secrets of the universe. I am not much in love with these sixpenny Utopias.” Baba has been insisting that those who draw five-year plans for dams, powerhouses, railway lines, and factories must also provide adequate correctives for the devastation of traditional values, which will follow the vast accession of pettiness and profit. People, intoxicated with sudden prosperity and disheartened at the loss of traditions, need *Prashanti* and *prema* to confer courage and equanimity.

Baba’s book, *Prasanthi Vahini*, gives us the key to the treasure-house of that, which escapes understanding and defies logic, namely *prashanti*, which the *Gita* calls the goal of human

endeavour. *Shanti* means ‘peace’; pra, the prefix, means ‘larger, superior’. *Prashanti* is *shanti*, unaffected by desire, greed, hatred, or anger. It is not curtailed by adversity, or multiplied by windfalls. Baba says that we must cultivate the three virtues of *viveka* (intelligence), *vairagya* (detachment), and *vichakshana* (discrimination), in order to equip ourselves with *prashanti*. He prescribes the *Viveka Chudamani*, composed by Shankara, as the text, which can develop in us these three virtues. Baba says, “Like children playing with dolls, you too call some elephants and others horses, some friends and others enemies, and spend your entire life in such make-believe. Once you realise that without the spirit, they are all just the same, inert substance, the notion of ‘many’ and the diversity of name and form, both disappear and there can be no liking or disliking any more...

You laugh and weep, love and hate, live in joy, sorrow, anger, and fascination, but all these varied reactions do not make the objective world less unreal.”

Vairagya gets a new meaning in *Prasanthi Vahini*. *Raga* means ‘attachment’ and *vairagya* comes, when you realise that the stone, to which you were attached, is really God. The ‘stoneness’ is like a veil, cast by your ignorance upon what is really of the same substance as you yourself. The *vairagya* that results from this illumination is lasting and most sublime.



Swamy on tiger skin (See page 17)

Eight Disciplines

Baba has also commented favourably in this book on the eight traditional stages of spiritual education, but He has given each of them wider and deeper meaning. The first discipline is *yama*, which includes non-violence, honesty, celibacy, and non-acceptance of gifts. Baba says, “This is the meaning usually given to this word. But, I would say that *yama* is really the

giving up of attachment to the body and the senses.”

The second discipline is *niyama*, which is described in *Rajayoga* texts as ‘physical purity, mental exaltation, austerity, steadfast study, and the attitude of surrender to God’. But, Baba explains it in the following manner, “*Niyama* is steady *prema* fixed on God, the Supreme Over-soul, regardless of time, place, and circumstances.”

Asana, the next discipline, lays down the place, time, and postures for the *sadhaka* engaged in meditation, to help him gain steadiness and stability. Baba has clarified it with a simple formula: “The best posture is *udasina* (the posture of full relaxation and complete detachment).” In the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali recommends *sthira sukha asanam* (a steady, comfortable style of sitting). Baba writes, “I am telling you the same thing in other words, that the most effective *asana* is the one least affected by the external world and *udasina* means ‘unaffected’.”

About *pranayama*, Baba says, “In *yoga*, this step is explained as breath control. But, the control of the vital airs is possible only for those who are aware that the world is an amalgam of truth and falsehood. The picture of the universe in the mind’s eye will be like letters written long ago by lead pencils, now hazy, indistinct, undecipherable, and giving impressions half true and half false. Only a person aware of this peculiarity of creation can command the vital airs to obey his will.”

Baba also elaborates upon and clarifies the fifth stage, called *pratyahara*, or the withdrawal of the senses of perception from the external world, in order to free the mind for uninterrupted meditation on the inner one. How can this be done? The awareness that the external world is born of *maya* and sustained by *maya*, will provide the motive force to withdraw the senses. According to Baba, no other achievement can accomplish this task. So here too, the acquisition of wisdom is a vital prerequisite.

Baba continues, “Patanjali declared that when the *chitta* is established in one thought, it is called *dharana*. I would say that *dharana* implies more than mere negation of the multiple activity of the *chitta*... Treat your *chitta* like a little child; caress it into good ways, leading it with tenderness. Gradually, make it aware that all that is ‘seen’ is illusion, superimposition, make-believe. Remove its fears with love reprimands and focus its attention on the goal.”

Dhyana, the next stage, has a book for itself from the pen of Baba. Suffice it here to say that, He reveals to us that *dhyana* is an uninterrupted dwelling of the consciousness within the consciousness itself. And the final stage of *samadhi* - the *savikalpa*, where there is but a trace

of the knower, the to-be-known, and the knowledge, and the *nirvikalpa*, where even this trace is effaced - is like the ocean, into which the consciousness finally merges. That is the goal, where supreme peace reigns.

For the people of the world today, *Prasanthi Nilayam* has become a place, where they can bask in the warmth of such a peace. On Christmas Day, when mankind celebrates the advent of the Son of God to establish 'peace on Earth and goodwill among men', hundreds of Christians from overseas gather at *Prasanthi Nilayam* to share with fellow Christians from India the presence of Baba, who has come on that same divine mission and is engaged in transforming man into an instrument for fulfilling that mission. He has directed every unit of the Sathya Sai *Seva* Organisation to close each session with the prayer, *Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu* (May happiness and prosperity reign everywhere). But, He has also warned them, "While repeating the prayer, if you do think ill of others or look down upon anyone, if you cannot tolerate difference of dress, language, faith, or temperament, you can never promote peace. Your hearts have become pits of hatred, greed, and jealousy. But, from this day on, while your tongues pray for peace, let your hands be engaged in service and your hearts dwell in love."

Prescriptions For Peace

"Today, quacks with new-fangled ideas lay down rules for *dhyana*," says Baba, "Each one has his own special prescription and claims that his system can confer more benefit than that of others. But, none has himself experienced its sweetness or sanctity. That is the real reason why *dhyana* has drawn on itself the cynical laughter of many. My intention is to instruct such people and guide them onto the right path."

Baba goes on to reveal in these words the origin of His book, *Dhyana Vahini*: "Even the most potent drug will not cure, when it is only extolled in elaborate phrases at the bedside of the patient. The drug must be taken in and allowed to work its way into the blood stream. Your reading what I write on *dhyana* will not make it easier. The mind is a mad pleasure-seeker, running after mirages seen through the inefficient and therefore, deceptive senses of perception. The multifarious desires that infect the mind have to be quelled and the mind focussed on *ananda* only. Of course, when the mind is enlightened that God is the highest *ananda*, it will itself turn to God. When knowledge is accepted as the master and given charge of the reins, when the mind is denied the food that breeds depravity, when the senses are tamed by firmness and faith, *dhyana* will surely lead you to that Goal."

Baba distinguishes between concentration, contemplation, and meditation. Concentration is an unwavering determination in one's daily life, in the realm of the senses, the feelings, and the intellect. Contemplation is achieved, when the senses withdraw for some time and attachment to the objective world slackens. "When you have completely broken away from all attachment, you enter a state of meditation," says Baba.

Baba gives the guidelines for meditation and mind control in *Dhyana Vahini*. He says that *dhyana* is as life-sustaining as *dhanya* (food). "The methods vary greatly," says Paul Brunton, who has tried quite a few, "but, they generally consist of physical asceticism and worldly renunciation, together with attempts to induce a contemplative mood by disciplining, during fixed periods, the confused drift of thoughts and impressions, which make up man's inner existence." Baba explains the choice of place, posture, time-table, and the curriculum, but lays greater stress on the compassion of the Lord, who responds to the prayer embodied as *dhyana*. Since God assumes, for the sake of the *sadhaka*, the name and form that he meditates on, Baba assures us that *dhyana* need never be a barter endeavour; the summit can be reached by perseverance, for He raises up to Himself the struggling and the exhausted.

Baba warns us against nine enemies that waylay the earnest *sadhaka*. Three of them are physical: adulterous urges, greed to possess things or gain exclusive love, and the tendency to injure living beings; three are verbal: delight in causing panic by false alarm, speaking lies, and spreading scandal; and three are mental: craving for what belongs to others, envy, and cynicism. Baba directs that meditation on the Form be accompanied by an unbroken absorption of the sweetness of the Name, by which that form is identified. When the form slips from attention, the name will soon bring it back; when the name drops from awareness, the form will restore it to the mind. "Thus, the constant presence of God in the consciousness is ensured," says Baba.

Blossoms Of Bliss

Mention can be made here of a small book, '**Dialogues with the Divine**', brought out by the Maharashtra Branch of the *Prasanthi Vidwan Mahasabha*, an All-India academy of scholars and *sadhakas* founded by Baba. "This work has," as Baba writes, "blossomed out of the bliss that V.S. Page has earned and enjoyed in his inner-self." When he sat at the feet of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and questioned him with humility, on various problems arising out of his studies and spiritual practices, Baba tells him, "Nothing can be attained without ceaseless practice. So, every moment, you should remember God and be happy in the thought. Then only will

you be able to attain peace. Are we not at peace, when one thought ceases and another does not arise? You have to wait for that gap, be at one with that peace. Then, that peace will become continuous and lasting.

Thoughts ever rise and subside as ripples on the surface of water. You have to look at the mass of water, not merely at the ripples. Similarly, the *atman* ever dwells in peace, but man fails to realise this and remains ever absorbed in the vacillations of the mind. *Nityavadhan* (constant vigilance) is needed to ignore the waves and watch the water... Restlessness is but the rise and fall of the wave on the ocean that you are.” The next *Vahini* to be published serially in the *Sanathana Sarathi* was the *Gnyana Vahini* (Stream of Wisdom). “Whenever the gross and even the subtle are transcended, when the intelligence is clarified, when the self is free from feelings, impulses, and instincts, what remains in the consciousness is the true self only. The person, then, is one with the eternal Truth, the One beyond everything. He becomes *Brahman or Paramatma*,” says Baba. This awareness is the acme of *ananda*. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, it is declared that, “From *ananda* all this merged and in *ananda* all this rests.” The greater the awareness of *Paramatman*, the more the *ananda*. Baba summarises the truth in one sentence, “Awareness is life,” and then, goes on to reveal, “All men are divine like Myself; the only difference is that they are yet unaware of their divinity. They have come into this *karmic* prison, through the *karmas* of many lives. I have taken to this mortal form out of My own free will. They are bound to the body, while I am free of this bondage.”

Another of the *Vahinis* is the *Upanishad Vahini* - a synoptic review of the ten principal *Upanishads* with a prologue and an epilogue on the rare text, called the *Brahmanubhava Upanishad*. These *Upanishads* are esoteric and highly cryptic, but they elucidate the highest truths discernible to the intellect of man.

Baba stopped short of the fifth form in high school, when He was fourteen years of age. He did not read books, or learn from any teacher. He is Wisdom incarnate. He is poet, *pundit*, linguist, educationist, artist, mystic - the best in each field. In His discourses, He quotes freely from the Bible, the Koran, the poems of the Sufis, the dialogues of Socrates, Kant, and Karl Marx, and from the myths and legends of ancient cultures. He quotes from the *Upanishads* and reveals new significance in the utterances of the sages, to the astonishment of the savants, who have too long been content with arid dialectics they have treasured.

On fifteen evenings, Baba held a gathering of over five thousand students and scholars at *Brindavan*, spellbound by His elegant and eloquent analysis of the *Vedic* word, *Brahman*,

which means, as Baba writes in the *Gnyana Vahini*, big, enlarged, gross, high, since it comes from the root *brh*. He carefully untied the knots, which pegged that portentous word to a cluster of irrelevancies and misconceptions. He traced the genealogy of the word from its roots to the tallest branch and the tiniest twig. He ransacked without compunction the nooks and corners of *Vedic* texts, to expose the excrescences that had gathered on that word as it rolled down the corridor of time. On subsequent evenings, for another fortnight, Baba spoke on another *Vedic* word, *Bharat*. He elaborated upon the origin and migrations of the word among peoples and through the texts. Baba has declared more than once, that the revival of *Vedic* studies and research, with the aim of reviving the practice of *Vedic* ideals, is one of His plans for rehabilitating man.

The Flow Of The *Upanishad*

Baba, therefore, decided on a small book on the *Upanishads*, in order to rivet the attention of the world to the efficacy of *Vedanta*. As editor of the magazine, which published serially the chapters of this book, I had an amazing experience every month, for a whole year. After dispatching the magazine on the 16th of the month, I would go to Him for the next part of the series. Announcing the name of the *Upanishad* Himself, He would ask me to wait for a while in His room and proceed along the veranda with a note-book and pen, towards the room, where there stood a table with a chair by its side and nothing else besides. Once, it was the turn of the *Brihadaranayaka Upanishad* to be summarised and simplified. It is the biggest and the profoundest of the ten. I am certain that Baba had never read it or consulted others, who could talk on it. And there was no copy available anywhere within miles. But, forty minutes after He moved out with the pen and the note-book as His sole possessions, I could descend the eighteen steps from His room with a ten-page dissertation on the truths this *Upanishad* enshrined! I peeped into the script as I walked towards the press and my eyes fell on the Telugu words, which said, "The grandeur of the intellect of the Sage Yagnavalkya is impressively evident in this *Upanishad*." I told myself, "The grandeur of the omniscient Teacher that Baba is, is now impressively evident to me."

Vedic literature is classified as ritualistic, consecrational, and metaphysical (*karma*, *upasana*, and *gnyana*), and the *Upanishads* are grouped under the third category. But, Baba says that each principal *Upanishad* deals with all the three and is, therefore, instructive for all types of *sadhakas*. Besides special rites described in most of them, the adoration of preceptors or deities is also recommended. Baba says, "The *Upanishads* enshrine the whisperings of God to man." About the ten, on which Shankara and other scholar-saints have written detailed

expositions, Baba says, “Humanity stands to gain or fall by these ten... They are the synthesis of human thought, experience, and aspiration at their highest. They confirm the possibility of human perfectibility. They declare and demonstrate that man can secure the awareness of God as His reality, if only he casts off the veil of ignorance that he now delights to wear.”

