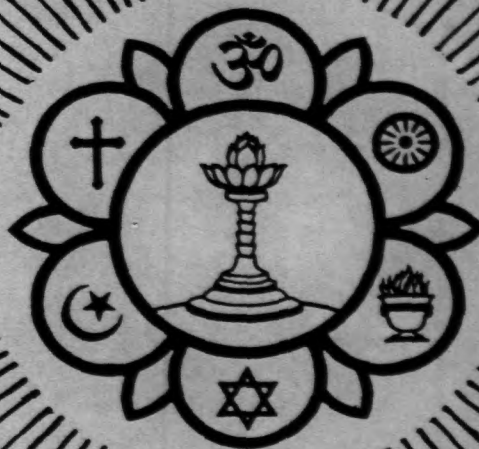


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SATHYA SAI Newsletter

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SATHYA SAI NEWSLETTER

*This publication is dedicated with love and devotion to
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

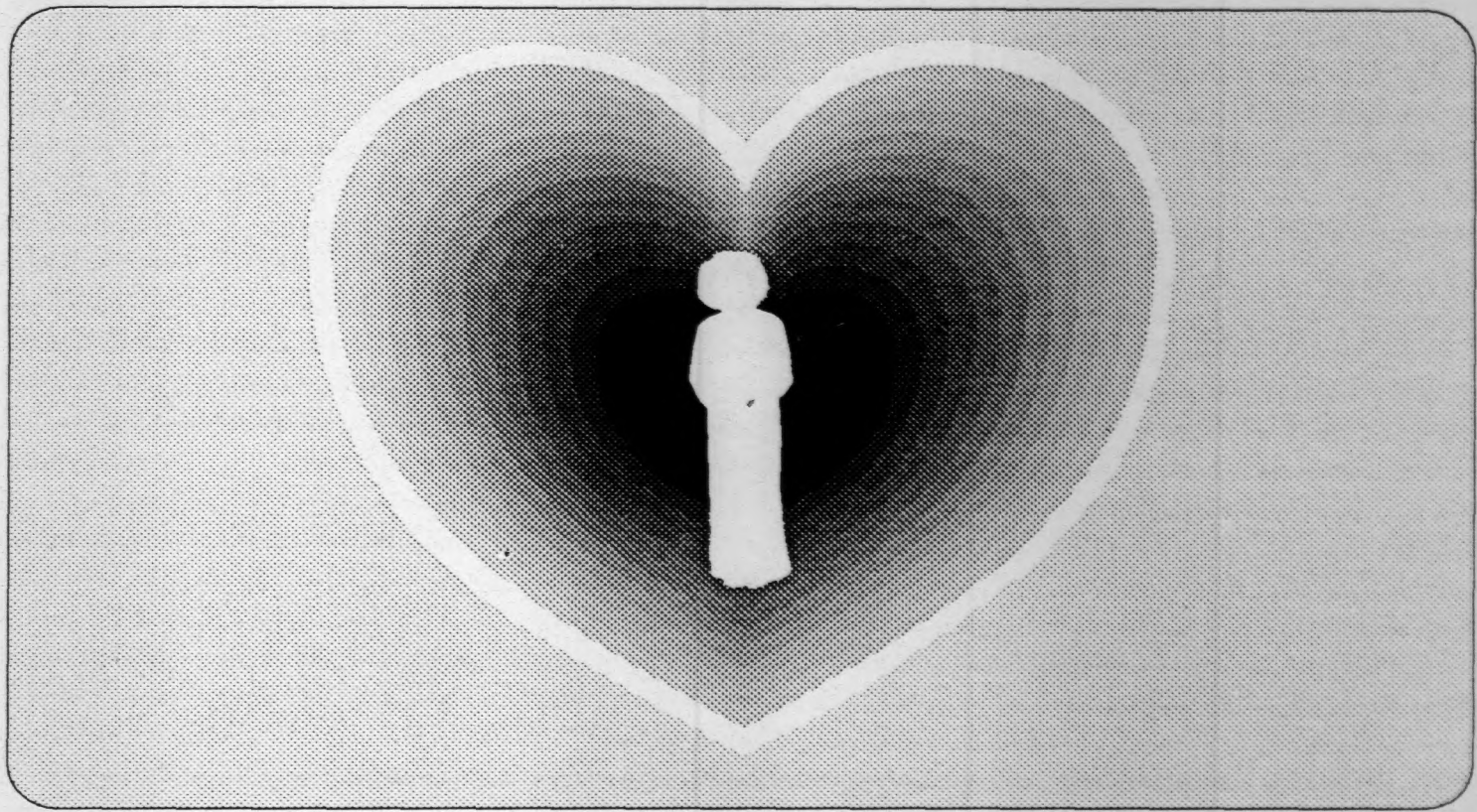
IN THIS ISSUE

A Quotation	<i>Sathya Sai Baba</i>	1
Sai Talks about the Organization	<i>Sathya Sai Baba</i>	2
Living Sai's Teachings	<i>Anne Sohani</i>	6
Why the Sai Organization Is Not a Cult	<i>Elaine & David Gries</i>	8
The Middle Path	<i>Jon Bruns</i>	10
Develop the Organization	<i>Jonathan Roof</i>	11
"Yes, Do. . . It Is Good "	<i>Devotion Coordinator, Tustin</i>	13
"Seek Ye First the Kingdom of Heaven"	<i>Deepak Bhat</i>	14
Why Organize?	<i>Sathya Sai Baba</i>	18
Another Approach	<i>Anonymous</i>	22
A Lesson from the Old Country	<i>Joy Frank</i>	24
Purpose of Organizing	<i>Richard Bayer</i>	25
A Study Circle Plan	<i>Gerald Dominick</i>	27
Love for Lunch	<i>Jorja Kelley</i>	28
Children's Corner, Nightingales in Grey	<i>Bal Vikas Quarterly</i>	30
Announcements		35
Sathya Sai Book Center of America		36



The Sarva Dharma symbol, the logo of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization, represents the unity of all religions.

Photographs, drawings, and literary contributions are always welcomed by the **Sathya Sai Newsletter**. We reserve the right of discrimination in selecting and editing material for publication. Send all literary contributions to: **Sathya Sai Newsletter**, 1800 East Garvey Avenue, West Covina, California 91791.



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Do not fret against the rules and regulations which the Organization imposes on you; they are laid down for your own good. Regulation is the very essence of Creation. The oceans observe their limits; wind and fire respect limits and bounds.

--Sathya Sai Baba
Hyderabad, India
March 29, 1976

SAI TALKS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Embodiments of the Divine:

The cosmos is permeated by God. What we call the universe is the world in which we are born, grow and return to the place from whence we came. The earth is the base for this world. On this earth, inside and outside, night and day, everywhere, the air blows ceaselessly, but it is not visible to the eye. People spend their time in various activities such as eating, resting, etc. But when they look up, they see the boundless sky. During the day the sun shines gloriously; at night, there is darkness. Wherever they turn, there are mountains, rivers, trees, houses and mansions. All these beautiful things are visible to the eye.

Human Evolvemement

In the story of mankind, the first activity which developed was agriculture. Every living thing feels hunger and searches for food. The first cry of a child is for milk, and the moment it gets food, it goes to sleep. Food is, therefore, the first essential item for every living thing. Food comes primarily from the land. This is the reason why, from the earliest times, the people of *Bharath* (India) worshiped the earth as the giver of food. It is by cultivating the land that mankind has been sustained all these centuries.

Along with agriculture, other activities developed. As the population grew,

villages grew into towns. With the growth of civilized communities, arguments arose among people as to the causes of their happiness and sorrow. In these inquiries, some enlightened persons, examining their own experiences, discovered essential truths. Others, who were wiser, realized that there were things beyond the material world that were not known to mankind.

The questions that were most frequently asked were: "What is it that we should really learn?" "What are the things beyond our powers?" It is clear that we cannot create the earth. We cannot create water. We cannot survive for even ten minutes if we do not have air to breathe. Nor is that all. In earthly life, we find that we are unable to understand the secret of birth and death. Many have tried to discover the nature of death, to find out what happens after death and the mystery behind it. But they could find no answers. Hence, those who were endowed with deep inquiring minds came to the conclusion that there is a power which underlies all living things, and that power is derived from the Divine. They described that power as God. They concluded that there was a Divine Power which was beyond mankind and pervaded the universe.

What is the form of this power? How are we to recognize a thing which is not visible to the eye? Are we to believe in it? Some scientists consider that it is impos-

sible to know these things. But our ancients regarded the sun as demonstrable evidence of the existence of Divinity. They felt that, without the sun, the world would cease to exist. Nothing can grow without the sun; no human activity would be possible. Mankind cannot survive in endless darkness. Hence, they felt that this great source of light and energy was proof of the existence of a divine, Spiritual Power.

Later, a controversy arose as to whether this Divine Principle is one or has many forms. They came to the conclusion that God is only One. The *Vedas* declare, "The One became the many." Thereby, they proclaimed the unity of the Divine. Although the Divine is only One, it appears as many to some people.

Inquiry

It is in this spirit of profound inquiry that the sages and seers performed *tapas* (spiritual austerities). By their penance and austerities, they discovered that the *Pranava* (the sacred sound of *Om*) is the origin of all knowledge. If the *Pranava* did not exist, there would be no sound and no speech. Similarly, the numeral "one" is the basis for all numbers. All numbers are obtained by continuing to add more ones to the primary number, one. Thus, it was realized that "Oneness" is the essential quality of the Divine, and the diversity that is seen in the world is only a manifestation of that Oneness. The Divine was regarded as the primary seed of the diversified universe. The seed requires a husk for it to grow. The husk is the cover and inside is the seed. Similarly, for the seed which is God, the husk is the universe. Without the seed, the husk cannot exist.

It is in recognition of this fact that the *Maharishis* (sages of the highest caliber) declared: "This entire universe is permeated by the Divine." Can this vast universe, which is sustained by Divinity, be regarded as different from the Divine? Whatever is associated with the Divine, is a reflection of the Divine. When the *Purusha Sooktha* (part of the *Vedas*) describes the Divine as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet, it is proclaiming the Divinity that pervades the universe in numerous forms. This also means that every object is a part of the Divine, and the cosmos composed of these myriad forms was described as the *Vishva Virat Swarupa* or the "Cosmic Being." The *Vishva Virat Swarupa* is not a figure drawn by a painter or something that can be described by a poet. It is the form of the cosmic, Divine Being. We must look upon this multifaceted universe, with its myriad beings, as the cosmic expression of the one Divine Entity. The Divine Principle is immanent in the smallest cell and in all creation. "As in the small egg, so in the Cosmic Egg." The *Andaanda* represents the individual, and the *Brahmaanda* represents the whole cosmos. If we are able to understand the truth of the individual, we shall know Universal Truth.

What is the evidence for determining the divine nature of the cosmos? Students of today, puffed up by a little knowledge, ask how anyone can believe in the divine nature of the universe when it is not demonstrable. Such people are forgetting their own inherent, divine nature. Do these misguided persons base all their knowledge on objective, physical proofs? For instance, someone says that they have

"no peace of mind." What is the physical form of the mind? If it has no physical shape, how does one see the mind? One says, "I am happy." What is the physical form of happiness? To seek direct physical evidence for everything is a sign of ignorance. Only *jnanis* (those who have true wisdom), who have realized the Divine, can demonstrate the nature of infinite Divinity. Let me give a small example: One individual asks another, "Who is your father?" The latter replies, "Such and such a person is my father." The first person asks, "How do you know that he is your father? You had no eyes to see your father at the time of your birth. Nor did you have the intelligence to find out who your father was." The second person replies, "The direct proof for my statement is derived from my mother who told me who my father is." This shows that concerning a matter as vital as who one's father is, one accepts the statement of the mother and believes it throughout a lifetime. In the same manner, you must accept the authority of the *Vedas* regarding the nature of your Divine Father.

The Divine Incarnates

Sometime or other, at some place or other, in some world or other, the inscrutable Divine incarnates for the purpose of upholding righteousness (*dharma*). It takes a recognizable form which is related to the occasion, the time, the place and other circumstances determining the Divine Advent.

Do the idle gossip mongers who go on indulging in atheistic propaganda make any earnest and sincere effort to find out the nature of the Divine? Without such

effort, how can the sacred character of the Divine be discovered? Special efforts are necessary even for discovering the fire that is in a piece of wood, the butter that is in milk, the oil that is hidden in the seed, and the sugar that is in the sugarcane. If one sets out with zealous seriousness and devotion to discover God, they will certainly find Him.

The whole universe, in fact, is sustained by the Divine. It is not a human creation. Every person must cultivate belief in God and develop devotion. God exists in every person, permeating every cell of the body. But if you cut a person to pieces, you cannot find God in the different parts; you only find flesh, bones, blood and other things. Proper methods must be adopted for people to discover the Divinity within themselves. It is because people do not make proper efforts that they often experience confusion, chaos and discontent.

The Organization

Today, it is the duty of all those who are connected with the Sathya Sai Organization to promote spiritual discipline, to dedicate themselves to social service and to lead a purposeful life. To promote the awareness of Divinity in human beings, thereby building a genuine sense of brotherhood among all people, should be our primary aim.

Embodiments of the Divine Spirit, realize that you are not this body, this mind, this intellect or this intelligence. You are embodiments of the Divine. Concentrate on your efforts to realize the Divine. There is nothing that cannot be achieved by sincere learning and continu-

ous practice. Our ancient philosophy, *Sanathana Dharma* (Eternal Wisdom), has indicated many sacred paths through which the Divine can be realized. This Eternal Wisdom is for everyone. Spiritual practice is essential for the realization of the Divine. Whatever books you may read, you will not realize the Divine merely by intellectual effort. One must put into practice what one has learned from books and other sources. Without spiritual practice and discipline, it is futile to read endless numbers of books, listen to numerous discourses or meet saintly persons, however great they may be.

Why The Rules?

Some changes have been made in the rules of the Sathya Sai Organization. You may ask, "What is the need for rules and regulations for those engaged in a spiritual quest?" The reason will be clear from a simple example. When you plant a sapling, you protect it in the early stages of its growth. You erect a fence around it so animals cannot touch it. After the plant has grown into a sturdy tree, there is no need for the fence. Similarly, even on the spiritual path, one has to observe some restrictions and restraints so that one's spiritual growth will not be affected by what is happening in the outside world.

In the Sathya Sai Organization, we call our members brothers and sisters. Whether members are from America, Japan, Germany or Russia--wherever they may come from--they are called that. If all members are brothers and sisters, how can we have different rules for America, Japan or Germany? Some members from Western countries do not seem to favor the rule of the

Sathya Sai Organization, which says that during *bhajans* and other meetings, men and women devotees should sit apart. The rule should be applicable to all members, whether they are Indians or non-Indians, whether they are in India or elsewhere. It is a part of the spiritual discipline that is necessary for devotees. Even a great warrior like Arjuna confessed to Lord Krishna (in the *Bhagavad Gita*) saying, "The mind is fickle and is very difficult to control." If even Arjuna found it difficult to control his senses, how much more necessary and important is it for you to have some regulations to control your own senses and to control your mind?

Some members demand that different wings of the Sathya Sai Organization should be allowed to function independently. This is not a proper approach. All these different wings should function in friendly cooperation with each other. Here are the five fingers of my hand [Baba held up His hand to demonstrate]: the *Seva Samithi* (coordinating committee) is one finger; the *Mahila Vibhag* (women's unit, not necessarily applicable in the USA) is another; the *Seva Dal* (service wing) is the third; the *Bal Vikas* (children's education) is the fourth; the *Bhajan Mandali* (devotional wing) is the fifth. If you separate one finger from the other, what is it that will remain? Conversely, with all five functioning together, what is it that cannot be achieved when they all work as one? All our Sathya Sai units should learn to function in coordination and cooperation with each other. Like the rivers which join the ocean, they have become one under the banner of the International Sai Movement.