Gita Retold

Baba’s *Gita Vahini* is the *Bhagavad Gita* retold, in order to save modern man from the myopia of egoistic materialism. He has declared that He has come to unify and clarify, fructify and fortify the holy aspirations of man. The doubts and delusions, which torment us while we are engaged in the ‘Battle of *Kurukshetra*’ with our outer and inner kith and kin, are treated here with love and sympathy by Sai Krishna, who also provides us with the answers.

I was once taken by an octogenarian *pundit*, a professor of Sanskrit and a retired Inspector of Sanskrit schools in the state of Orissa, to the *Gita Mandir* that he had built at Puri. He had spent all his earnings on the construction of this memorial. The temple is in the form of a magnificent chariot, over twenty feet in height, complete with wheels and horses. He had explained to me, with a glint in his eye and a tremor in his voice, the symbols he had got carved around the chariot. The figures represented various steps in *sadhana* and stages of spiritual achievement. There was Hanuman on the flag of the pole fixed atop the chariot. And when we stood in front of the chariot and looked up, I could see two mysteriously real statues seated upon it - the Lord and His disciple, who was just awakening from his self-inflicted stupor! It was a moment of thrill for me. I had not expected such a satisfying impact. I saw the disarming smile on the countenance of the Lord, when He recognized the dawn of self-knowledge on the doubting and dismay ridden mind of His disciple. His hand extended lovingly towards Arjuna, as if He wished to draw him closer to Himself and on that hand, I could see resting upon His palm, the book of books - the *Gita Vahini* of *Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*! I saw Sai Krishna comforting, consoling, and convincing Arjuna.

The *pundit* knew that Baba’s *Gita Vahini* was not a resume, or a commentary, or an abridgement. It was the voice of Krishna Himself, ringing over the clash of hate and greed and calling us into more worthwhile victories.

We are encouraged in *Gita Vahini*, to offer Baba the prayer He puts into the heart of Arjuna, “As You are guiding this chariot, guide me also and show me the way,” for, He is in fact the charioteer installed in everybody. The *Gita* as expounded by Baba, is a text-book of *Yoga* and guide for *sadhana*. It is a *Yogashastra* and *Brahmavidya* rolled into one. Through simile and

story, sneer and laughter, banter and reprimand, question and counter question, Baba pours into us the nectar of wisdom.

At *Kurukshetra*, Krishna said that, the mind and its vagaries can be tamed by *abhyasa* (discipline) and *Vairagya* (detachment). In *Gita Vahini*, Sai Krishna adds *vichara* (discriminative reasoning). Baba also analyses the concepts of *kshetra*, *yagnya*, *yoga*, and *maya* and sheds light on many corners, which the lamps of the ancient masters did not illumine. The ideal of *nishkama karma* (selfless action) gets a glow of heroism, when He interprets it as a conscious refusal of the fruits of activity, a courageous turning away from both triumph and failure.

Self-Revelation

There are many passages in *Gita Vahini* of self-revelation by Baba, where it becomes difficult to determine who is speaking to us so intimately - Krishna or Sai. “How can I ever forget him, who never forgets Me?” is the question. “Forgetting is a human frailty. Let Me tell you: There is no need for *yoga*, or *tapas*, or even *gnyana*. I only ask you to fix your mind on Me, dedicate it to Me. That is all I demand and all that you need to do.”

This is the promise of grace, which all Arjunas can hope to receive: Grace revives us, when we are in great pain and restlessness. It revives us, when we totter through the dark alleys of a meaningless and empty life. It revives us, when our disgust for our being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our total lack of direction and composure have become intolerable. It revives us, when, year after year, the longed-for perfection does not appear, when stale compulsions reign within us as they have done for decades, and when despair destroys all happiness and courage. Sometimes, at that moment, a wave of light breaks into our darkness, like the voice, which Tillich describes in his book, *'The New Being'*, saying, “You are accepted.”

Gita Vahini also condemns fanatic, blinkered *gurus* and pompous exponents of the *Gita*, whose oratory sounds hollow, because they do not themselves practise what the *Gita* preaches.

The *Gita* is the central gem in the crest jewel of the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. Sage Vyasa wove this intricate tapestry of sublime heroism - physical, mental, moral, and spiritual. He had also codified the *Vedic* hymns and rituals. He prepared a magnificent garland of aphorisms, summarising the basic philosophic truths. In spite of his encyclopaedic scholarship and great creative skill in the realm of thought, Vyasa was afflicted by a deep,

inner sadness. He had no sweetness or peace left in him. Narada, the sage who propagated the validity of devotion as a means of achieving bliss, had advised Vyasa to describe the glories of God, who had incarnated as Krishna. The exposition that did emerge from this advice is called the *Bhagavata Purana*. And Baba has given it to us again, in a sweeter and more concise form, as *Bhagavata Vahini*.

Sentence Of Death

Baba's *Bhagavata Vahini* flows clear and cool, straight from the page to the heart. The book contains 338 pages, the first 270 and the last 90 of which thrill us by the narration of the *Leelas* of Krishna and of the dedicatory acts of those who received His grace, while about 40 pages are devoted to the vast regions mapped by Vyasa under the compulsions of scholastic norms. As a result, *Bhagavata Vahini* is not just a book; it is a tonic, a balm, a pilgrimage, a hallelujah, a clarion call, a beacon light. It is designed by Baba to loosen our bondage from the trivial and to tame the wildness of our minds. Vyasa's son, Shuka, had recited the *Bhagavata* for the benefit of King Parikshit, who had been cursed to die at the end of seven days. The recitation occupied those seven days. Since the King had filled his mind with this narrative of the glory of the Lord, he died with the name of God on his lips and the form of God before his eyes. Each one of us is under such a 'sentence of death', only we do not know when death will confront us. The *Bhagavata Vahini* can save all those who choose to be free from the fear of death and prepare them for passing beyond the realm of life, cheerfully and hopefully.

Remembering The Past

The latest of the *Vahinis* to emerge from Baba's pen is a lucid narrative of Rama's life, the *Ramakatha Rasavahini*. Baba has announced that He is the same Rama come again to carry out His mission through His horde of followers. Drawn by His love, we have the same good fortune now, to share in His task of remoulding man after His Image.

While recounting the incidents in His life as Rama, Baba has included in His narrative certain details of dialogues and diversions not contemplated by Valmiki, or any subsequent author. He mentions many additional events and encounters, which fill the lacunae that have long disturbed admirers of the *Ramayana*. The controversy over whether Rama is to be reckoned as a historic prince, or as God incarnate, has been set to rest by Baba. *Ramakatha Rasavahini* is the very nectar of the epic.

Letters From Him

The *Avatar's* pen writes letters to persons anguished by doubt, or defeated by disaster. These letters carry His love and mercy into their hearts and heal the wounds that fester there. Invariably, they feed and foster the springs of spiritual striving and help in the growth of love. No occasion is too routine, too trite, or too grand for Him to play His role as a teacher. Writing to a couple on the occasion of their marriage, He tells them, "You are not just boy and girl, coming together. You are Siva-Shakti, hyphenated, as truly as I am, the right and the left halves of the same body. May you be ever in the shade of joy and contentment; may you both float as one on the waves of ecstatic love; may you sway merrily on the flower-bedecked swing of faith, held by the ropes of courage and confidence; may this boat, which you are boarding this day, be loaded with happy comradeship and festivity, health and wholesomeness, to reach safe and smooth at the lotus feet of the Lord. Row it forward, both of you, with the oars of self-surrender and service, and let its sails be filled with the breeze of grace."

In a letter to a devotee on his sixtieth birthday, He writes, "Awaken! Sathya Sai, who resides in your heart as your loving *Mai* (Mother), is heaping *ananda* on you. He is blessing you that you may have a long life, sound health, peace of mind, devotion to God, detachment from the transient objects of the world, and success in the search for your own truth, your reality. May you, your children, and your grandchildren be happy and prosperous; may you spread delight all around you; may you achieve the role of the witness, content in the contemplation of the manifold *Leelas* of God; may you ever be in good and godly company and may your hours be spent in the recapitulation of the glories of God. Here, hold forth your palm and receive this *amrita* that I am offering, the *amrita* of love. No nectar can be sweeter and more invigorating."

Sai Will Save You

To a ninety-year-old devotee, fast sinking into the lap of the Lord, He wrote, "Narasamma, accept My blessings. Sai is in your heart; He will not move away. Say 'Sai' with every breath; spend every moment repeating that name. Spend all your thoughts, trying to picture Sai standing near you. Sai will save you. You will be merged in Sai. You will be in Sai eternally." It need not be said that a gentle calm descended upon the face of this blessed lady. Seconds before her death, she chewed some *vibhuti*, miraculously dropped into her mouth by Sai, who gave her both *darshan* and *prasad* as promised.

His letters quicken the pulse, warm the heart, and soothe the pain. A devotee wrote to Him that he had to sorrowfully forego his visit to *Prasanthi Nilayam*, during the *Dasara* celebrations, because his mother was seriously ill. Some months earlier, the Government had posted him as magistrate, in a town only a few hundred miles from *Prasanthi Nilayam*, but he had prayed to Baba that he may be transferred even nearer. However, he was actually shunted to a place a thousand miles away, on the Bay of Bengal, near the Orissa border! Baba wrote to him, “I got your letter. I accept your prostrations. I am aware of the anguish, which you communicate to Me. The anguish of separation from the One you really adore and love is the best *sadhana*. Be brisk in that *sadhana*. Continue yearning, more and more ardently. That is the best means of ensuring Sai’s presence in your heart. I know you are happy, only when you are in Sai. And remember always, that your happiness is My daily food. My dear child! Why are you sad at not being able to serve Sai, during the *Dasara* festival that is nearing fast? You are sorry that your mother’s illness prevents you from coming to Me. Well, is not service to your mother service rendered to Me? The mother, who is called *Aayi*, *Tayi*, and *Mayi*, is no other than *Sayi*. Serve her and through that service, worship her. Why hesitate, or doubt, or grieve? All the time, ever with you, as close and as alert as the eyelids to the eye, Sai is guarding you. He is where you are, accepting your day’s *puja*, receiving your offerings and giving you the *ananda* of grace. He will not forget you or give you up; He will never move out of your heart. Convey My blessings to your mother. Tell her on My behalf to fix her mind on the *atman* as Rama, to the exclusion of every other thought. That is the strongest support, the most reliable refuge. That is the unshakable, unseen base; the rest are but short-lived superstructures, mirages, castles in the air. Tell her to have the Name always on the tongue and to meditate on God, seated on the swing that oscillates in her heart. Tell her to picture God, playing on the waves of *ananda* inside her consciousness. That is the real *sadhana*, which I teach every day.

Convey My blessings to your *Grihalakshmi* (wife, also referred to as the goddess of prosperity and felicity, presiding over the home). You can, very soon, be in the Presence and derive the *ananda* you crave for.”

Sai – The Resident Of Your Heart

He wrote to an old lady, whose husband had died in an accident: “Marriage binds two persons together, as husband and wife. What were they to each other, minutes before? The one would not have worried for the other, if the wedding had not happened. Where was the son or the brother before conception? Life is an interlude between what was and what will be.

During this interlude, one should not lament over what cannot be helped or set right, but should seek God and take refuge in Him. Your husband lived a good life in the light of the Truth he had glimpsed. He did no wrong to anyone; he loved and served the suffering and the illiterate; he salvaged many families from penury and infamy; he helped many young people to go through college; many sick persons were saved by his timely donations; he was ever cheerful and spread cheer wherever he went; and, at last, God willed that he cast away the body that limited him. Of what use is it now, to calculate what might have happened had he not gone to Madras that day?

Your duty now is to sustain the greatness he earned, to follow the ideals that he had placed before himself. Your husband is here, in My presence and he will be here forever, as he had wished to be even when alive. *Swami* will not allow him to be separated from His presence. He is now free from all bonds and boundaries.

You are indeed fortunate that destiny drew you to him and gave you so many years of loving companionship with such a fine person. His thoughts were pure; there was no blemish of envy, hatred, or greed in him. So, his place is with Me, forever. I am writing this letter to you, in order to shower on you the cool rain of love. That rain will scotch the flames of grief that are now raging within you. Your husband is at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, in the presence of Sai, having attained that climax by his spiritual aspirations.” The *Gita* describes the Lord as the friend of all beings (*sarva bhuta suhrid*). These letters reveal that He is more reassuring than any father, more affectionate than any mother, more considerate than any kinsman, and more just than any human authority. The blessing that Baba confers on lives dedicated to God, who is enshrined within us, is, invariably, everlasting life in Himself.

Letter To Me

Let me take the liberty of allowing you to read one of the letters that Baba wrote to me twenty two years ago. It illustrates His omnipresence and His omniscience, as well as His boundless love attributes that He has decided to demonstrate in this *avataric* form, in order to draw into the crucible of transformation the peoples of the world. I had returned to Bangalore, after a long and arduous pilgrimage to the holy shrines on the Ganges, to Bodhgaya, Dakshineswar, Kamarpukur, and Puri. I was urged to take my mother and wife on this pilgrimage, by Baba Himself. He had blessed us the day we had set out and assured us that we would have Him with us, during our journey. He had said, “On three railway tickets, four shall travel.” Baba, we knew, is the stowaway in every ark, which breasts the deluge of

delusion; He is the companion of all, who progress on the road of pilgrimage.

When I had finished the assignment He had given me, I wrote to Him at Kodaikanal hill, where He was staying at that time, expressing our gratitude and informing Him that all three of us had clear and tangible visions of Him at Rishikesh, Varanasi, and Gaya. In the reply that I received, Baba wrote, “Your letter reached Me at Kodaikanal, in time, but since we came down to Madras that very day, I could not send you a reply. I reached Madras on the 25th, around midnight (The letter is dated 26th). I am happy that you have returned full of joy, after visiting the holy places with your *matru devi* (venerable mother). How can delay, disappointment, or danger cross your path, when *Swami* is ever with you? My name is not distinct from My form. The name recalls the form as soon as it is pronounced or heard. When the form is seen, the name comes into awareness that very moment. So, since the name is ever dancing on your tongue, the form too has to be before you and beside you. What need is there to mention this in your letter, as a gift from Me? I have to manifest the form, whenever and wherever My name is remembered with faith, or sung with devotion.