Continued on page 32

LIVING SAI'S TEACHINGS IN OUR DAILY LIVES

What is the purpose of being a member of a Sai Center? It means that you have accepted the disciplines given by Sri Sathya Sai Baba and will live His teachings in your daily life. You will become the embodiment of these teachings. You, as a follower of Sathya Sai Baba, are fortunate because you know the Avatar in this lifetime. You have earned this special grace through many lifetimes of struggle. Don't waste this precious opportunity.

We, as Center members, take visible forms as embodiments of Sathya Sai's teachings. The teachings you choose to embody are up to you. Start with one, and gradually others will become a part of your life. The two I have selected to discuss are:

- * Love the Lord with all your heart.
- * Call upon His name and trust Him.

Let your love for God develop into a real and true love. Once you feel the depth of this love you will accept nothing less. How do you live the teaching of "love the Lord with all your heart," in your daily life? When you love someone with all your heart, their name is ever on your lips, their form is ever in your mind. It delights and tantalizes you. All of you remember teenage crushes. How you watched and waited for a glimpse of the loved one. How you filled your daydreams with this loved one. Now give your total attention to this love, and direct it to your favorite form of [or formless] God. He will love you back.

How else can you live this teaching? You find that you do not turn away from the unfortunate or distressed, but you bless them and participate in some service to help them. Most of us in the New York City area, until recently, have avoided the Bowery. Now we are there, performing *seva* (service). We prepare food and serve meals to the people there. We collect and distribute clothing to them. These same people, whom we once tried to avoid, we are now trying to help.

Swami once told us that we cannot change the world; He is responsible for that. But we can change ourselves. When we do change ourselves, then there is one less person who will try to cheat or take advantage of another. There is one more person to smile and make others smile; one more person to help when help is needed.

How else can you live this teaching? You find you are more patient, more tolerant. If someone tries to put you down, you laugh with them. You lighten stressful situations. Once when our office reception area was crowded and the people were annoyed at having to wait so long, a lady who always caused a commotion called out to me, "Honey, you look like you've been eating a lot of chocolate pies." "Yes," I said, "and when I turn around, you'll see where the brownies went." This changed the whole mood of the situation. Laugh, be joyous. Love is joy. Swami laughs with us and sometimes even at us.

You become content when you love God with all your heart; it does not matter who or where you are. Swami says, *"Learn to be comfortable in any place. Live in joy wherever you are. Revel in the realm of your mind, worship there the Lord you have chosen as your goal. Be free from all the effects of the natural or human environment."*

Call upon His name and trust Him. To say the Lord's name was one of Baba's first instructions to us when He advocated the singing of *bhajans*. How do you practice this in your daily life? Say His name over and over as you ride to work, as you walk, as you have time between thoughts. The Lord's name is powerful. Sita repeated Rama's name for a year while she was in captivity. Draupadi called Krishna's name when she was in distress. The Christian martyrs called the name of Jesus as they suffered in the arena. Each religion has examples of the faithful who repeated the Lord's name even at the time of death.

One member of the Brooklyn Center was on a subway platform by herself late one night. Across the tracks was a man pacing up and down and talking to himself. The man looked up and saw her. He then climbed down onto the tracks and began walking across to her platform. "Swami," she said, "do You see what that man is doing?" The man climbed up on the platform near her and came over. After looking at her for a few moments, he said, "You look like someone who helps people. Are you?" "Yes," she said, for she was a counselor. "I thought so," he said, then turned and walked away.



Sathya Sai Baba in Kodaikanal, spring 1988

The twenty-third psalm states ". . .yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. . . ." Keep the Lord's name with you. There is no spirit, no spell, nothing more powerful than the name of the Lord, said from the heart.

--Anne Sohani
Clifton, New Jersey



WHY THE SAI ORGANIZATION IS NOT A CULT

We Sai devotees are sometimes confronted by well-meaning relatives and friends who are concerned that we might be involved in a negative and destructive cult. We can relieve their anxiety by explaining the differences between a cult and the Sai Organization. This article provides information that will help you do this. Our information is drawn from two books on cults: *Mindbending: Brainwashing, Cults, and Deprogramming in the 80's* by Lowell Streiker, Doubleday, New York, 1984 and *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* by J. Melton, Garland Publishing, New York, 1986.

Streiker indicates that a real cult will lack the following characteristics:

- * Genuine concern for member's welfare,
- * Appreciation of constructive criticism from nonbelievers,
- * Active encouragement of dialogue between members and the outside world.

Beyond that, there are nine major characteristics of cults, as listed below. With each characteristic, we show through direct quotes from Sathya Sai Baba that the Sai Organization does not have these characteristics. In the references for quotes from Baba, SSS stands for *Sathya Sai Speaks*.

1. Primary cult activities are fund raising and recruiting new members.

"I do not like your going about collecting funds or raising donations." (SSS VI, 67, p 325). **

"Fund collection is as much opposed to this movement as fire is to water." (SSS VI, 5, p 34).

"Enough for us if there remain one or two members where practice and preaching are correct and sincere. Quality is accepted; quantity is of no consequence." (SSS VII, 13, p 81).

"I do not need any publicity." (SSS IV, 23, p.140).

"Do not imagine that your task is to propagate Baba and speak of Baba and His message." (SSS IX, 35, p 191).

2. Cult members are encouraged to cut off communication with family and friends. They are isolated from the outside world and any reality testing it could provide.

"Your primary task is to discharge your duty. This does not mean renouncing worldly life or your obligations to your family." (Sanathana Sarathi, February, 1992, p 37).

"Use the opportunities confronting you as a householder to develop detachment and self-sacrifice." (SSS IV, 33, p 191).

"Don't keep yourself separate by working on your own salvation through meditation; move among your sisters [and brothers] looking for opportunities to help. . . ." (SSS VII, 39, p 194).

3. Cult members hand over possessions and earnings and become totally dependent on the group.

"Whoever may ask, even if they say that I have authorized them, do not give them a penny." (SSS VII, 57, p 307).

"Do not lean on others; live on your own earnings, your own resources." (SSS VIII, 44, p 231).

"Where money is asked and offered, I have no place." (SSS IV, 69, p 392).

4. The cult enforces demands by peer pressure, embarrassment, and [sometimes] even violence.

"Humility and tolerance must characterize the behavior of Sai devotees." (SSS X, 10, p 44).

"Start the day with love; spend the day with love; end the day with love; that is the way to God." (SSS VIII, 14, p 88).

"Non-violence includes not causing hurt even by a word, look or gesture." (SSS X, 59, p 307).

5. The cult is the only possessor of truth--others are unsaved and hostile to truth.

"Do not develop fanaticism or sectarianism." (SSS VI, 7, p 37).

"All religions call upon the one, omnipresent God." (SSS X, 44, p 230).

"Diversity of religion and faith is conducive to the welfare of mankind." (SSS VIII, 25, p 149).

"Finding fault with another's faith casts a slur on yours." (SSS V, 67, p.333).

"You have to teach the equal validity of all faiths." (SSS X, 5, p 283).

6. The cult feels above the law; the ends justify the means of lying, stealing, defrauding.

"Dharma (right action) is essentially social morality." (SSS IX, 2, p 13).

"Dharma includes morality, truth, virtue, love, and a host of other qualities that

uphold communities of man and the individual." (SSS VI, 38, p 167).

"Care of the country is as important as care of the body." (SSS VII, 20, p 98)

7. The cult may be apocalyptic; members will be the only survivors of a world catastrophe.

"Do not be upset at calamities; take them as acts of grace." (SSS V, 32, p 165).

"No disaster is imminent for the world. Over the vast globe, there may be some mishaps here and there, from time to time." (Sanathana Sarathi, March 1991).

8. The cult is based on the teachings of an authoritarian, corrupt leader who is the sole source of what the group believes and of rules for daily behavior.

"The scriptures lay down the lines along which man has to direct his thoughts and activities. Sincere adherence to those laws and limitations alone can guarantee wisdom." (SSS IX, p 151).

"I have not come to set afoot a new cult." (SSS VI, 46, p 235).

"Seek out chances to study and substantiate the basic similarities in all religions." (SSS VIII, 14, p 9).

"The Vedas are the foundation of Indian culture." (Sanathana Sarathi, Dec. 1982, p 260).

"Truth, right action, peace and love are the four pillars of eternal wisdom." (SSS III, 25, p 122).

9. The cult exists for its own material survival and makes false promises to help society.

"The Sai Organization is exclusively for spiritual development." (SSS VII, 34, p 164).

"Service to man is the best form of wor-

shio." (SSS IX, 46, p 235).
"Organizations, bearing my name must
render service to the helpless, sick, dis-

tressed, illiterate and needy." (SSS VI, 36,
p 158).

--Elaine & David Gries
Ithaca, New York

**Page numbers vary with different editions of the Sai literature. So we suggest that
when looking up these quotations, the reader refer to the chapter name or number.

THE MIDDLE PATH

What do you do when you're on a road
traveling, you know not where?
Do you charge ahead, or just lay back
and pretend not to care?

Can one be good and one be bad?
Is there an "up" without a "down"?
I believe you'll find the answer's
between a smile and a frown.

It's opposing pairs that shape the world
causing the ebb and flow.
It's on the wings of circumstance
that we ride the winds that blow.

At times we may be brilliant,
at times we play the fool.
But I think we walk the middle path
when we live by the golden rule.

Do you think that Allah can be praised
and the living Christ denied?
Fire won't burn your sins away
if to the wheel you're tied.

All is one,
and one is all there needs to be.
Just ask your favorite form of God,
and He will help you see.



--Jon Bruns
Kalispell, Montana

DEVELOP THE ORGANIZATION

Sri Sathya Sai Baba announced the following at the Fifth World Conference which took place in November 1991:

"Embodiments of the Divine Atma, take a vow to develop the Sai Organization day by day. Take all people within the fold. People who have gone away from the Organization are the unfortunate ones; you should not become unfortunate. Come what may, do not give up this Organization. Consider this Organization as your life's breath. This is real service. This is real penance. Take a vow on these lines to become experts. This is what I desire. Swami will be with you in whatever you are doing."

The role of the Sathya Sai Baba Center is central to our personal spiritual effort as well as to our common goals. Sometimes it is difficult to work within the confines of a Center Organization. Conflicts of personalities are not uncommon. Many duties must be performed to carry out the programs. Members are not always recognized for their contributions and are sometimes even chastised for their sincere efforts. But who can renounce the great good, the message of joy that these groups announce?

Each of us who become adherents to the Sai message of love and brotherhood have benefited from the Organization. The *ashram* at Prasanthi Nilayam, the Book Center, the publications and the individual Centers--all have played a part in our uplift. Having received the benefit of these institutions, can we fail to support

them for others who follow? Is it possible for us to take Sai's message of love and service to heart and not remain within the Center to lend a hand to those who are yet to come? If we attend a Center, and after having received our fill, decide to leave, can we be said to truly understand the message of Sai? Have we become unwilling or uncaring about sharing our experiences with others? Wouldn't Swami want us to learn to participate, not for the benefits that we receive, but for the contributions we can give to our fellow travelers on the path? Getting is a hollow experience compared to giving. In giving, we glorify and affirm the message of Sai. In giving, we affirm that we have understood what we have learned from His teachings.

Baba asks us to become experts. Expertise is not gained in a day, a week or a year. It is gained only by difficult experience, by making countless mistakes in our efforts and by traveling incorrect roads. Expertise is gained by sustaining pain and criticism and persevering in our efforts. If we understand the teachings of Sathya Sai, we will know that we are one with each other. Is it possible to pursue individual spiritual effort, which has no concern for others? No, it is not.

Our inner growth lies in our identity with others and with all things. Baba has asked us to take all people within our fold. He has addressed us as, *"Embodiments of the Divine Atma."* Who will resign themselves to a lesser destiny; who will strive for a less lofty goal?

Swami tells us, "You should not become unfortunate." We live now in the most glorious of all times. Great joy awaits those who seize the opportunity to benefit from the Avatar. This is the time for us to make a mark upon history, to lift mankind on the rising tide of Sai's grace. We cannot leave the Center where we have learned to reduce our egos and desires. If some among us have left, then we must

return and work through whatever difficulties we encounter. The Center needs the contributions of all. Each individual has an irreplaceable role to play. Only together can we achieve the great task which faces us. Come, contribute to the advent of the golden age. Receive the love and grace of Sai in full measure.

--Jonathan L. Roof
Tucson, Arizona



"... members and officers must take an oath from the very depth of their hearts before engaging in the [Sai Organization] activities. 'Swami, save me from any acts of commission or omission which will adversely affect the qualifications You have laid down. Bless me with the skill, intelligence and enthusiasm necessary for the task I am dedicating myself to carry out for my own uplift. Guide me along the right path; shower Your grace on me so that I may earn a fair name in this attempt; guard me from temptation and wrong steps.'"

--Sathya Sai Baba
Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. VI, chapter 7

"Choose men and women who have unshakable faith in this present Avatar, with this name and form... The leaders of these units lead because they have the vision and the yearning, not because they have the votes or the purse... Detachment, simple living, steady sadhana (spiritual discipline)--these are the qualities that entitle a person to membership in these units."

--Sathya Sai Baba
Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. VII, chapter 38

"Officers in this Organization are leaders who bear the brunt themselves, guides who walk along the path they wish others to take. They shall not command or punish; they can only persuade and advise. It is Sathya Sai who inspires each activity of each wing [of the Organization]. This fact has not been taken to heart by many of you. Sai is the inner inspiration and light for each worker."

--Sathya Sai Baba
Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. X, chapter "He, Too, Is He"

"YES, DO... IT IS GOOD"



Some Sai Center members who participate in *Gayatri Japa*.

Early in 1991, some members of the Sathya Sai Baba Center of Tustin began a Friday evening *Gayatri Japa* (repetition of an ancient, spiritually-charged chant). The purpose of the meeting is to provide a group prayer as an offering to the Divine.

After several months some questions arose by those who did not participate as to whether Baba would approve of Westerners repeating the *Gayatri* 108 times. So, on September 3, 1991, the Center's Devotion Coordinator presented Baba with this picture (above) and asked, "Baba, may we have your permission to recite the *Gayatri Mantra* 108 times as a group? And if so, what should we do to improve the way we recite it?" Baba took the picture, held it, looked at it for a long time saying, "Yes, do. Don't change; it is good."

The program we use includes the following format: Meet each Friday evening

at 7:30 to 9:00, Quiet time 7:30 to 7:45, Chant *Gayatri* 108 times 7:45 to 8:15, Quiet time 8:15 to 8:30, Conclusion, *Asa-toma* (prayer for enlightenment), and *Loka Samastaah* (prayer for world peace), Additional quiet time until 9:00 for those who wish to stay.

We serve no refreshments and there is no discussion. Members enter and leave quietly. For Centers who may want to start a similar program, we learned that a more devotional feeling was experienced when a "group voice" was developed. No individual voice stands out in the group. We also found that the blended voices have a quality that everyone finds inspiring. Our Friday evening ritual has brought us peace and equanimity in this sometimes frantic world. *Sai Ram* (God Bless).

--Devotion Coordinator
Tustin, California

"SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. . ."

It is 3:00 PM on a Sunday afternoon. In another hour, the Sai Center meeting will begin at the church. Don is about to leave for the Center with his six-year-old son, Jason, when the phone rings. Steve, the *Bal Vikas* teacher for Group I, is on the line saying he cannot make it to the Center today and would Don please inform Dorothy, the Education Coordinator, that he won't be teaching his class.

Penny signed up to bring cheese for the Wednesday food service project for the local soup kitchen. On the day of the project, she called Roger, another member of the Center, at 5:00 PM and asked if he could pick up the cheese because she had decided not to go to the service project. Her reason? She was tired and it was raining. Roger agreed to do it. He got off work at 6:00 PM and had to make a long detour to pick up the cheese, then fight the evening traffic to get to the home of David, where others were waiting. He had no time to eat dinner before the service project began.