You might say that those visions were boons of grace from *Swami*. No, I always say, ‘*Sadhana* first, *sankalpa* later.’ That is the correct order. My *sankalpa* or Will confers bliss only after assessing the depth of yearning in the devotee. *Sadhana* is the essential prerequisite. You were a professor and so, you can understand this easily. You must have evaluated the written answers of your students. You evaluate and assign them marks only after careful scrutiny of what they have written, don’t you? I too measure and weigh the sincerity and steadiness of the *sadhana* you have imposed upon yourself and I frame My *sankalpa* accordingly. Of course, many are not aware that the misery, in which they find themselves, can be negated by *sadhana*.

At Kodaikanal, thousands had gathered for the evening *bhajans*. They were having *darshan* for the first time in their lives. It was their ‘right’ to get *darshan* that had brought Me to this hill station. For, as you know, I had not planned to come here. It all happened so suddenly.

Your daughter was very upset the other night, over her husband’s health. His illness had taken a turn for the worse. I was there, when your daughter wrote Me a letter about his condition. She posted it next morning, to the Puttaparthi address. It has not reached Me yet, but I knew its contents even while it was being written. When *Swami*’s grace is available in plenty, why fear?”

Dear Child!

Now, I wish to quote from a letter written to a devotee, who, due to desperate financial straits, had desired to flee the country and proceed to Malaysia, but later planned to commit suicide, when his steamer ticket and travel documents were stolen by pick pockets inside the harbour area, at Madras. This letter was written when Baba was twenty-three years of age: “Pattabhi, dear devotee. *Swami* is writing to you; see, He is blessing you. Dear child, but what madness is this? What a letter you have written and left at home! It is foolish to be hasty. Think over your affairs calmly. Slow deliberation always reveals the true and the beneficial. Think of the crores of people the world over, who are in conditions far worse than yours. Remember always, you have Me to guard you and guide you. How many of them have this fortune? Consider that. Are you the only victim of poverty and indebtedness? The step you are contemplating cannot give you rest or peace. It is not right. It is not manly to run away from responsibility. Listen to Me! Go back to your place, be bold, and face the world with courage, for courage will set you free. It will conquer all obstacles. Give up your foolish plan to escape.” And Pattabhi went back, recovered self-confidence, and made a success of himself.

While with these individuals, Baba is so gracious, He does not pardon or pass over indiscipline or ill-behaviour among those He wants should lead exemplary lives. He wrote to a state president of the Sri Sathya Sai *Seva Samiti*: “There is no use My writing about the *Samitis*. I have been saying that the next world should be gained by man’s triumph over the fascinations and fancies of this world, but the members of the Organisation have given up all thought of future lives and the other world. They behave as if this life, this world is the only one. To them, this seems the only measure, the only goal. For such persons, illumination can be only as faint as the glow worm in the night. Though the stars twinkle in the sky and appear as tiny specks, when compared in brightness to the moon, they are really much more brilliant. Each of them is a hundred suns rolled into one. But, for the limited vision of ignorant onlookers, the star is a spark and the moon a huge source of light. Such men think of the future, because of its ‘distance’, as quite trivial and of the present, due to its immediate ‘proximity’, as very important. They pay no attention to the stars, but continue to be overawed by the moon. Civilization today is concerned with the atom, but it ignores the *atman*.”

Read This Aloud

When He is away from *Prasanthi Nilayam* for long, Baba often writes letters to be read aloud to the residents. Usually, they are sharp reminders of the need to respect the rules and regulations He has laid down for them.

“Blessings to all at the *Mandir*,” He writes, “Tell them all to fulfil their assigned duties and responsibilities. The daily schedule of *puja*, *dhyana*, *bhajan*, *sankirtana*, and study should be followed punctually and with faithful devotion. People should move among one another with love and reverence. Of what benefit is *sadhana*, if it is done without controlling jealousy, envy, pride, anger, and malice? However long you may live in the *ashram*, these vices will undermine any merit you acquire. As the proof of the rain is in the dampness of the ground, so the proof of *sadhana* is in the subjugation of the senses. Give up all irrelevant and impertinent talk and activity. Cultivate self-examination and self-discovery, and develop, through discipline, the inner eye. Make the best of this chance, acquired as a result of your good actions in many previous lives. Of course, *Swami*’s grace and love are always with you, but to earn them more and more, *sadhana* has to be done every day, with greater and greater enthusiasm. The residents of Puttaparthi and *Prasanthi Nilayam* have to pave the way for mankind, so they have to lead pious, humble, and disciplined lives.”

Dear Boys

Now, for some letters *Bhagawan* has written to be read out to the students of Sri Sathya Sai colleges. Since they have had the opportunity of a closer association with Baba and more chances of listening to intimate expositions from Him, on the unity at the base of this illusory multiplicity, these letters reveal the crux of Baba’s teachings, regarding the individual and the Universal, the *atman* and *Paramatman*.

On *Janmashtami*, in 1974, He sent this letter to the college students at *Brindavan* (It may be news to some, but it will not surprise His devotees to know that these letters are written by Baba Himself in English). “Come, one and all,” He writes, “and see in Me yourself, for I see Myself in you all. You are My life, My breath, My soul. You are My forms, all. When I love you, I love Myself; when you love yourselves, you love Me. I have separated Myself from Myself, so that I may love Myself. My beloved ones, you are My Own Self.” This is only further evidence, supporting Baba’s declaration that He created the Universe of Himself, with one word, to become all this diversity (*ekoham bahusyam*).

Let me quote from another letter, where Baba indicates that He is the Inner Motivator: “My boys,” He writes, “the bird with you, the wings with Me; the foot with you, the path with Me; the eye with you, the form with Me; the thing with you, the dream with Me; the world with you, the heaven with Me - so are we bound, so are we free, so we begin, and so we end, I in you and you in Me.” Viewed superficially, it may appear epigrammatic effusion, but below the surface lies the treasure of Truth: “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” Essentially, man is but a fraction, a fragment, a fiction in search of a fact. God alone adds value to the zero by standing as an integer by its side.

Gustaf Stromberg from Mount Wilson writes, “The development of a living organism is in many ways like the building of a machine, designed to perform a definite function in the future. A plan must first be made and this can only be made by an intelligent being, with his attention focussed not only on his past experience, but also on the purpose, for which the machine is constructed. Nature, apparently, has foresight and intelligence, and it is capable of highly organised activity. Since an impersonal nature cannot have such characteristics, we are led to the idea of a personal God.” The letter of Baba mentioned above is reminiscent of such a One.

The Self And The Self

Now, the letter unravelling the truth of each of one of us, addressed to the students on *Janmashtami*, Lord Krishna’s birthday:

Dear boys!

In the world of today, so full of people, who are selfish, unloving, and unloved, the brand of atheism known as ‘self-love’ has spread to the extent of almost becoming a universal religion.

What is the Self? It is the Self that says, ‘not I,’ for if it says, ‘I,’ then it is the unreal self. The real Self is selfless and has no thought either of, or for itself. It is the Self that has now forgotten itself, because somehow, it can visualise itself only in others. It is the Self that loves selflessly, because pure love is but selfless affection. It is the Self that seeks the truth with selfless determination, because truth is selfless wisdom. It is the Self that is quiet, because in silence lies cessation from all worldliness. It is the Self in wordless meditation, because wordless meditation is the conquest of the mind through union with the Divine. It is the Self that does not judge, but evaluates. It does not compare, seek scrutiny, or even see itself. It is the Self that has completely absorbed itself and yet, in a strange and mystical fashion, it is

more itself, more complete, and more real than it has ever been. This is the real Self.

God is love and love is selflessness. Selflessness is the abolition of all sense of ego and separativeness, of all spurious identification with the isolationist life of that counterfeit thing, called 'self'; self is separativeness and separativeness is the denial of wholeness, holiness, God.

The denial of God is known as atheism. As can now be understood, atheism is not the denial of this or that religion, or of this or that concept of God. It is rather the denial of a life of love, which is the nature of God, and the assertion of the life of the egoistic self. In short, real atheism is the denial of love and the assertion of selfishness. The Godward process, called 'self-sacrifice', is in its essence, love. For, God is love and love alone can lead to Him. As the godliest act is one of love, the most godless act is one of hate.

But, hate, which is separativeness, can arise only when there is selfishness. Thus, it comes to pass that the most godless, loveless, atheistic act is the act of selfishness.

Love must be totally selfless to be Godward, to be Divine. Its criterion must be, 'the Beloved first'; its technique must be 'your happiness before mine.' The way to happiness is to forget oneself and to remember God, Sai Krishna.

With Blessings and Love,

Sri Sathya Sai

His Two Eyes

There is a mysterious episode concerning an Indian couple, who live in America. The husband, Dr. Y.S. Tatachari, is a dedicated biophysicist, who has worked for some years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and after that, at Stanford University and the University of California. As early as 1960, he suffered, as the doctors suspected, from rheumatoid arthritis. But, the experts, who examined him at Stamford - after dozens of X-rays, brain scans with radioactive mercury, a surgical excision, chemical tests, and a biopsy of the scalp lesions (he had developed several bumps on the scalp) - declared that he had, "Aggressively malignant and metastasising tumours in the skull, the neck, the ribs, and the hips, the cancer having the features of both Ewings and Reticulum Cell Sarcoma." It was a death sentence, enveloped in medical abracadabra! In a letter to me on this judgment, Tatachari wrote, "Thus, after delivering blow after blow, the surgeon told me, 'Sir, miracles do happen. We hope such a miracle would happen to you.'" That was in 1962. The couple

returned home to Madras, to be in the midst of relatives, while trying out palliative therapies.

In January, 1964, doctors at Madras discovered widespread destruction in the pelvic bones. Soon, they pronounced that the liver was affected by the cancer. Let Tatachari complete the account of what transpired. “In 1965, I felt like seeking the blessings of *Bhagawan* Sri Sathya Sai Baba, following a chance reference by a friend. Baba blessed me and my wife, and directed us to go back to Stanford, continuing the Endoxan if I wished to do so. In 1970, when I approached Him again, He asked me to discontinue all drugs and dietary supplements. He gave me an assurance of cure and dispelled that ever-present dread of recurrence.”

Tatachari is now pursuing his teaching assignment and research projects in America, with undiminished zeal, thanks to the ‘miracle’ that happened. When asked how he brought about this most wondrous miracle that defied all medical predictions, Baba replied, “All I did was to invest him with confidence and willpower to cure himself. It is My abounding love, reciprocated by the intensity of the devotee’s own faith that finally produced the desired result.”

About three years ago, Baba wrote to them, “My dears! I know that though your bodies are far, far away, your thoughts are with Sai. That awareness and attachment is sufficient to keep Me near. Thoughts have no walls or boundaries; they can reach Me across the oceans. There is no one without Me; I am with and within everyone.”

“When only the body is near, but the thoughts are afar, the situation is like frogs leaping around a lotus flower. But, bees know of the ambrosia that the lotus is ready to give; they yearn to partake of its sweetness and ever hasten towards it. *Bangaru!* (a word, meaning ‘gold’, which is applied to a child, who is charming and well-behaved.) You have *Swami*’s grace in plenty. Where the Name is, there is the Form.”

“Busy yourselves with the duties, which are entrusted to you, in good spirit and fine health. Sai is ever by your side. He is the charioteer of the vehicle of your life. The ship of life, however heavily loaded with the cargo of joys and sorrows, can certainly arrive at the harbour of self-realisation, if it is propelled by holy, mental energy. Repetition of the Name is the ‘dug-dug-dug’ of the pistons; the steering wheel is love; the anchor is faith. Continue the journey in confidence. Sai is always guarding you from harm and pain. You both are like His two eyes. *Swami* is constantly showering His compassion on you. He counsels you from within and corrects you. On your part, be immersed in the duties entrusted to you; remember, that is *Swami*’s work. When you discharge your duties, convinced that the work is Mine,

health and happiness will be added unto you.”

When a devotee, R. Lal, telegraphed from Bombay that he had severe heart attack, Baba wrote to him, “It is not in any way connected with your heart. Do not exaggerate the small malfunction. Siva-Shakti is in your heart; that Siva-Shakti will not permit any infirmity or injury to affect it. Be happy. This day, Mother Sai is conferring on you the boon of Her love. That will grant you health, joy, peace, courage, and contentment.”

This is how He consoled a stricken Hindu wife: “Mother, the news that your husband attained merger with the Divine came to you all of a sudden. It is quite natural that you were shocked at the accident, which killed him and feel miserably lonely and deserted. The daughters of Mother India do revere their husbands as their all and are ever concerned about their health, honour, and peace of mind. Yet, one should not forget that the body is composite of diverse elements. It must disintegrate into those elements, however much one might guard it or lay claim over it. It is a feeble contraption, prone easily to be put out of action. A slip, a stumble, a hit, a sneeze, a little carelessness, or a moment of recklessness is enough to damage or destroy it. No one can avoid death, even if one manages to lengthen one’s life by avoiding all these. Even *Avatars* take birth, resolving to die someday. When birth occurs, death has to follow. To grieve over death, which is an inevitable and inescapable consequence of birth, is not a sign of wisdom.”

About ten years ago, He wrote a letter to a devotee in Gujarat: “Two fundamental messages, ringing through Indian culture down the centuries, are: ‘Revere the mother as divine. Revere the father as divine.’ These are sacred commands. When the parents are by-passed and hurt by disobedience, I am sure I too will soon be by-passed and disobeyed. When your son treats you as non-existent, how can he claim to revere Me? That claim is patently false.

The Lord does not demand external grandeur; He examines only whether internal purity exists. A life lived badly is like a body without life. The body, in Sanskrit, is called *deha*, meaning ‘that, which has to be consigned to flames.’ A body belonging to a person, who does not strive for inner purity, can live only for that consummation, to justify that appellation. It serves no other purpose and it cannot be blessed by the grace of the Lord.

The value of education has to be measured in terms of the virtue it implants, because virtue alone ensures peace and joy. Without it, a man is as good as dead, or even worse. Education must endow man with a sharp, discriminative capacity. But, for your son, it is an ugly and vulgar acquisition.

Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, and Prema are the cardinal virtues. *Sathya* is what I teach; *Dharma* is the way I live; *Shanti* is the mark of My personality; *Prema* is My very nature.”



The Will And The Way

Here are two more messages sent to the Hostel boys:

I. “Where there is a will, there is a way is absolutely true. At first, the will is your own. It has to be strengthened by the assent of God, but until you convert it into the almighty Will of God, you seem to be playing a particular game, which you do not desire to give up. You can always change the game, if you so wish. You are not weak and helpless. All strength and power is within you. God-vision is yours the instant you will it with concentration. But, you simply don’t choose to do so.

Sai is not mocking. He is perfectly earnest. He is giving expression to the truths gathered from the depths of experience. ‘Trust in and submission to the Supreme will in all circumstances’ means the ‘vision of Truth’ or ‘realisation of the Eternal Principle of all creation.’ ‘If God wills’ means ‘if you assert your own, all-powerful will.’ The real solution, therefore, is to awaken the inherent power and splendour of your soul. Do it, boys! You are verily the Immortal Truth, the great, changeless Reality. May victory ever be yours. With blessings, Baba.”

II. “Boys, through the awareness of the Divine alone, can we bring true peace to the world. There is no doubt that considerable effort is being made by great leaders of the world, to bring about peace and harmony on the material plane. But, Sai does not see any sign of their success.

The only way left for us is to turn our minds within ourselves and to find out that true and

everlasting basis, that supreme source, from which alone we can bring true happiness and peace to the world. That basis is God, who is, in fact, dwelling in the hearts of every one of us. He is the universal spirit.

Every one of you is an embodiment of Divinity. You are *sat-chit-ananda*, but have forgotten this truth. Realise it now. Meditate on the Reality, until your mind dissolves and you stand revealed as Truth itself, and enjoy, as Sai has been enjoying, that Eternal Bliss. With blessings, Baba.”

He Teaches Through Letters

Pundit Veerabhadra Sarma is a renowned *Vedic* scholar. He can expound the sacred scriptures and hold vast gatherings spell-bound for hours, by the clarity, simplicity, and sincerity of his Telugu oratory. He is also a leading minstrel of the popular, *Burrakatha* musical recitals and has composed a Sanskrit *Sai Gita* and *Puja Vidhana* on classical lines. He was chosen to be a member of the party that undertook the pilgrimage to Badrinath, when *Bhagawan* decided to bless that holy Himalayan shrine.

In spite of these unique distinctions, his material poverty was so acute, that one day, he blamed Baba for ‘neglecting him and heaping upon him misery after misery.’ His wife, who could not bear this sacrilege, offered to write to Baba about the situation. She was certain that His blessings would clear the sky. But, Sarma was adamant. “No prayer should proceed from either of us to Baba, who has mercilessly betrayed our trust,” he insisted. This was on 20th January, 1962, at Kakinada, eight hundred miles from *Prasanthi Nilayam*. *Bhagawan*, of course, sensed his pique and was aware of his obstinacy. So, He wrote Sarma a letter Himself, which reached him on 23rd January, 1962. Sarma revealed to me its contents. The letter is a miniature *Gita*, which reveals the love that Baba showers upon those who are misguided and move away from His fold, and the courage He instils by revealing the course He lays down, for their liberation from the entanglement of ignorance. It reads thus: “Dear child Veerabhadram! You are *bhadra* (secure, happy, full of confidence and joy), aren’t you? You might ask, ‘What kind of *bhadram* is this?’ Of course, that question is natural.

When life flows clear and smooth with no hurdles to cross, to feel that it is so, because of oneself and to forget God, and when that flow encounters obstacles and obstructions at every turn, to lament and lose heart - are these not signs of the intellectual frailty inherent in man? You too are human, dear Bhadram, therefore it is no wonder that you are overcome by depression and despair, when troubles bother and obstruct you at every step.

Though the life of man is basically a manifestation of immortality and an unbroken stream of *ananda*, he strays away from the awareness of the *atman*, the spring of that *ananda*, slavishly yielding to the vagaries of the mind, the intellect, and the ego. Sinking and floating, rising and falling on the turbid waves of the sea of delusion, he is tossed between anxiety and calm, grief and joy, pain and pleasure. He is afflicted with the evanescence of the world and the unreality of his desires.

Why are you confounded and confused by this false panorama? Remember, you are thereby despising and denying your own *atmic* identity. You have stored in your brain the *Vedas*, the *Shastras*, the *Puranas*, the *Itihasas*, and the *Upanishads*, but you behave like a dull boor, you bewail your lot and weep at your plight, as if you had no resources to fall back upon. This attitude is not worthy of the learning you have accumulated. You have to draw strength and courage therefrom and further the blossoming of holy, heartening thoughts.

Should this one single trouble - want of money - make you stoop in weakness and fear? You have with you the Name, which is the *Dhanvantari* (Divine Physician) for all the ills and anxieties of man. Instead of letting that Name dance joyously on your tongue, why are you paying so much attention to what you call loss, grief, and worry?

You are the repository of so many branches of scriptural scholarship, but you have neither realised their value, nor attempted to experience the joy they can give you. This must be your prime goal. Instead, you are spending your days in the mere satisfaction of having acquired this knowledge, as if fluent oratory were the best purpose, to which you could devote your learning. The result is that you are led into the baseless belief of being attacked by anxieties and adversities.

Really speaking, these are all objective phenomena, passing clouds that are but a feature of the external nature. The *ananda* that the *atman* can confer on you cannot be lessened or hindered in the least. Have firm faith in this truth. Don't you know, *bangaru*, the freedom, the delight, and the tranquillity you can derive by contemplation of the *ananda* that the unbroken awareness of the *atman* can endow you with? Knowing this, even if you are confronted by the seemingly most insurmountable problem, how can you get entangled with, or be affected by circumstances and phenomena in the objective world?

To preach to others is quite easy, but to put even a fraction of what is preached into actual practice and experience that felicity promised is extremely difficult. You have been announcing in ringing tones that *Swami* knows everything; *Swami* is the unitive embodiment

of all the names and forms, by which man has adored God down the ages. But, when problems overwhelm you, you forget to establish these truths in your own life.

Don't I know? The other day, when you had been reduced to plead with your father for help and when you were about to proceed to where he resides, your wife suggested, 'We shall write to *Swami* about our troubles and losses.' Let Me ask why you told her, 'I won't allow this; you should not write.' I shall even tell you the reason. You thought she might inform Me about various other details. Don't I know? Can I know this, only if she writes to Me? Foolish *bangaru!*

Don't I know that you went to Ramachandrapuram to give a series of talks on the *Gita* and returned with a minus balance? The *Gita* discourses did not receive the response you expected, because your talk was pervaded and polluted by the *Burrakatha* style that has long struck root in you. It cannot be easily overcome.

Bear with it patiently and with steady effort, be rid of it. If you desire that your *Gita* lectures be appreciated, some improvements are called for. Without effecting them, why do you moan, be gloomy and dejected, blaming your scholarship and your experience as mere useless loads.

Well, for Me, who is fostering all these worlds, fostering you and your family is no burden. I am giving you these series of troubles, in order to teach you some lessons. Study is not all important. Practising what you have learnt is very necessary. My purpose is to bring to your notice this facet of the process of learning.

Let Me tell you this. He, who plants a sapling, cannot but water it; if he had no will to water it, he would not have planted it at all. This is the identifying principle of the *jiva* and the *Atman*, the individual and the Universal, man and God. You had written and published that the name of *Swami* is dancing and the form of *Swami* is being adored in home after home. And by this little vision, you were filled with *ananda*. But, know now that the name of Sai will arouse ecstatic delight, filling the entire world, aye, every inch of it. People now sing, 'All is Sai full, this world is Baba-full.' This fullness will be realised, without doubt. Be bold; be in bliss; take up the burden of the duties assigned to you. Seek realisation through the four stages leading man to God - *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*.

When you resolve to progress on these lines, the Lord of Parthi will Himself be available to you to lift you and liberate you. Therefore, *bangaru*, seek and gain your own Motivating Principle. I will never give you up. I will not forget you, no, never.

You have been maligning the rich; give up this erroneous habit. Not only the rich, but you should not dishonour anyone in any way. If they are bloated in their ego, they will suffer. How can it affect you? Remember, Sai resides in all, so maligning another means maligning Sai Himself.

Convey My blessings to your wife and children. I have written this long letter out of the compassion and love that I bear towards you. Be ever in joy; be ever intent on practice and experience. The Resident of your heart, Sai.”

Telegraphic Words

Bhagawan conveys a world of meaning, an ocean of grace, or a *Gita* of wisdom even through a short telegram. When Walter Cowan, whom He had revived from death, passed away at last, nineteen months after his ‘coming back’, Baba’s telegram to his wife, Elsie, from *Prasanthi Nilayam*, declared, “Walter arrived here in good shape!” Dwell on that sentence for a while. Walter had uttered, “Baba! Baba!” just before he passed away, for he was filled with years of grateful devotion. And soon after, Baba announced that Walter’s soul had arrived. Similarly, when Narayana Bhat of Alike was killed in a motor accident, Baba had sent a message to his mother, which read, “Narayana Bhat has merged in Me.”

Sai Baba autographs books, pictures, and photographs, while walking between the rows of seated devotees and visitors. Very often, He simply writes His name as we know it; at other times, He may write ‘Blessings’ or ‘Blessings with Love’. Once, when someone reached out with a photograph of His, having a dark background, to be autographed, He borrowed a pen and wrote with it in a white script, the blue-black ink in the pen obligingly turning white. Thus, the method, style, and content of His message - all uniquely elevating.

Words Do His Will

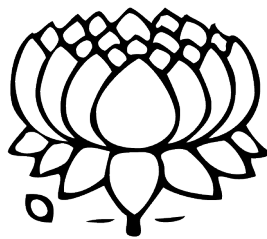
Baba’s words are known to cure not only every type of disease or ailment, but also to effect a miraculous change of attitude towards truth, in the most incorrigible persons.

Shri M.K. Mishra, a mining engineer from Morena district in Madhya Pradesh, writes, “Some of the northern districts of this state - Bhind, Morena, Gwalior, Shivpuri, and Datia - and some adjoining districts of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh were infested with dacoits, since the dawn of India’s independence. The Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan tried their utmost to decimate them, but in vain. The dacoits were virtually in control of these districts. In 1960, Acharya Vinoba Bhave toured this region, in order to

persuade the dacoits to give up their life of crime. He was able to persuade a few of them to surrender. In October, 1971, Madho Singh, who was the leader of the most prominent gang, approached Shri Jaya Prakash Narain to persuade him to take up the unfinished work of Acharya Vinoba Bhave. With the help of the Sarvodaya workers, J.P. contacted various gangs of dacoits. Ultimately, his efforts bore fruit and about four hundred dacoits agreed to surrender.

One problem that was agitating the minds of the dacoits as well as the Sarvodaya leaders, was whether the dacoits should make an open confession of their crimes. Some Sarvodaya leaders advised the dacoits to contest the criminal cases started against them, in court. The dacoits were also of the same view.

On 23rd August, 1972, Shrimati Prabhavati asked Shri Hem Dev Sharma, Secretary of the **Shanti Mission** in Gwalior, to bring a copy of the Hindi translation of Vol. II of '*Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*', written by Professor Kasturi. Shri Hem Dev Sharma's neighbour was a devotee of Baba, so he was able to procure the book from her. On that day, J.P. addressed the dacoits and read out the story of Kalpagiri, as narrated in chapter six of this book. *Bhagawan's* advice to Kalpagiri, who had committed heinous murders and who was roaming about disguised as a *sanyasi*, to go to the police to make a clean-breast confession and undergo cheerfully the punishment he may be awarded, was listened to by the hard-boiled dacoits. It touched their hearts deeply and convinced them that their real salvation lay not in refusing their misdeeds, or trying to secure acquittals from law courts, but in confessing them humbly, in a spirit of repentance."





Chapter 5

Moves In His Game

Interludes

Death is our birth right, a gift everyone can claim. It is a relief for the tired and a refuge for the persecuted, a lesson for the wayward, a jolt for the epicurean, a milestone for the pilgrim, punishment for the poltroon, and paradise for the faithful.

Baba's elder sister's husband died at a young age, when he was just twenty-five years old. Baba chided me for shedding tears. He asked, "If there is to be no birth and no death, how am I to spend My time?" Death is but a move in His game, an 'exit' in the divine play, at which the player has to leave the stage. Baba says that the finitude of the body and the infiniteness of the soul have to be stoically accepted. He creates ash and applies it to our brows to remind us of death and the change of the body thereafter, into a heap of ashes. That helps us develop detachment towards worldly things and turn our gaze towards lasting values.

Baba has come to assign death its legitimate place in the scheme of existence, neither more, nor less. He brought Walter Cowan back from the region beyond death, because, as He said, "He has not completed the work he has to do." Baba does not will the effacement of death. "Why do living beings die?" we ask. "For the reason they are born," He answers. Anything put together has to disintegrate; anything that originates has to end. But, man can escape rebirth by cutting off the roots, namely the deposits of *karmas*, good and bad, that burden his account in the book of God. Achieve a nil balance not by the renunciation of your physical, mental, and intellectual activity, but by the renunciation of the fruits thereof. Doing your righteous duty, be indifferent towards the fruit of your actions. God gave you body, mind, and intellect; God also planted desire and designed the entire plan. Let fruit of His grace belong to Him. Then, there is neither plus, nor minus in your account. You need not come again to balance it. So long as your actions are not totally selfless and duty-bound, you must

accoutre yourself in a physical body, in order to transcend from the limited to the unlimited.

Baba told Schulman, “I know how your past has shaped you and I watch you shaping your future. I know why you suffer, how long you have to suffer, and when your suffering will end.”