Elizabeth volunteered to be the study circle leader because she did not like the way the previous leader was conducting the discussion. Then she missed two meetings. When she finally came, she said she did not have time to read the material and had, in fact, forgotten the book at home. So she tried to wing it. The result was that there was no consistency or quality in the discussion.

Marissa had her hands full with Kathy in her *Bal Vikas*, Group II class. Kathy was late for the class three weeks in a row. Today, she forgot to bring her folder and had not completed her assignment either. Then, during the discussion in the class, she continued to talk to her friend Linda, interrupting Marissa. When Marissa asked her to recite the story they had just read, Kathy shrugged her shoulders and giggled. When asked to pay attention, she burst out at the teacher saying that she did not like the stupid class and that the story was boring. After the class, Marissa went up to Kathy's mother and told her about Kathy's behavior, explaining that Kathy was being constantly disruptive and rude in the class. Kathy's mother lashed out at Marissa, criticizing her for being too strict and unreasonably demanding.

Gary was asked to organize a packet of information for the Sai devotees attending the midsummer retreat in his region. He spent many days and nights collecting articles and other information from Sai magazines, books and Baba's discourses. Through his noble efforts, Gary came up with a well-designed folder for the retreat. He then pitched in to help others make road signs, to clean and check all cabins, and made himself available for any last minute duties at the camp. At the end of the Conference he was criticized by some members of his Center because he was not around when some of the out of town participants, who came late in the

night, needed help to find their cabins. Gary felt deeply hurt by the criticism.

Bob came to the Center once in awhile and usually found something that annoyed him about the program. He complained loudly and stridently every time he was present. The officers of the Center sought him out, asking for his suggestions and input on improving those aspects which he found less than satisfactory. He wanted a lot of things changed. One of the officers asked Bob to organize and lead a new program so that he could implement his new ideas and make the program more interesting. Bob refused! He said that he found the meeting time and the day very inconvenient.

Sonia loved to sing *bhajans*. Most of the time she would just open the book and pick any song that caught her eye. She had difficulty keeping the tune and rhythm. When the devotion coordinator tried to suggest that she should practice at home beforehand, she scoffed at the suggestion. She insisted that there was no need to practice because Baba didn't care about musical prowess but only looked at one's devotion.

And the stories go on. . . . These are not just some stories with fictitious names [to protect the guilty], but actual events that we all have experienced or heard from others. These instances happen in many Sathya Sai Baba Centers. I am quite sure there are other, similar stories from around the country of the problems and difficulties experienced by Sai devotees as they find their way through the spiritual path they have chosen.

It is a difficult situation. It is also a *leela* (divine play) of Sai Baba in which He puts all of us in a place where we have to find spiritual, compassionate ways to deal with these incidents. Everything we have read from His discourses, heard from various speakers and intuitively understood by our own work and effort, must come into play if we want to find happy solutions to such problems.

When all these situations are digested to extract the underlying, fundamental issue, what we are left with is just one thing: Commitment. It is a question of commitment when Steve fails to warn the education coordinator well ahead of time to find a replacement teacher and instead chooses to call someone else to take his message to the coordinator. It is a lack of commitment when Penny puts Roger at a great inconvenience because she cares for her own comfort and convenience above Roger's convenience, and the need of the hungry people at the soup kitchen. It is a lack of commitment when Elizabeth volunteers to conduct the study circle, and then fails to show up.

When Kathy's mother lashes out at the *Bal Vikas* teacher for mentioning her daughter's misbehavior in the class, she is sending dangerous signals to her child that the *Bal Vikas* program has no value and that rudeness towards elders is acceptable. Bob's method of criticizing without any constructive action to remedy the problem is another example of lack of commitment to the growth of spiritual environment in the Center and a sign that his only concern is for his own likes and dislikes. Sonia's attitude shows a lack of

understanding of the teachings and a lack of commitment to improve her skills. Then we have Gary who tries to do everything well, and tries to help out wherever he can. It is a test of his faith and surrender when he is criticized by others who would not themselves lend a hand. If he feels hurt and angry, he has not given up the fruits of his actions. If he accepts the criticism and continues to do his work with the same dedication, he becomes a good example to others.

So, it boils down to commitment, priority and discrimination. How important is it to be fully dedicated to our own spiritual growth? How clear is our understanding that our spiritual benefit is not the responsibility of someone else? How strong is our conviction that when we choose to lead an activity, or are chosen to do so, we represent Baba to the public, which is comprised of members of the Center, visitors, and even our own family? Where does this task of spiritual renaissance fit in the scheme of things in our life? Why do we feel threatened by "rules and guidelines," by the demand on our time, by the necessity to follow another mortal human being who happens to be a chosen leader for a given activity?

Interestingly, when asked why they come to the Center every Sunday, most people cite one activity or another as the magnet that draws them. For some, it is the *bhajans*, while for others it may be the study circle, service activities or *Bal Vikas*. There are also those who come to the Center "because there is nothing better to do at home." So, we have people of varying tastes, needs and interests who come for spiritual *satsang* (keeping good company).

There is a saying in Sanskrit which says, "Drama is the only art form that appeals to all people of varying tastes." Thus, we see that the drama or play being enacted by the artists on the stage serves the purpose of entertaining a wide variety of people of different dispositions. When everyone does his or her part well, it gives joy and satisfaction to all. When an actor forgets his lines, or if the stage prop or someone's costume comes loose, or if the musician plays out of tune, it spoils the show for everyone.

There is no difference between a drama being enacted on a stage, and the activities we engage in during our lifetime on this planet. This, too, is a drama being enacted by the Lord for His amusement. We, as actors and actresses, have to learn our parts well and render them flawlessly so that everyone can derive *ananda* (bliss). This requires dedication, commitment and a correct choice of priorities in life. It also requires that we take responsibility for our own actions and do them to the best of our abilities and skills. Nowhere is this more important than in our own spiritual life because it is here that our faith in God is tested.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," said Jesus Christ on Mount Sinai two thousand years ago. *"Take one step towards Me, and I shall take ten towards you,"* said Sathya Sai Baba almost a quarter century ago. It is in His name that we meet at the Center every week, and yet we cannot abide by His word, by His guidelines, by His example. Why? Because the conviction that God alone is the doer is not firmly rooted

in our hearts. We sometimes shirk our responsibilities, find fault in others, criticize those who try to do His work and justify our worldly priorities.

The remedy is simple, as Jesus showed by His own life, as St. Francis of Assisi showed by his actions and as Mother Teresa is showing by her own example. If we resolve to put someone else's need ahead of our convenience and comfort, Jesus promised that the Heavenly Father will take care of our needs, too. It is a matter

of priority, not convenience. It is a step taken with courage and not with trepidation. It is a responsibility accepted with faith and not with doubt. As many a saint in all the lands have shown, the Kingdom of Heaven descends into the lives of those who dedicate themselves in this manner. It is all that Swami asks of us in return for His boundless Love, Compassion and Grace. Not even Madison Avenue or Wall Street can match such a bargain!

--Deepak Bhat
Troy, Michigan



"You are trying, through various means, to live the ideals of Sai and to spread the love that Sai evokes in you. How far have these efforts succeeded? How have these ideals helped with your identification of the humanness of mankind? Along with the process of listening to the exposition of the ideals and of the message, they have to be practiced in daily life. Only then can you declare that you have grasped the meaning and purpose of Sai's message."

"Everyone must become the embodiment of love. Love can be expressed only as love, through love. Lovelessness is at the root of the anarchy that stalks the world today. Unchecked self-interest, misdirected activity, wild antics of the ego, pompous living, envy and intolerance have caused a monstrous situation. Realizing this, you have to be vigilant. Do not allow even a trace of ego, pomp or cruelty to pollute your actions. Peace and prosperity can dawn on the world only when you move in society with love that is free from the taint of selfishness."

"The question may be raised whether our Organization is free from this taint, it is not without it, for you are but humans. But you should endeavor ceaselessly to get rid of that taint and its attendant evils. When these bad traits are evident in others, you feel disgusted. . . ."