While gifting a rosary of 108 pearls to Indra Devi, Baba said, “Keep this on the sick person and help him to pray for recovery. He will be cured.” “Of any illness?” asked Indra Devi. “No,” said *Swami*, “not if the illness is a form of payment for *karmic* debt.” A rosary was given by Baba to Shrimati Venkatamuni of Madras. When her aged mother-in-law approached the threshold of death, her bed surrounded by many of her kith and kin, she placed the rosary on her chest and prayed for her recovery. Her mother-in-law did regain consciousness and sat up to greet the dawn of another day, curious to know the reason why the house was so full of people. When her own son, afflicted with frequent fits since childhood, was dangerously on the verge of death, Shrimati Venkatamuni ran to her room to bring the rosary. But, her fingers could not hold it; it slipped out of her grasp again and again. When she could at last hold it and take it to her son, it was too late. The illness was a form of repayment of *karmic* debt, which, when repaid, gave him release. Baba told her later that her son was here to liquidate the balance of his debt and he had now attained the region of everlasting bliss. “If you have genuine affection for him,” He said, “be happy that he has been relieved of the body that gave him no peace.”

Father And Son

Shri Soundararajan, the renowned singer of South India, was pathetically distraught, when doctors declared that his daughter’s heart could be saved by an operation possible only in the U.S.A. But, Baba cured her in a remarkably short time. He created a *rudraksha* seed and directed her to drink the water, in which it had been ceremonially washed. Shri Soundararajan’s son had been ailing from a malignant type of jaundice. When the doctors gave up all hope, he was brought home and placed before a portrait of Baba, at his own request. Shri Soundararajan put through a telephone call to Baba at *Prasanthi Nilayam*. He was able to contact Baba, but the line was subject to so much disturbance, that neither could his prayer be conveyed to Baba, nor could he catch the voice of *Bhagawan*. His son passed away with the name of Baba on his lips. Later, Baba told Soundararajan that his son was a great soul, who had achieved liberation from the bonds of birth and death after paying off the little balance of his *karmic* debt.

Baba addressed a mammoth meeting at a football field, at Rajahmundry. Two weeks later, He received a letter from one, who, with his son by his side, had heard Him speak that day. "My son was so inspired by the discourse and by the *bhajans*, that he became totally immersed in You. He was constantly doing *bhajan* and reciting Your glory and Your majesty. He passed away, while he was in that heightened consciousness. I am glad I could claim such a pure soul as my son. We gladly performed the last rites, knowing that he had attained the highest goal attainable by man." There are cases of Baba conferring this boon directly, when prayed for.

The eight-year-old daughter of a lady, known as Chincholi Rajamma, used to visit Puttapparthi with her mother, in the forties. She skipped and ran, laughed and crooned, and flitted about like a ray of sunshine in the presence of Baba. One evening, while Baba was about to proceed with a small group of devotees, to the Chitravati sands, she brought His sandals and placed them on the ground before Him. Baba patted her on her head and said, "What do you want? Tell Me." She surprised everyone and shocked her mother by her reply, "I want to be absorbed in You." Baba said, "You are a child; you have to get married, bring up a family, and make your mother happy." But, the girl insisted that these things were trivial, when compared with mergence in Him. Wherefrom did she learn all this, people wondered. Baba wiped her tears and said, "Your father is no more; you have to be with your mother." But, she protested, "If, as You say, I get married, I will still have to leave my mother. No. I wish You would shelter me forever." Baba was silent for a while. His response to the agony of the tender heart was, "Good, good," and He tweaked her cheek. Five days later, at Bangalore, on a Thursday, she died peacefully with her eyes fixed on a portrait of Baba, which she had herself adorned with garlands barely three hours before, while continuously reciting *bhajans*. The mother is now grateful that the Lord has welcomed her daughter into His arms.

Shri Ranajodh Singh was for some years, in the thirties of this century, the Inspector-General of Police in Mysore State. His daughter was suffering from acute colitis, which prevented her from taking food and drink. Her parents were devotees of Baba and she too had deep faith in His divinity. It was a Thursday, when Baba surprised them with a visit. He spoke compassionately to the patient and creating a *dosa* - hot, tasty, and crisp with the fragrance of fine *ghee* - gave it to the girl to eat. When Shri Ranajodh Singh prayed that He bless them with a visit, the next Thursday also, Baba did not reply, but left the house. On the ensuing Thursday, the girl sat up on her bed, had a bath, and did *puja* before Baba's portrait. Then, saying, "See! Baba is calling me!" she left her body behind. Baba had long ago created for

her a silver plate with the markings of two feet, which He called *Vishnu Padam* (the Feet of Vishnu), which was always reverentially kept under her pillow. When she died, the plate disappeared and was never traced again, in spite of an intensive search. The parents were filled with supreme gratitude, for, as some Americans, who tended a young man named Steve at White field, when he was nearing his end through cancer, declared, “If only people knew how resplendent it is to die in Baba.” On this last day, Steve stopped re-living his days of drugs and alcohol and emerged from the purificatory ordeal with an illuminating prayer on his lips and an expression of delight on his face, when his prayer was answered by Baba.

Dr. Kraemer of Honolulu writes in the same strain of gratitude, “This is to inform you of the sad, yet glorious news of Meeke’s passing away. She must have passed straight into the hands of Baba. She was so peaceful, so smiling, so completely without the slightest trace of apprehension or anxiety, and she could think of Baba’s name, until the very last moment.”



On His Palm They Saw

A certain person was a captain, during the Second World War, but since he died of a commonplace disease in a civil hospital, his widow did not get much by way of pension. So, she had to earn some money teaching music, in order to keep her three children - two daughters and a son - in elementary ease. The son passed his B.Sc. examination with a first class, from the Madras University, while still in his teens. The army authorities gave him a job in their cantonment office at Bangalore. His mother, who was overwhelmed with joy, sent him to offer homage to the family deity, Venkatachalapathi, in the temple on the Thirumalai Hills, in Andhra Pradesh, so that he could join duty at Bangalore with divine blessings.

However, what did happen was that the boy got drowned in the holy tank of the temple. His body was in police custody for two days, as it was unidentified. The anxious mother was

confronted by the photograph of her son's corpse, which appeared in the daily papers. But, Baba appeared to her in a dream and directed her to come to Puttaparthi. There, she was taken by a mysterious stranger to the Presence. *Bhagawan* called her and her children for the precious interview. "Don't weep," He said, "for your son, who led a disciplined life and was full of devotion, has now merged with God. When he has found the lotus feet of Bliss, you should not indulge in grief." But, she could not be consoled.

Then, Baba said, "I know your heart is broken, since you could not have even a last glimpse of his body. See, it is here." Saying this, He spread His palm in front of her and she could clearly see the events of that fateful pilgrimage appear upon it: The son slipped on the steps of the tank and few people jumped in to save him. It was too late. Even first aid could not revive him. A lotus-like bunch of flames rose from his body and proceeded towards the inner most shrine, where the idol of Venkatachalapathi is installed, disappearing in a blaze of glory at the Lord's feet. Then, she saw the idol come alive and change into a charming image of Baba Himself.

After sometime, Baba spoke to her, "Mother, the one you loved as your son was a staunch devotee of the Lord, during his previous life. He was engaged in *tapas* for twelve years, on the steps of the very holy temple tank. His deepest desire was to attain *jala samadhi* (Water-mergence) in those sacred waters. To fulfil that desire, he took birth again and as your *guru*, has led you to Me. Remain in Puttaparthi, ever singing the glory of Venkatachalapathi, who has accepted your son into His fold."

Today Is Thursday

Shri Ramakrishna, Professor at the Victoria College, Palghat, was returning home during the afternoon recess, when an old man stopped him in the middle of the road. He appeared to the astonished professor as the very embodiment of the Sai Baba of Shirdi. He said in Tamil, "Today is Thursday," as if that was a strange piece of news, "so, I am taking Ramesh with me." Ramesh was the professor's fourteen-year-old son. He had left for school that morning. The professor hurried home to discover that Ramesh had come home from school with high fever. He kept himself alive, only until he could see his father and mother together, at his bedside. The father wrote to me, "How kind of Baba to tell me that He was taking Ramesh, whom He had given me as a boon and that too, on a Thursday, the day when He advises us to offer ourselves at His feet." Some weeks later, at Ootacamund, Baba called in the professor and his wife for an interview and confirming His announcement, blessed the boy's picture in

his bungalow with showers of *Vibhuti*.

The mother of Lynn, the girl from San Diego on the Pacific Coast of America, also had the consoling thought that it was a Thursday, when her daughter fell from a tree and died, while attempting to save her younger brother from a dog. Lynn adored Baba. She was the brightest child in her *Bala Vikas* group. Her mother bore the calamity courageously and calmly, for Baba had granted her the wisdom to bear such blows of fate.

On 31st December, 1973, I had a letter from New Delhi, from a bereaved father. He wrote, “I know I will not get any reply from you, as you are very busy. But, I must write what I feel, because it helps me in getting nearer to my Lord, Sai Baba.

I lost my daughter in Safdarjung Hospital, on 21st December, 1973. She died of burns. During the eight days I was with her, Baba was always ‘with me’. His presence gave me so much courage and peace, that I could face the ordeal without a tear or murmur and could accept it as His doing. I know that her death was so ordained; that is why my prayers to Baba failed. But, His blessings were constantly with us and His *charanamrit* and *vibhuti* were given to her before death. You will be glad to know that her end was very peaceful. Her bodily agony was not anywhere as great as similar patients in her ward. Please convey my thanks to the Lord.”

When an aged devotee, Raval Seshagiri Rao, was on the last breath of life, Baba entered his room at *Prasanthi Nilayam* and revived him, while helping him sip coffee. He was privileged to have been in charge of the shrine for over fourteen years. He was well-versed in the scriptures and very regular in *japa* and *puja*. As a matter of fact, he was passing out with the *Upanishads* on his tongue and Baba before his eyes. “The five fundamental elements, which, in combination, became this body of mine, are now parting company,” He said. “What a glorious death,” I said to myself. But, Baba knew that he had yet to pay the last instalment of his *karmic* debt. So, He turned to him and reprimanded him, saying, “Why did you embark on this journey without first securing a ticket from Me? Get down! Do your shrine duties as usual. Attend the forenoon *bhajans* and perform *arati*.” There is no need to add that he did as he was told.

You Cannot Die

Let us consider the confession of a person living in Bangalore, who was preparing to die. Vrajlal P. Parekh wrote on 18th August, 1972, “Six years ago, I sat in the *darshan* line around the Sai Ram tree, at *Brindavan* in Whitefield. Baba granted me a private interview. He

exposed my private thoughts and worries and blessed me with the words, 'Be confident; have peace of mind. Baba's blessings are with you.' I was not blessed with *vibhuti*. My faith in Him strayed hither and thither, when my luck ran down in business and I was caught in much anxiety. Though I had secured a Diploma in Commerce in 1938, I found myself unfit in modern, business techniques and was financially completely ruined. I was sorely dejected and decided to separate my soul from this body. I purchased a bottle of Tik-20 and kept it in a secret place. After having deeply thought over the matter, I decided to make use of the poison on 4th September, 1970, the night of *Ganesh Chaturthi*.

But, my elder sister, who had been ailing for a few months, passed away suddenly that very day, as if bidding me to postpone my suicidal act. I could not understand the mysterious ways of Baba. I became more gloomy and finally, fixed the date and time as 4 p.m., Friday, 11th September, 1970, to swallow the poison with a pinch of *vibhuti*, so that I might have a peaceful end. I went to my shop early that morning, with the bottle in my pocket. I was alone and no customer was expected in the afternoon. I was feeling happy as the time fixed for death was approaching. I was reading the *Sanathana Sarathi*, which had come at noon by post, wondering how I would experience the miracle of Baba while dying into Him.

At 1:30 p.m., two plain-clothed men walked into my shop and wanted me to accompany them to the Seshadripuram Police Station. I could not imagine why I was wanted. In a terribly confused state, I closed the shop and went with them. The bottle was in my shirt pocket. At the station, I was told that the Inspector had gone out. I was told that there was a warrant for my arrest, from a magistrate at Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh. Then, I realised that a case had been filed by a Moradabad merchant, for non-payment of a bill by me. I had explained my difficulties to him and pleaded for being allowed some time to make the payment, but he did not believe me and proceeded against me in court, charging me with cheating. The warrant wasailable, but I had to present a surety.

Meanwhile I was asked to go into the 'lockup'. The police officer said, 'Take out all the articles in your pockets and place them on this table, before you go in.' I hesitated on account of the bottle. I said that, it was only a civil case and prayed to him not to send me in. He sympathised with me and allowed me to sit on a bench beside him. I then sent for my elder brother, who arrived there very soon. I handed over the tell-tale bottle to him just as it was, wrapped in paper, and asked him to keep it at home, without telling anyone. He was also to get someone to stand surety for me.

Just on the stroke of 4 p.m. (!), the Inspector of Police arrived and ordered that I be put in the cell. He would not give ear to my pleadings or explanations. I recalled *Bhagawan's* assurance, 'Baba's blessings are always with you.' I felt most happy, when I discovered that Baba had prevented my suicide. I saw Baba in the cell, laughing at me for my folly. I was in the cell for hardly four minutes. My brother came with the surety and I was released. My brother scolded me severely, for having kept poison in my pocket. Baba had foiled my first attempt by causing the sudden death of my sister, simultaneously releasing her from the painful ailment, which she could not endure in her old age. Again, He foiled my second attempt by causing a warrant from 1,800 miles to be served on me and have me go into the cell, without the bottle, at the exact time fixed by me for suicide. It is indeed beyond human comprehension to gauge His mystery."

You Have Come

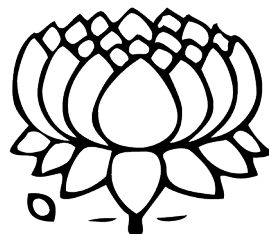
Many, who have come within the horizon of Heavenly grace, have died in peace and joy, pronouncing the name of Baba, or even declaring that they had been blessed by Baba's *darshan*. Baba says that we cry *koham* at the time we are born, puzzled by the problem, 'Who am I?' Likewise, when we die, we should draw the last breath in joy, uttering *soham*, 'I am That.' "Baba is calling me," "Baba is here by my side," profess devotees before they pass away. On the day, when Baba had the Cowans with Him at Whitefield, to shower further grace on the resurrected Walter and his wife, He asked Walter to narrate his experience at Madras, while ostensibly accompanying Baba to the Seat of Judgement. When Walter had finished his narration, there was a strange flutter in the minds of all present. Indra Devi spoke on the overwhelming compassion of Baba. She described how Baba had fulfilled a boon, which He had granted years earlier to my mother, "I shall give you divine nectar, when you leave this world,' Baba had said. She left for her heavenly abode one noon, at *Prasanthi Nilayam*, when Baba was at *Brindavan*. But, a few minutes before she died, nectar gushed from the idol of Shirdi Sai Baba kept near her bed, from the toe of the right foot that was placed over the left knee. She noticed it and held her cupped palm to receive the gift. Kasturi helped her sit up and drink the nectar, about two ounces of fragrance and sweetness. Then, she lay down again and passed into Sai." Baba listened to her narrative and then, said, "Yes, I keep My word to those who are steady in their faith. I also give *darshan*, when death calls on those who have dedicated their lives to Me."