"The evil traits that have grown through many lives and generations cannot be wiped away in an instant. So, mix in good groups, cultivate good habits, have good attitudes and immerse yourself in good activities."

--Sathya Sai Baba

Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. XI, chapter "Grow in Love"

WHY ORGANIZE?

The task before mankind is to plant the seeds of truth, righteousness, peace and love in hearts made ready for their reception. The task also includes fostering the saplings and watching over them with love and care until they grow into trees which yield a rich harvest of sweet fruits, enabling all to share in that sustaining repast. Sages, who succeeded in this beneficial culture, have laid down the means and methods that mankind has to consider. While engaged in this task, millions have benefited by their counsel. But never before has this become an organized movement in which all humanity is involved. Unless it becomes so, there can be no liberation from fear, anxiety and injustice.

The sages of India knew that mankind was fundamentally Divine; they sought to make people aware of their inner Reality and expand that spark of Divinity into light.

Members of this Sai Organization must be examples of the joy that can be derived from "giving up" rather than "accumulating." The *Upanishads* proclaim that giving up leads to immortality. In spite of this, people seek to "own," as a result, they reek with "dis-ease." They pursue *bhoga* (catering to the senses) and are rewarded with *roga* (illness, grief).

Thyagaraja, the great mystic singer, realized that the presence of the Divine is preferable to any other companion. He knew that the most desirable treasures are truth, righteousness, peace and love.

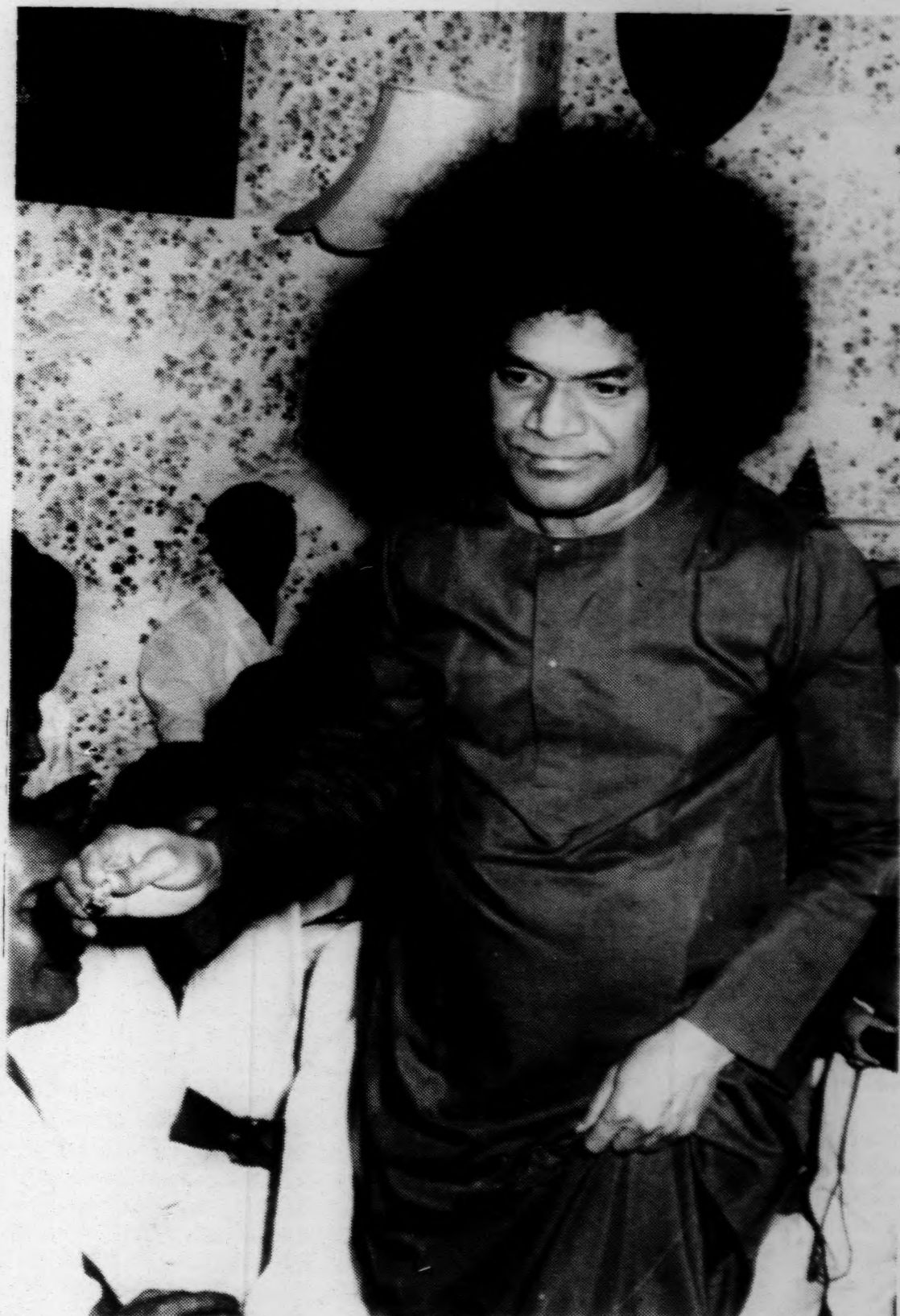
Truth about oneself is to be learned first. When people do not know their own truth, how can they judge others or deal with others? When people know that they are the indestructible, eternal *Atma* (indwelling Divinity), they are free! That can illuminate the individual and society in the splendor of love. As a second step, they advised the discarding of violence, which has egotism and greed as its roots. The *Vedas*, the *Sastras*, the *Puranas*, the scriptures all carry these messages. Mankind is afflicted by misery and is caught in the coils of never-ending desire and all-consuming greed. Casting off these trammels, people have to march on toward the goal of realizing that God is the inmost Truth.

The swimmer has to push the water behind him so that he might proceed forward. So, too, while attempting to march forward, humanity has to push back from evil thoughts, habits, deeds and impulses that crowd in. The Sathya Sai *Seva* Organization has to teach this lesson, not by precepts elaborately described in elegant language, but by examples that spread conviction, instill faith and assure success from fear. Truth can shine forth only from a purified mind and a clarified intellect.

The units of the Sathya Sai *Seva* Organization must be ever active in following and observing the disciplines laid down for these two processes: Mankind has to overcome animal instincts. The *pasu* (beast) has to be laid low, and the *pasupati* (the Master of living beings) must be installed in the heart. This aim has to be constantly

kept in mind by the members of the Organization; the journey toward this has to be steady and fervent. Patience, tolerance, fortitude, equanimity, fraternity--these will prove to be valuable equipment for the pilgrim. Do not distinguish between one fellow pilgrim and another on the basis of caste, creed or color; do not divide them into friends or foes. Recognize only the common traits, the uniting efforts, and the basic Divinity in everyone. Rich and poor, scholarly and illiterate, these are distinctions that do not hold good for long; they are but outer frills. A flower radiates fragrance and charm, whether held in the right hand or the left. It does not limit that gift to some and deny it to others. Everyone who comes near the flower is blessed.

The members of the units of this Organization must be ever engaged in the twin processes of purifying the mind and clarifying the intel-



Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, circa 1988

lect. They have to free themselves from all prejudices and misunderstandings. They

have to speak softly and sweetly, and give everyone the respect and attention due them with sincerity. Humility and tolerance must characterize the behavior of a Sai devotee. When the wind agitates the serene waters of a lake, wavelets dance all over its face, and a thousand suns sparkle. When one fixes attention on the sun, apart from the image and the water that caused it, there is only the one sun that is real. The sparkling little images on the agitated lake are the symbol of *Dwaita*. The complete image in the depths of the serene lake is the symbol of *Visishtadwaita*. The one sun which is reflected as one or many is the *Adwaitic* truth. This fact is clearly revealed in the three statements made by Jesus: "*I am the Messenger of God*," "*I am the Son of God*," and "*I and my Father are One*." The three statements are revelations of the *Dwaitic*, *Visishtadwaitic* and *Adwaitic* points of view.

The Organization must help people to realize the unity behind all this apparent multiplicity, which is only superimposed by the human mind on the One that is all This. The *Vedas* proclaim that God is One, that the goal is the same, and that truth stands self-revealed when the veil of the world is cast away.

One simple way to realize the unity is *seva* or service. Service should not be tarnished by a superiority complex, by pride or even by a sense of duty toward the Organization with which you are bound. Revere the Dweller within, not the house where It resides. The Dweller is the same in every house, whether it is a palace or a hovel, a flat or a cave. Devotion to the Dweller must persuade you to worship the individual in whom the Divine dwells

through acts of service intelligently executed with sincere enthusiasm. If you were to donate blood, the gift might save lives and restore health. Of course, it is a laudable act of service. Remember that there is something even more laudable, to charge every cell of the blood circulating in you with love and the spirit of dedication to God.

Do not fret against the rules and regulations which the Organization imposes on you; they are laid down for your own good. Regulation is the very essence of creation. The oceans observe their limits and bounds. The human body has to maintain warmth up to 98.6 degrees in order to be free from fever. The heart has to beat a definite number of times a minute; breathing has to be done 21,600 times a day. How then can the Organization escape the prescription of certain rules and regulations?

Devotion has to be guided and controlled by discipline and duty. What exactly is duty in this context? By duty, I do not mean the items of work entrusted to you by your superiors or society. Duty means the responsibility you have to not hinder or harm anyone by your movements, speech, behavior or activities. When you walk on the streets waving a stick, you have to be conscious of the people coming from behind. If you have the freedom to wave, they, too, have the same freedom and all should behave as if they have a duty to others. Also, the units of this Organization have to respect other units and help them in doing their duty. Rules are called for until the members realize the spiritual unity of all. Then they become incapable of inflicting harm

or transgressing the moral code; so rules become superfluous. Protect the plant from goats for a few years. Then, when the tree spreads its branches far and wide, thick and green, these very goats can lie down in its shade.

We have five principal units in the Organization. In every village or town where we have these, there should be exemplary unison and cooperation among the five. They are like the five fingers of one hand. The little finger is the *Bhajan Mandali*, the group devoted to singing the glory of God. But they should not be proud that they are the pioneers and primary workers. The ring finger is the *Bal Vikas*. On the precious gold plate of juvenile hearts, the guru affixes the gems of goodness and godliness. That is what the ring finger wears. But that should not make the *Bal Vikas* proud. The gurus should not feel that the work done by them is the most important and so they have to be honored most. A sense of mutuality and cooperation must prevail. The middle finger is the *Seva Dal*, service wing, helping the two units on one side and the two on the other. But they should not hold their heads high and claim to be superior to all the rest. The index finger is the *Mahila Vibhag*, the unit which is composed of women who point to the good, the great, the useful, the right. They, too, should not be filled with conceit. The thumb, naturally, is the *Seva Samiti*, the overall executive committee, the guide and the guardian, the promoter and provider. The thumb has to join the other four fingers so that

they may hold, grasp or manage anything. Without the thumb, the other fingers are helpless. So, each finger must feel that strength lies in working with the rest and that all are but parts of the one, which cannot be ignored.

In a world torn by factions based on the flimsy grounds of caste, creed and color, you must prove that it is possible to have inspiration for genuine service through faith. Service to God in other people must be your daily act of worship. Of all *sadhanas* (spiritual disciplines), this is the most effective. Seek slum dwellers, the poor and neglected in hamlets and take love and light in plenty to them. "God is the refuge of those who have no place to rest," says the proverb. Go to places where you can find such and carry the message of hope and strength to their hearts. Be grateful to them when they welcome you, and provide you with chances to serve them. Your happiness depends on their happiness; your health depends on their health. You keep your houses clean; their houses, too, are yours. For the same Sai that resides in you resides in them. Until their houses and their surroundings are bright and clean, how can you feel bright and clean?

The Organization must promote this high sense of unity and responsibility. It must constantly inspire and educate members to engage themselves in the *sadhana* of service.

--Sathya Sai Baba

Hyderabad, India, March 29, 1976



At Prasanthi Nilayam, a few days after His birthday in November 1991, Sathya Sai Baba said to a group of gentlemen who were about to begin an organizational meeting, "*First Cooperation, then Organization.*"

--Editor

ANOTHER APPROACH

The following excerpts are from a letter written by a devotee to a concerned person who had been raised in a different religious orientation. Like so many Westerners, that person is struggling to justify the differences he or she perceives between Christianity and Eastern Philosophy.

Having been raised in a Christian home, I can identify with much of what you have said. I, too, struggle with the same concerns and difficulties that you do. I am, also, looking for solutions and would like to share with you some of my experiences and thoughts up to this point. Perhaps, together, we will make more spiritual progress than either of us could alone.

When I first came to Baba, it was the Indian-Americans who reached out to me and treated me as God. They taught me about their spiritual culture and wisdom, things like reverence, discipline, respect and that God is the center of all life.

Like you, I have learned the foreign words, practiced the rituals, love and adore Swami. And yet, I have not been able to fully integrate what I have learned into my spiritual upbringing and culture. I would like to!

However, it does not seem right to me to require that those of different spiritual backgrounds or cultures adapt to my ways. That would be the same thing that you and I are objecting to. The only solution that I can find, so far, is to support every aspect of the Sai Organization, learn from it, and expand it to support spiritual growth. All the precepts are great, but let's get practical. What to do?

There is a small weekly meeting at our house, designed for the spiritual growth of those who attend. Our meetings feel comfortable and are not in conflict with the Sathya Sai Baba Center Guidelines.

People assemble to a recording of the "108 Names of God," designed to put us in a spiritual frame of mind. (That's what was done at the first Sai meeting I ever attended).

We then sing four English devotional songs in unison with a cassette tape. Therefore, we have no song leader, ego problems. We have no *Ganesha bhajan*. We chant the prayer for liberation (*Gayatri Mantra*) following Baba's voice on tape. While chanting the Indian words, we have an English translation in hand.

There is a 40-minute study circle based on one of Baba's discourses from the *American Sathya Sai Newsletter*. Everyone's related experiences are elicited, and the group often shares some practical applications of the teachings. It is requested that no one dominate the discussion. Everyone is given a chance to speak, and there are no cross-conversations. The moment someone stumbles into those pitfalls we turn to Baba's teachings by going around the room, one person at a time, until all have spoken, and we have again

learned the value of listening to everyone's ideas.

The "I am God" prayer that Swami has given us is read in unison; then we have a 10-minute meditation or silent sitting. The evening ends with the peace prayer (*Loka Samastaah*) repeated three times. The meaning is read aloud in English. Pleasantries are briefly exchanged and everyone leaves quietly.

When it seems appropriate, my spouse and I spend a few extra minutes with those in need. In addition, we are fortunate to be able to attend two regular Sathya Sai Baba Center meetings a week, thus getting the best of both worlds.

There are several one-day happenings that take place within a two or three-hour drive. We examine them closely. Some are devotional songs only, some have songs and

good fellowship, some have speakers and other programs. We select those activities which time allows.

One-day retreats or conferences are simple to organize. All you need is a home or perhaps even a backyard. There is usually a speaker in the morning, later, an afternoon speaker, and sometimes questions and answers with those same speakers participating. (Be careful that the answers are just a sharing of experiences; the speakers are not meant to impart tual wisdom). Everyone brings their own box lunch. Try it, you'll like it. Include some devotional singing, too, if you wish.

The procedures described here have been fulfilling for us. It is one of the ways we have worked toward finding unity in diversity. May you, also, find that same love and unity.

--Anonymous



"Because of rapid progress made in science and technology, modern man has forgotten his Divinity. Some say that God is dead. If you think this is clever, it is not. Some declare, 'I have no religion.' In the worldly context, they might be thinking of people who are Buddhists, Moslems, Hindus, Christians, etc. But we should not confine our concept of religion to such a narrow outlook. For what is religion? It is love. Love is the religion of Sai, and love is common to all humanity. It is the aim of all religions. If these 'educated' people knew this, they would not say that they don't believe in religion, for that means that they love nothing, that there is no trace of love in them."