While on the topic of death-bed *darshans*, I must also relate here the narration of my revered *guru*, Mahapurushji of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, about the 'shower of peace' from

Ramakrishna Paramahansa: A sweeper named Rasik lived at Dakshineswar. One day, as the Master was returning from the direction of Panchavati, absorbed in a spiritual mood, Rasik knelt before him and prayed, “Father, why don’t you bless me? What will be in store for me?” The Master assured him, “Your wish shall be fulfilled. You will see me at the time of death.” A few years later, as the moment of death approached, Rasik cried out in joy, “You have come, Father! You have really come!” and saying this, breathed his last.

When we find Sai devotees facing death, or enduring the departure of their beloved ones, we are apt to judge them as insensitive and dull. No. They meet death heroically, for they are certain that Baba will be their guide, guardian, friend, and teacher, through as many births and rebirths they may have to pass. He is at all times with us, in us, beside us, before us, and behind us. So, instead of being anxious at the time of death, devotees approach this final act as children being led to school by loving parents, or as graduates attending the convocation, or as a mountaineer approaching the summit, or as rivers merging into the sea.

There was a doctor, serving in the hospital at *Prasanthi Nilayam*. He was about 60 years old and appeared to enjoy good health, in spite of a damaged heart. One evening, Baba sent for him and he left off eating his lunch. “*Bhagawan* is calling me,” he said and hastened towards the *Mandir*. Just as he neared it, he fainted and did not recover. Death was sudden and painless. His wife, who had imbibed Baba’s teachings on *karma*, on the *atman*, and on the eventual mergence in *Paramatman*, bore the blow with courage and wisdom. She told the women, who ventured to console her, “Perhaps, you fear that I am a hard-hearted woman, because I do not weep. No. It is only because I know that weeping is futile and foolish.” Mr. Sethu from Delhi writes in a letter, “I believe that whatever Baba does is for our own good, though it may not immediately seem so to us.”





Chapter 6

Closer And Closer

The Interview

ON the ground floor of the *Mandir at Prasanthi Nilayam*, the room at the western end of the long veranda, through which one has to pass to arrive at the steps leading to the first floor, is known as the Interview Room. Persons blessed by Baba with a chance for private conversation and guidance, sit outside the door of this room, till He directs them to come in.

Since the day of the Annunciation (23rd May, 1940), when Sathyanarayana declared Himself to be Sai Baba, supplicants from all quarters have been streaming into the village of Puttaparthi to have His *darshan*, to participate in the *bhajans*, and to earn counsel, consolation, confidence, and courage from Him. And on the 23rd of November, 1950, the twenty-fifth birthday of *Bhagawan*, was inaugurated the *Prasanthi Mandir*.

Earlier, *Swami* was residing with a few devotees in the village itself, at a *Mandir* constructed on a small plot of land, gifted by Subbamma, the ‘foster-mother’, on the eastern outskirts. When the seekers swelled in number, a long extension with a corrugated sheet roof was added as a shelter and a separate structure, with a sleeping room and a bath room, was built behind the *Mandir* for Baba’s use.

Baba, who was then in His teens, moved among the pilgrims either in the kitchens, where they would be working, or in the extended shelter, where they stayed. Persons anxious to win the precious gift of His grace, or those wishing to benefit from premonitory warnings and preparatory guidelines for spiritual progress, followed Him from one room to another, until He finally sat down somewhere upon a bedroll, on the floor. They gathered in a semicircle at His feet and prodded Him with prayers, petitions, and problems. On most evenings, Baba moved to the sandy bed of the Chitravati and, while *bhajans* were being sung, called a few to follow Him into the thickening dusk, so that He could grant them interviews.

The shrine, before which *bhajans* were sung, was on an elevated platform at the western end of the long shed. After the *bhajans*, it was 'closed', a thick, blue curtain being drawn across the shed from south to north. Pilgrims proposing to depart were often granted interviews in the mornings and afternoons, on the other side of that curtain. Then, as now, all hours of the day were spent by Him in the task of repair, reconstruction, and reform of the individuals, whom His Will had drawn to His presence. Repair of physical abnormalities and subnormalities was also carried out by divine surgery, during such interviews.

Pada-Puja

During the years at the old *Mandir* (and for about five years after the new *Mandir* was occupied by Baba), every person or family leaving the Presence for a substantial length of time was blessed with the opportunity to offer *pada-puja* to *Swami*. *Padapuja* means 'worshipping the feet'. Seated on a silver chair in a room at the eastern end of the veranda, Baba graciously placed His feet on a silver plate. The devotees poured water on the feet, while *Vedic* hymns were recited. They then placed flowers on the feet, while the 108 names of their chosen deity were repeated. After this, they waved incense and lighted camphor. They offered fruits or sweets, bits of which were tasted by *Swami* and blessed to their immense satisfaction. On such occasions, *Swami* would initiate a boy into the *Gayatri mantra*, or a child into the alphabet, would 'christen' a baby, or bless a couple about to be married. There were days, on which as many as three or some such *pujas* were performed - a measure only of the extent of Baba's compassion. After the *puja*, people would linger longingly, until Baba had answered the questions, which tormented them and solve the riddles, which baffled them. Days might melt into weeks and weeks into months, but the afflicted would await the great experience. Each day was 'the day'; each moment, 'the moment'. There were no definite days or hours, when one could expect to converse with Him and undergo the 'conversion'. However, if one had to leave before one had been given this golden opportunity, one would sadly depart, hoping for better luck next time.

In spite of *Prasanthi Nilayam* being imposing and spacious, it did not have, until 1974, a separate, secluded room for personal conversation with the *Avatar*. The persons selected by *Bhagawan*, from the rows of eager devotees, were called into the room at the eastern end of the veranda, fifteen or twenty of them at a time. Baba would first address them as a group, on the various aspects of *sadhana*, giving them inspiration and insight. Then, He would meet each one individually, to impart His message, providing them solace and strength. After diagnosing their ailments, He would prescribe the antidote for their cure in a soft, unobtrusive

atmosphere of love.

The events that take place during the interview are recorded only in the tablets of memory. Baba delves into personal failings and inbuilt agonies, and is ever engaged in revealing and correcting faults, disinfecting habits, filtering emotions, fumigating passions, and fostering virtues - a process that discourages publicity.

The First Interview

Dr. John Hislop writes, “When he had his first interview with *Bhagawan*, this writer was seated in a small room with his wife and several others, who were part of the interview group. All attention was on the slender, elegant, graceful form of *Bhagawan* - His deep, luminous eyes, the sweet, warm smiles, and the charm. The critical and questioning mind stopped its restless activity. Anxiety about the world and its problems faded away from the consciousness. There remained just a feeling of quiet happiness. Although Baba was speaking, one was surrounded by quietness. In that peaceful state of being, one’s awareness deepened without effort. There was a perception that something alive, something unknown was in one’s heart. In a moment, the realisation came that a current of love was moving in this writer’s dry, ‘western’ heart and then, it was very clear that the source of that love was *Bhagawan* - nay, more - that the sweetness of *Bhagawan* Himself was there, with life, in the heart.” How could Sri Sathya Sai Baba, a stranger never seen before, come into the heart of a mature man and bring about a change from within, a change from which there is no turning back?

Surely, God is the only 'stranger', who can do this. Hislop writes, “On that memorable day, when I first came into the presence of Sathya Sai Baba, I reached the end and goal of my forty-seven years of search for the One, who could say the truth so directly, that I could see for myself that it was true. Never can I forget that day.”

Hislop and his wife contacted Theosophy from Dr. Annie Besant and J. Krishnamurthi, through Thray Sithu U Ba Khin and Mahesh Yogi - series of splendid teachers, who struggled on the path of *gnyana*. “But, when I came into the presence of Baba on that ever-memorable day, in 1968,” writes Hislop, “I made the totally surprising and unsuspected discovery that I was a *bhakta!* Never had I shown that tendency to myself and I was truly amazed.” “The Lord has to come in human form to move among men,” says Baba, “so that He can be listened to, contacted, loved, revered, and obeyed. He has to speak the language of men and behave like human beings do. Otherwise, He will be either neglected and negated, or feared

and avoided.” Thus, the Lord revealed Hislop (the true self) to Hislop and directed him on to that road within himself, which leads to Him.

Another person, who underwent a similar, revelatory experience, was Swami Abhedananda, for long a resident *sadhaka* at the *ashram* of *Bhagawan* Ramana Maharshi. He wrote to me on 23rd December, 1961, “To be frank, I must admit that I have been hearing of Sri Sathya Sai Babaji and about His *mahimas* for a long time. But hearsay does not convey a good opinion about Him. Recently, nearly a week or ten days ago, I got your book, *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*, from a devotee of His and I went through it. It is very interesting and illuminating, and is driving me to have a *darshan* of the Divinity. Will you let me know whether and when I shall be able to have the *darshan*?

Although I have been living my life in this fashion, for over twenty years now, I still have doubts and defects. This body is at the fag end of its life, having passed the age of seventy-six. I cannot delay relishing the *summum bonum*, the certainty of which my doubts do screen. May I request you also to help me earn His grace and thus, be liberated from these doubts and defects, this sinuous, unending *samsara*.”

Even before my reply reached him, he had a vision of both Ramana Maharshi and Sai Baba, on the 27th, at 4 a.m., while fully awake at the *Ramana ashram*. Baba spoke to him in clear Telugu and directed him towards a new process of meditation. He came to *Prasanthi Nilayam* and was immediately blessed with an interview. His letter to me, dated the 5th February, 1962, gives an account of the grace Baba conferred on him: “I must thank you for being instrumental in exposing me to Baba’s grace, which helped clear all my doubts. I was really astonished to find my old-age infirmities disappear and my weakened limbs regain strength merely by His touch. His clear exposition, with analysis and analogies, not only put an end to my long-harboured doubts, but made me see Truth face to face, in its sublime nature.

Not only this, but His transformation at the time of my leave-taking, into *Muralidhara Krishna* (Krishna with the flute) in dazzling splendour, is a sight I shall never forget. The *darshan* of *Saguna Brahman* (the Universal Absolute incarnated as a limited being) was a blessing bestowed on this poor soul to reveal the oneness of *saguna* and *nirguna*.”

Hislop too was very prone to accept God only as the Universal Absolute; the limited, temporal, particular incarnation was to him less glorious and divine. So, Baba gave him also a vision of Himself as Krishna, in order to make him aware that the Divinity is full and free,

and that It cannot be diminished or devalued, if it takes the form of an *Avatar*. Abhedananda continues in his letter, “I was still a believer only in *Nirguna Brahman* and considered everything that was visible to be *mithya*. This gracious transformation of His changed me and made me see everything - visible and imagined - to be *Sathya*, a part of that same Absolute Principle.

Baba had anticipated all the difficulties and doubts, which I carried to Him, regarding my efforts in *sadhana* and He cleared them all. He instructed me, convincing me about the validity of His advice and how to proceed further. I am not quite convinced with the popular view, attributing avatarhood to Baba. He seems to me to be the perfect *Purna Brahman*, personified to end the unsettled state of the world by making man realise his own real nature, which is Bliss.”

Shri Maharajakrishna Rasagotra, presently India’s envoy to France, writes of moments he has spent in Baba’s presence, “Words cannot sum up the quality of such moments spent in Baba’s company. He sits there, a picture of compassion, nay, the very embodiment of Love, transforming each fleeting fraction of time into a moment of revelation, enlightenment, and release. When He enters a room, you feel enveloped in the warmth of His love. You feel a part of Him and the identification of one with the other is complete. Perhaps, that is why there is nothing in one’s past, present, or future, which is hidden from His gaze.”

No More Cobwebs

“Years ago, when I first sought Him out in a remote place, without prior appointment, acquaintance, or introduction, He brought up, without any suggestion or provocation from me, the subject of death, saying, ‘The loss of your child weighs upon your heart, still. The living must get reconciled to the inevitability of death.’ He then proceeded to bring into my vision an altogether new horizon, with which I was not acquainted before,” says Shri Rasagotra.

I heard Him gently ask a devotee thus, “What is the cause of your worry? What are all your fears based on?” And He continued, “Your worry and fear is based on your experiences in the past, experiences of yesterday. But, today is not yesterday. And tomorrow will be different. You do not know what tomorrow will bring. Why do you then give fresh life in your heart, to the ghosts of yesterday?”

The interview is an occasion, when Baba cleans the cobwebs from the brain, erases the wrinkles on the brow, and cures the myopia of the intellect by removing the distractions from

the mind. He advises us to pay attention to the breath and listen to the '*Soham*' it recites. He fixes a silencer to the tongue. He sweetens and softens the speech. He lightens the burden on our shoulders and gives us hope for the future. He gives new meaning to our actions and places, new goals for us to achieve. In fact, He sublimates our emotions and sanctifies our passions. Shri Rasagotra, who has experienced the grace that Baba confers during an interview upon those who go to Him with constant yearning, writes, "A man, who goes in for a meeting with Him, seldom comes out the same. He emerges from the encounter, exalted and radiant, as if Baba has stripped him of his motley cloak of many patches and fitted him out in Love's pure raiment, for a fresh journey towards a bright, new destination.

The transformation begins almost at the first moment of contact with Baba and the process of irresistible uplift never slackens, thereafter. Perhaps, this is His greatest appeal, which draws to Puttaparthi and *Brindavan* men and women of all faiths and beliefs, from every part of the world. The impact of His personality is instantaneous, electrifying, and elevating. In His luminous presence, one feels part of a higher order of reality, lifted out of oneself, as if one were on a different, altogether purer plane of existence, where there is no lust, greed, anger, or falsehood and where, while there may be suffering and pain, there is no fear."

William Penn writes, "That is the wonderment of Baba; once He enters your life, He fills it completely. It becomes totally different, totally delightful."

Baba installs Himself as the Master, in every heart that is warm with love. No problem is beneath His notice, or beyond His benediction. He challenges us with dilemmas and when effort fails and the ego surrenders, He deals with our personal problems with intimate sympathy. So, most of what happens then - the counsel He bestows, the courage He installs, the dilemmas He reconciles, the despair He overcomes, the symbols of grace He gifts, the revelations He vouchsafes, and the doubts He resolves - is not recorded to be retold. Some idea of what those, whom Baba selects, earn during an interview can be gained from the following account received from a participant.

What Does Happen

"There were seven others in the batch, which Baba called into the room that morning. A doctor from Bombay, a lady from Sri Lanka, an American couple from Los Angeles, two American Scientists from the Psychic Research Society in New York, and a gentleman from Hong Kong. A remarkable assortment indeed and a good sample of the variety in the eager rows of visitors sitting before the *Mandir*, awaiting this stroke of luck. There was an ornate

chair in the room, but Baba sat on the floor, with us sitting around Him. As He sat down, He created *vibhuti* and gave us each a share. He called on me to translate His Hindi into English, though my Hindi was poor and His English was unexceptionable. It was a unique experience for me and I was genuinely happy at getting the chance. Perhaps, that was the reason why He asked me to do so. Baba made us feel quite at ease, as if we had gathered before our family hearth. He appeared extremely youthful and handsome, cheerful and buoyant - the very embodiment of graceful charm.

He suddenly turned towards the American couple and asked them if that day was not the 33rd anniversary of their wedding. They were stunned. It took a few seconds for them to say yes. He then created a ring with His portrait embossed on it and placing it on the trembling palm of the lady, He asked her to put it on her husband's finger. He waved His hand yet again: a gold chain, with a golden lotus suspended from it, emerged. He directed the gentleman to put the chain around the neck of his wife. Their joy knew no bounds; they had never dreamt that Baba would remind them of the significance of that day. How could He, when they themselves had forgotten it in His presence. And Baba had now celebrated it with such unforgettable grandeur!

Baba asked the scientists, 'What is your explanation for the materialisation?' They sat silent. 'The laws of physics,' Baba said, 'do not allow something to be created out of nothing. But, they do not hold good as far as I am concerned.' They asked, 'How is that?' Baba said that, science was limited to the world that could be perceived, that was manifest. But, the spiritual eye can see matter, where even the most powerful microscope can find none. 'I need no X-rays or chemical graphs to diagnose a disease. You too can develop such spiritual insight. I am here to reveal to man this possibility and to lead him to new vistas of peace and potency,' Baba said."

Why Bring To Life?

"The scientists asked Baba whether He had gone out of His body to rescue a man, who was drowning in a well at Kuppam village, as was reported by Murphet. Baba said, 'I did save the man, Radhakrishna, from drowning, but I did not go from here to there to do that. I was there already; I am everywhere at all times. I need not go or come back.'

They asked Baba, 'On what basis do You bestow grace upon people?' Baba replied, 'I bestow grace, when a person has fully surrendered to Me and when the situation so demands. At Madras, Walter had three attacks of heart failure, full and fatal, but I saved his life all the

three times, for that was needed. I also brought Radhakrishna back to life for just ten days, because I deemed it necessary. You ask Me about death and the extension of life, but I say that you are neither born, nor can you die.'

'Can you grant grace to a country as a whole?' asked an American. 'I can,' said Baba, 'if I desire. I have granted these two scientists special grace, giving them many chances to watch Me and listen to Me, for they are interested and have the capacity to help humanity by the knowledge gained from these experiences.' Just then, one of the scientists observed that the stone on a ring, materialised earlier by Baba, was missing. All of us started looking for it, but Baba indicated, with a smile, that He had dematerialised it.

Then, Baba rose and gave short, personal interviews to each of us. Within minutes, all my doubts and uncertainties had been resolved. He injected into my life a new sense of purpose. As I stood speechless before Him, He reassured me, holding my hands in His, saying, 'Do not worry. I will take care of you. I am always with you, beside you, in your very heart.'

A few days later, Baba called the two scientists, two new couples from America, a British citizen, and myself into the interview room. He enquired about the missing gem stone. Then, He took the ring back from the scientist and holding it before His mouth, gently blew upon it three times. The missing stone reappeared, firm and beautiful. 'It is *sankalpa*, the Will that does it,' Baba explained.

Baba then spoke of the need for the cultivation of compassion and humility, self-control and a virtuous character among scientists. He spoke of the atom bomb and other destructive weapons, and described the holocaust wrought by such weapons. As He began speaking, 'Seven thousand years ago, on the historic battlefield of Kurukshetra...' an American intervened with the question, 'How does Baba know of events that took place seven thousand years ago? From books, or through other means?' Baba smiled, 'I know what happened seventy thousand years ago! I can go forward and backward in time and learn of anything I wish. Time and space can impose no limitation on Me.'

Someone questioned Baba about the halo that Hislop had written He saw around Baba's head. 'Thousands have seen the halo,' Baba said, 'You must be both near Me and dear to Me to be able to see it,' He added.

This question led to many others and Baba answered them all in a short talk He gave us, 'You are surprised that I can be in two bodies at the same time, or in a thousand different places. When I give you a ring or any other object materialised by Me, it instantly informs Me,

whenever you are in imminent danger. I can reach you immediately and tender all necessary help. However, even if you have nothing on you that has been given by Me, if you have only genuine love and devotion for Me, My response will still be immediate. I respond to every sincere prayer, no matter what form or name of God you may adore and worship.’

‘Once, in this very room, Indra Devi of Tecate (Mexico) was sitting with others, listening to Me. She had an American gentleman, whose wife was in the States, sitting here. I knew that her car had met with serious accident, while she was in it. Even while engaged in conversation with them, I saved her and gave all necessary assistance. Here, I told her husband not to worry and to go home as planned. Now, science and technology have advanced tremendously, but man has no peace of mind. Tranquilisers and sleeping pills have become a must for everyone. A simple and regulated life, which includes natural foods and plenty of physical exercise, is the best remedy for the complicated diseases that haunt man in all lands. I do a lot of work as you must have seen, and take a small quantity of simple food. I do not take milk, curds, butter, or fruit-juice. This body will continue to be in good health, until its ninety-fourth year. I must admit that, occasionally, I take upon Myself the ailments of My devotees, but these only pass through My body, without having any effect on Me.’”

Helping Thousands

“Someone asked how many hours Baba slept at night. ‘I do not sleep at all,’ He replied. To a question about gesticulating with His hands, Baba said, ‘During *bhajans*, when I am seated, you find Me gesticulating with My hands or fingers. Sometimes, it appears as if I am writing in the air. People are curious to know why. At such times, I am communicating with people you cannot see. I am engaged in tasks that you cannot understand. I write replies to questions asked by someone far away and help thousands of people in every part of the world.’

Then, He called us into the ante-chamber, one by one, and spent some time with each, healing and heartening, comforting and correcting. I secured a second chance to touch His feet and to draw strength and spiritual sustenance from another assurance of His ever-present grace.

An American asked, ‘When will I have another chance?’ Baba smiled and patting him on his back, replied, ‘Today, a group of villagers has come. I give Myself first to the needy and the poor. Most of the people who come here have no money to spend for a long stay. I’ll give you another chance, when I am free.’”

“The material is only a baser state of the spiritual, of the divine. It is the fulfilment of God’s Will, the measure of His power. Creation can take place, only when the power of the spirit is

channelled properly. Sai Baba is bringing this truth into our awareness today,” said the octogenarian Dr. Sigried Knauer, M.D., of Mexico. Speaking about the interview he was granted, he told an audience at San Diego, “He called me in. After some minutes of talk, which I will keep to myself, Baba asked me to cup my hands and He slowly dropped one by one, thirty-three tiny, amber-coloured pills. (Thirty-three vertebrae, He explained.) The pills had formed in His palm, one after another.

At Bombay, before my departure from India, Baba called me into one of the rooms at *Dharmakshetra*, where He was alone. He circled His hands a few times and turning His palm up, He showed me how a liquid was slowly filling one hand. ‘Oil,’ He said. It had an exquisite fragrance. Then, He rubbed both palms to spread the oil evenly on them and He gave me treatment with the oil. In gratitude, I wanted to touch His feet, but He did not let me do so.”

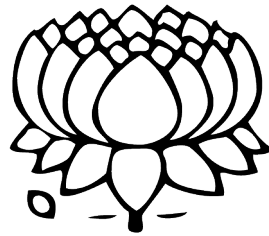
No Reaching

“By what path can we reach You soonest?” once asked a doyen of Hindu metaphysics. Baba replied, “I am too near you to prescribe a path for you. You cannot reach Me. If you need Me, I am yours.” W.G. Steve, an architect from Honolulu, narrates, “The little interview room was crowded and Baba launched into a spiritual discourse, with specific comments directed towards some, but seemingly applicable to all. Then came the individual session, during which He quickly cut into the secret depths of our being - our problems of health, previous meetings, when He had contacted Irene in a dream and, would you believe, the details of that dream, difficulties we encountered in our individual efforts in *sadhana*, the personal desires of each of us, and our own internal turmoils. *Vibhuti* was also manifested. All this was quickly, naturally, and spontaneously delivered and conferred with love and understanding, which rendered new meaning to old words. Here was a confidante, guide, doctor, friend, father, mother, and God beside us both, as One.”

How is this supremacy of the spirit attained? When Baba says that we too can attain it, what does He really mean? Dat Pethe sheds light on this, “Whenever a meeting of two individuals takes place, it is really two separate, psychological setups that meet, each set-up confronting the other with a complex of innumerable experiences, memories, sentimental attachments, bias towards various matters and situations, and countless idiosyncrasies. These form the background and the source, from which the words used in conversation by the two individuals originate. But, when Baba is talking to somebody, one is struck by the discovery

that on His side, there is no such set-up at all. And He gives us the power to get over the handicap of our own confused and disorganised set-up.”

Once, to an earnest aspirant clamouring for an interview, Baba said, “I am giving you interviews, everyday (through the inner voice). It is you, who always avoid granting Me an interview, an *enter-in-view*, from viewing you as Me in Me.” When we realise the truth in Baba’s declaration, “I am in you and you are in Me; we are really One,” the so-called ‘interviews’ with Him become superfluous. Jerry Bas writes, “A fellow pilgrim from the United States, when about to return home, prayed to Baba for an interview. Baba stood before him for a few seconds and said, “Be great! Be great! In reality, you are great! Interview? Interview is small; it makes you separate.” That reply is worth pondering over in silence for some time.





Chapter 7

Dabbling And Diving

The Cosmic Visitor

JONATHAN Swift wrote in his characteristic, caustic style, “When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign - that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.” Vilification is the tribute that envy offers to mystery. Ignorance breeds either humility, or obstinacy; it seldom blossoms into inquiry and illumination, for it cannot recognise itself. It clothes itself in pride and revels in the petty practice of slander.

Dr. Gokak describes Baba as the ‘Cosmic Visitor’. Baba Himself announced in His twenty first year, “No one can comprehend My glory, whoever he may be, whatever his method of inquiry, and however sustained his attempt.” No wonder He attracted a campaign of vilification, when He was just fourteen years of age. His father threatened to beat the alleged ‘megalomania’ out of His head. Brandishing a heavy stick, he accosted Him saying, “Are you God or a fraud?” When Baba replied, “I am Sai Baba come again; worship Me,” the stick dropped from His father’s hand. Miracles soon convinced him that it is best to leave his Son alone. Baba’s elder brother drew His attention to the barbs of pettiness and prejudice, aimed through rumour and scandal at the dazzling, new phenomenon, who had arisen from a ‘hamlet between the hills’. Baba wrote to him, “These people have to be pitied, rather than condemned. They do not know. They have no patience to judge aright. They are too full of lust, anger, and conceit to see clearly and know fully, so they make all types of allegations. If only they knew, they would not talk or write like that... People are endowed with a variety of characteristics and mental attitudes and each judges the other, according to his own level of perception, debates and defends his point of view, in accordance with his particular degree of enlightenment.”

Slanderers prowl around those who stand above the common level. Peggy Mason, editor of

‘Two Worlds’, writes, “A great light arouses detractors. Jesus was scorned as a wine bibber and a consort of publicans and sinners, who had received his healing powers through the good offices of Beelzebub.” Baba too was scorned, while yet a boy of fourteen, as being possessed by a spirit. His brother and parents subjected Him to a painful process of exorcism. The villagers of Puttaparthi spread the story that the boy was possessed by some local spirit, which, through their efforts in that direction, would soon set him free. Baba says that detractors only help in separating the chaff from the grain and even this, by itself, is sufficient reason to welcome them.

Baba is an open book. There is nothing exotic or esoteric about Him, nor is there any trace of abracadabra in His teachings; His ministrations have no mysterious ceremonial or initiatory rite; He is ever intent on giving and forgiving; He never accepts for Himself any gift, or offering, or present; if you need Him, He says, you certainly deserve Him; He is by your side, when you call, no matter where you may be and love is the only currency He deals in.

Invokes A Sense of Unity

Therefore, institutions trying to propagate and promote special cults, purveyors of dubious remedies, and agents of ‘exclusive’ roads to the Abode of God, naturally try to keep their own flocks intact by means of slander.

Baba declares before hundreds of thousands of people, belonging to every caste, creed, and religion and assembled from every part of globe, “There is only one caste - the caste of Humanity; there is only one religion - the religion of Love; there is only one language - the language of the Heart; there is only one God and He is omnipresent.” This message demolishes the walls laboriously built and vigilantly preserved by petty, separative minds, who readily take refuge in slander and vilification as their first line of defence against this Cosmic Visitor.

Blatantly yellow journals felt encouraged to turn their slander towards the divine phenomenon by forces that could not, however, disturb it in any way. They spun spicy tales, which they hoped would distort and damage its image, and fetch them quick returns. Periodicals that were restrained were prompted into this nefarious adventure by those having vested interests.

But Baba, being the embodiment of Love, has only love to offer in return for such presents. He says, “In every age, in every land, these unfortunate people drudge for their daily bread. I stand between the heap of praise and the heap of blame, blessing both. You recite My name

in your homes; they shout My name along the lanes and bylanes, and all over the market-place. Why do you begrudge the few paise they earn by selling their stuff, to provide their children a little food?"

Baba, in His infinite compassion, advises, "Pity them, they do not know... Pity them, for they *cannot* know." When I proposed to publish the first part of His biography '*Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*', in 1954, after a six-year stay in His presence, He at once demurred, saying, "Readers will not accept the book as authentic, since they do not and cannot know My truth. They will treat it like a fairy tale, as they do the *Arabian Nights*. Wait. I have still to make the world eager and ready for that book. Now, people will doubt your sanity. Later, they will blame you for underestimating Me." And this happened exactly. The book was released in 1960. On 8th February, 1962, I received a letter from Swami Abhedananda, for long a resident of the *ashram* of *Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi* in Thiruvannamalai, who had recently met Baba, "In my humble opinion, an *Avatar* is only a particle of the supreme *Brahman*, descending on the Earth simply to moderate the ups and downs of humanity and to alleviate their imaginary woes."

He then went on to charge me with the sacrilege of underestimating Sai Baba, saying, "He seems to me to be the perfect, *Purna Brahman*, personified to end the unsettled state of the world, to rectify human defects, and to bring man to realise his own true nature and its bliss."

The Superstition

Another group of people, who cannot be happy with a divine phenomenon in their hemisphere, are the 'rationalists'. They are allergic to the very idea of God. And here is Baba, declaring that He is God and that everyone is God, including those who deny God. Such people adore only their ego or their ism. They called a halt to their logic, somewhere about the forties of the present century, before Eddington, Jeans, Freud, Jung, and Einstein highlighted the limitations of science. Science has now humbled itself before the inscrutability of the cosmos.

"The universe is a thought of God," says Jeans. The cell and the atom, matter and energy are dealing surprise after surprise on syllogisms and systems laboriously built by hoary *pundits* of science. The once-respected faculty, called 'intellect', has been discarded as a superstition by front-line thinkers in biology, psychology, and physics.

As Paul Brunton writes, "If anyone considers all the evidence of intention and failing to believe that a higher power directs all, comes only to atheism, it is because the mind, which

such a person considers as evidence, is already closed by bias or ill-balanced by emotion, upset by suffering or too distracted by the five senses, or is faulty in yet some other way.” Atheism is kept alive by the tendency to rebel against adult beliefs; it is a sign of juvenile stubbornness. Some propagate this cult, because they have no courage to accept a stance considered out of date, while others behave in that manner, for being unhappy themselves, they desire to undermine whatever happiness is available to others.

A group of so-called rationalists once initiated a project with great fanfare, to ‘investigate’ Baba by means of certain tests, which they announced in various periodicals. “We shall ask Baba to take off his gown. What about his hair - it may be fake; some say it is, so we shall have to find out. Perhaps, we would have to use metal detectors to check if he is concealing some things on him,” they announced.

“Grotesquely ridiculous and grossly insulting,” exclaims R. K. Karanjia, editor of Blitz, who had himself in the past, openly questioned and criticised Sathya Sai Baba. The faithful followers of the investigators thereupon vilified Karanjia as having been bribed, bought out, hypnotized, converted, or otherwise influenced by Baba!

The sallies, which such persons indulge in, remind us of the adventures of Don Quixote and his companion Sancho Panza. It is now well-established that what we call 'reason' is only a state of mind and it is perverted and polluted by unreasonable likes and dislikes. It can be distorted by propaganda. It is so riddled by self-love that one sees things only as one wishes to perceive them. Child experiences too create bias towards persons, principles, and procedures. But, more than all other defects, our reason suffers from a tendency to rationalize prejudices, in order to salve the conscience and shield the ego from guilt.

‘Take off the gown... pull at the hair... pass a metal detector over the body!’ No wonder the Sancho Panzas were laughed off the stage. Many were aware of Dr. Osis’ remark that, “In the scientific community, as in every establishment, there is inertia, conservatism, and hostility towards anything radically new.” But, no one could have expected such a caricature to emerge from this community.

Baba says, “How can science, which is bound by physical laws, investigate transcendental phenomenon, for these lie far beyond its scope and comprehension. I have repeatedly declared that those who want to understand Me are welcome here. It is the spirit of investigation that is important. Foreign para-psychologists have come here and examined Me in a positive and constructive spirit. They do not write slanderous letters, or make public

demands. But, the very approach of these people (the 'investigators') was wrong. That is why I refused them. I want people to come, see, hear, observe, and experience Me. Only then will they understand and appreciate the *Avatar*.”

Diving Into Sai

Dr. Karlis Osis, a Director of Research from the prestigious American Society for Psychical Research, and his friend and fellow-worker, Dr. E. Haroldson visited India three times, met many people, who had a long association with Baba, journeyed thousands of miles on fact-finding assignments, and stayed at *Prasanthi Nilayam* for months together - seeing, hearing, studying, observing, and experiencing. Dr. Osis writes, “The abundance of the phenomena encountered and the magnitude of the miraculous effect were a complete surprise to seasoned para-psychologists like us. I have been an active researcher for twenty-five years and have travelled widely, but nowhere have I found phenomena, which point as clearly and forcibly to spiritual reality as the daily miracles of Baba.”

Baba says, “Those who wish to secure pearls must dive deep to get them. It is useless to dabble in shallow waters and claim that the sea holds no treasures.” Dr. Sandweiss journeyed to *Prasanthi Nilayam* and “dived” with the intention to prove its barrenness, but to his own amazement, his efforts yielded pearls aplenty. His apprehensions about mass hypnotism, group hysteria, and uncanny influences were quickly laid low. Before he started on his voyage of investigation, he had written, “The opportunity of observing such events at first hand and of investigating their psychological mechanisms myself was very appealing. I felt that observing Baba in person would give me an idea of what might have taken place at the time of Christ to propagate those incredible stories.” He has since written the now well-known book, ‘Sai Baba, The Holy Man and Psychiatrist’, on the last page of which he has described the ‘pearl’ he secured thus, “It has been my good fortune to draw close to Him at a time, when it is still possible to become friendly with Him on a personal level and see the clear signs of His greatness in a close and intimate way. Yet, I feel that soon, Baba will become but an orange speck on the horizon, surrounded by millions of eager faces. And like the people in His village, who were once blessed to know the sweetness of His being from daily, personal contact with Him, I too will one day, be saddened by having to view Him only from a distance.”

Karanjia too, on the suggestion of both Baba’s devotees and adversaries, finally decided, like Sandweiss, to ‘dive’. He now recalls, “I myself went to Puttaparthi to put all available

criticisms straight to Baba and to obtain His answer... The encounter was fantastic, almost shattering... Sathya Sai Baba revealed Himself as a scientist of consciousness, showing mankind the way to realise the indwelling God through love, devotion, detachment, and selflessness, to evolve to a higher level of enlightenment.

The false dichotomies, created by Western thought, between man and God, *purusha* and *Purushottama* simply do not exist in the Hindu scriptures, which propagate the mergence of God in man and man in God as the basis of religion. Baba personifies this philosophy. Baba's holy mission leads us deep into the spiritual significance of the Cosmic Drama. It aims to first unmake the materialistic, ego-bound man and then, remake him in the image and likeness of God."

Karanjia goes on to quote the English version of a Telugu poem, which Baba once sang as a prologue to one of His discourses:

**I am the Dance Master;
I am *Nataraja*, the Lord of Dance. You are all My pupils.
I alone know the agony
Of teaching you each step of the Dance.**

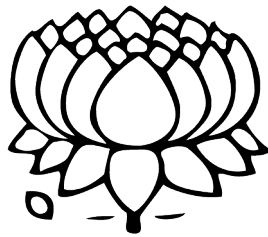
Ruminating over the cosmic dimensions of the agony that this poem tries to express, Karanjia writes, "To one, who carries the burden as well as the glory of human agony, campaigns of calumny indulged in by a few misled people can hardly touch Him." And as simply and naturally as Christ's plea from the cross, for forgiveness for those 'who know not what they do,' Baba blesses the calumniators.

To those who are troubled by His assertion that man is divine, the question asked is, "As God is omnipresent, can He not be found in man?" To those who feel hurt by His treating the rich as lovingly as the poor, the reply is, "They bring to Me their troubled hearts and sick minds. I cure them by asking them to divert their wealth and power to spiritual ends, like *Seva*." Those who will have Him 'perform' a miracle, which suits their taste, must first understand that He is no 'performer'. What we call a 'miracle' is, in fact, only a concretisation of His love. Baba also explains, "Articles that can be worn by devotees are given by Me, so that by wearing them, the recipient can keep contact with Me throughout his life."

Most questions and doubts arise only from cleverness. The reason is used, as Aldous Huxley says, "To create internal and external conditions favourable to its own transfiguration by and

into the spirit.” Huxley goes on to assert that, “Cleverness has given us technology and power. Therefore, we believe, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that we have only to go on being cleverer in a yet more clamorous way, to achieve social order, international peace, and personal happiness.”

In accordance with *Bhagawan’s* constant advice, let us now resolve to understand ourselves by transfiguring reason into spirit, rather than disfiguring it into cleverness. Let us determine to resolve our own mystery. Only then, says Baba, can we hope to understand Him, to understand that we are a part of Him. Then, the truth, “My Me is God,” will shine. Let little minds dabble; we shall dive.





Chapter 8

Tomorrow

“O God! How does it happen
In this poor old world
That Thou art so great,
Yet nobody finds Thee;
That Thou art so near,
Yet nobody feels Thee;
Thou givest Thyself to everybody,
Yet nobody knows Thy Name.
Men flee from Thee and say
They cannot see Thee;
They turn their back and say
They cannot see Thee;
They stuff their ears and say
They cannot hear Thee.”

Thus lamented Hans Denk, as have also countless other human beings. God heard the cry. He pitied this poor world and willed to rescue us. He incarnated as Sathya Sai.

Sai has come as small as man, so we can find Him amidst us.

Sai has come as near and dear, so we can feel Him close.

Sai gives Himself to everybody, yet no one knows His name. (All names are His!)

Sai is everywhere, so as to whichever direction we flee, we find Him there.

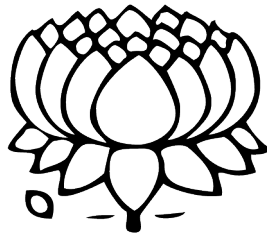
Sai is behind us, beside us, before us, so we can never turn our backs on

Him.

Sai ever resides within our hearts, so with ears stuffed we still hear His voice.

Humans need not lament their weakness anymore. Sai, the *Avatar* of Divine Love, is here. Let us rejoice and listen to His voice. The poor, old world of today will be the happy, new world of tomorrow.

Jai Sai Ram



About SSSSTPD

On 1st January, 2009, Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust (SSSST) commenced operations with four divisions; the Bhakta Sahayak divisions (one in Prasanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi and another in Brindavan, Bangalore), the Publications division, and the Media division.

The Publications Division (SSSSTPD) caters to:

1) The publication and distribution of spiritual, religious, and educational Sai Literature and the production and distribution of audio and visual multimedia, photographs, calendars, and diaries, educational software, etc. for the benefit of visiting pilgrims and devotees all over the world. All the literature and publications are based on the teachings, philosophy, message, and values of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

2) The publication and distribution of Bhagawan Baba's monthly spiritual journal - Sanathana Sarathi - in English and Telugu languages. Since 2011, e-versions of the magazine are also released simultaneously and are available in PDF and EPUB formats on www.sanathanasarathi.org.

3) Maintaining a reporting channel, which covers all the major activities taking place in Prasanthi Nilayam, and publishing an e-newsletter 'Sai Spiritual Showers'- for free distribution.

4) Organising and conducting seminars and conferences on spirituality, religion, education, and human values.

5) Providing library and Reading room for visiting devotees, with a very large collection of various spiritual and religious books.

Other Books By SSSSTPD (In English)

1. Sai Sathya Sakha, 2. Summer Showers In Brindavan, 1972
3. Satyopanisad I, 4. Satyopanisad II
5. Gurudev, 6. Namasmarana
7. Bhakthi And Health, 8. Life Is Love, Enjoy It!
9. Life Is A Challenge, Meet It!, 10. Life Is A Dream, Realize It!
11. Bhagawan And Bhakta, 12. Body And Mind
13. My Dear Ones, 14. Sevadal
15. Silence, 16. Suffering

17. Surrender, 18. Atma
19. Do You Know, 20. Gopikas Of Brindavan
21. Gratitude, 22. My Beloved Ones
23. Only Love, 24. Purity
25. Memoirs Of A Sai Student, 26. A Journey To Self-Peace
27. Dharma, 28. Guru
29. Karma, 30. Life
31. Meditation, 32. Peace
33. Simple Truths, 34. Nama Mahima
35. Divine Vibrations, 36. Guidelines To Active Workers
37. Sri Sathya Sai Anandadayi, 38. Truth, Auspiciousness, Beauty
39. Sai Baba's Mahavakya On Leadership, 40. Path To Peace - Prayers for Daily Life

Connect With SSSSTPD

The Publications Division's websites are

1. Sri Sathya Sai Publications – www.srisathyasaipublications.com
2. Sanathana Sarathi – www.sanathanasarathi.org
3. Sai Reflections – www.saireflections.org
4. The Prasanthi Reporter – www.theprasanthireporter.org

Connect with us on

1. Facebook – www.facebook.com/sssstpd
2. Twitter – www.twitter.com/sssstpd
3. Pinterest – www.pinterest.com/sssstpd
4. Smashwords – www.smashwords.com/profile/view/sssstpd

Get Sanathana Sarathi

On Sanathana Sarathi official website – www.sanathanasarathi.org – subscribe for paperback and e-versions. Single monthly editions are also downloadable in English and Telugu languages at <http://bit.ly/sarathienGLISH> and <http://bit.ly/sarathitelugu>.



Publications Division