--Sathya Sai Baba

from a discourse, December 27, 1983

"After you reach home, you will find that there are Sathya Sai Organizations doing spiritual work. I am hoping that you will join such organizations and recall all that you have learned here and continue to live in this experience."

--Sathya Sai Baba

Summer Showers. . . 1974, last chapter

A LESSON FROM THE OLD COUNTRY

They tell a story, back in the days when carts and horses were used instead of automobiles, about village elders who had decided to organize the working day to suit their desires.

The eldest man told the others that since he'd spent his whole life toiling, he now wished to relax more since it seemed that all was well. The idea of less work was exciting to many. "Oh yes," they agreed, "let's do only the things we choose and forget the rest."

They organized each day of the week to include long rest periods, elaborately prepared meals, and only pleasurable activities. They also had excluded time for prayer. Now those villagers had always had reverence and gratitude for God. They knew that God had always provided for them. But they forgot where all these wonderful gifts they were partaking of, came from.

Within a few weeks, they were becoming ill from all the rich food and lack of exercise. They were running out of supplies because very few people were working. Things were looking bad. It was as though they had all but forgotten how to work and what their lives were like before.

One man and his wife ignored the new ideas. They had kept on working as usual. The others treated them badly in the beginning, but now they were jealous of the robust, cheerful attitude this couple had.

The eldest man, now quite weak, came to the couple, "Oh please," he begged, "Can you help us remember what our lives were like before?" The couple glanced at each other and the wife said, "We take our direction from God. He is in our hearts." The old man implored, "But how do we get Him back with the rest of us?" The woman reminded him that God had not gone away. He had been there all the time.

The husband took the eldest man by the hand and led him back to the center of the village. "Come with me, my elder, and I will remind you of who organized our ways since the beginning. I will show you and the others how to organize again, with God directing us."

They had walked a long way back to the village, and as the younger man spoke, the elder gained strength.

--Joy Frank
Los Angeles, California



"You should consider the Sai Organization as your very own organization. Your personal work is not more important than that of the Sai Organization."

--Sathya Sai Baba
from a discourse, February 15, 1988

PURPOSE OF ORGANIZING

A Center is formed to provide its members with circumstances favorable to the deepening of their understanding of themselves and their lives. The Center makes the company of fellow devotees of God available to its members and thus encourages dedication to a spiritual life. The Sathya Sai Baba Center stands for the message of the divine Avatar, Sathya Sai Baba, which proclaims that only by living in love for God can there be depth, sweetness and peace in one's life. Life is fulfilled through the direct realization that each individual who, at their most subtle core, is Divine and one with God.

"The Centers are not to be used for publicizing my name or creating a new cult around my worship. Center members must try to spread interest in prayer, meditation and other spiritual practices which lead mankind Godward. They must demonstrate the joy derived from singing and remembering the Lord's name and the peace that one can draw from the company of the good. They must render service to the helpless, the sick, the distressed, the illiterate and the needy, with no thought of reward." (Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. VI)

Organization & Devotion

It is sometimes asked why a movement, based on universal love and devotion, needs an Organization in order to flourish. In addition, if such an Organization is needed, why must there be rules, policies, officers, guidelines, etc., all of which can create confusion, division and personality conflicts where once there

was just devotion and love. Baba's teachings answer these questions and perhaps can set the tone for His ideal Organization. According to Sai's teachings, from the utterly pure, perfect and impersonal Divine, humans take form as individual beings in order to enact the drama of life on an illusory world stage. Forgetting our true nature, we struggle to regain our divine stature and fulfill the supreme will by merging in it. As part of our human struggle, all the illusions and delusions of birth and death, necessities of spiritual practice, the joys and sorrows of our personal lives--all these become the means by which we learn to transcend the mean and petty and aspire to the highest consciousness of love. The world serves as each individual's schooling, guiding us toward the higher life to the extent that we allow the Divine Will to manifest in our lives.

When the Divine takes form as a world teacher to extend a helping hand to spiritual aspirants and to reestablish in the world the eternal truth of life, He uses many means to make His message known to mankind. Sathya Sai Baba, discarding publicity, advertisement, missionary activities and other efforts that might associate spirituality with the worldly marketplace, has taken the role of personal teacher and guide to the millions who look to Him as their very own breath and seek to practice, even in the smallest way, His teachings and message.

In order to extend that message and to ensure that it reaches the ears of the

world, untarnished by misinterpretation and undiluted by methods and means that do not meet the Sai standard of high character and purpose, Sathya Sai Baba has founded and blessed this Organization. It is based on His teachings and message, with goals and activities that may inspire individuals throughout the world to strive for perfection, selfless love and

light can shine brightly, the Sai Organization springs directly from Sai, with His guidance and advice. Imperfections in the Organization will come only when individual members bring such faults into it.

Surrounded as we are, by a world full of organizations based on power, money, publicity, politics and other base motives,



Sathya Sai Baba at the time of His 65th birthday

realization in this human birth. In a sense, the Organization itself is like an individual devotee, which, by its *dharmic* and loving service, may be a light unto the world. *Dharma* means practicing what you preach, doing as you say it has to be done, keeping precept and practice in line. Earn virtuously, yearn piously. Live for reaching God. That is *dharma*.

Unlike the human devotee, however, who comes onto the spiritual path with many years of wrong habits and attitudes that must be purified before the inner

the Sai Organization seeks only the transformation of the human into the Divine. This can be done through the vehicle of love, supported by pure character and selfless motives. Each of us, regardless of his or her position, is just another individual struggling on the path of devotion. We try to overcome personal weaknesses with the grace of Sai and the efforts of spiritual practice. It is our hope that in this Organization, its divine birth as an Organization and our human path can merge in service to mankind.

--Richard Bayer

from, *Sathya Sai Newsletter*, circa 1978

A STUDY CIRCLE PLAN

Members of Sai Centers are urged to have regular study circles to promote better understanding of Sai's teachings. This enables participants to appreciate Baba's precepts.

Each study circle has a leader whose function is to facilitate discussion of the passage that has just been read aloud. The leader encourages others to express opinions, thoughts and feelings concerning the passage.

Discussion begins after a phrase, sentence or paragraph has been read which contains sufficient information for analysis. If the passage is too long, there will be too many points to be discussed. That may lead to possible confusion, or to some points remaining unclear. So, keep it short.

The commentary moves around the room in a circular direction as persons are given an opportunity to express themselves. Everyone should speak distinctly and loud enough for all present to hear and understand. The first time around the circle, discussion is confined to the passage just read, and no response is made to the comments of others. Thus, there is no cross-comment among the participants at this point. If a person doesn't wish to make a remark, they may pass; there is no pressure for anyone to speak. When the discussion has passed around the circle and back to the beginning, the facilitator may make comments. After the first time around the circle, anyone, in any order, may make additional comments or responses to any points that were made.

One purpose of the study circle is to encourage individuals to think the teachings through for themselves. Each participant is considered to be of equal expertise on the material being covered, including the study circle leader. No one person is an authority. The discussion of each particular point should lead to clarification of the teaching being discussed.

All comments should be long enough to convey the meaning, but brief enough to remain interesting. No person or persons should dominate the discussion. Personal experiences may be shared if they relate to the subject under discussion.

The study circle is not a reading, nor is its goal to see how many paragraphs or pages can be covered. It is more important to cover one point thoroughly, than many ideas briefly.

The preparation by the study circle leader should involve the selection of the reading material and an understanding of the words used, especially if they are foreign.

If you, as a study circle leader, are uncertain about how to prepare for or conduct the discussion, talk to one of the officers of the Center. Be prepared, but if you should have any difficulty during the course of the study circle, ask for assistance from other Center members. After all, we are brothers and sisters in Sai; we are here to learn and to help one another.

-- Gerald Dominick
Ojai, California

LOVE FOR LUNCH

Recently I began helping my friend, the president of the Sathya Sai Baba Center in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, with our Center's supplement to the national "Meals On Wheels" program. Some time ago, she discovered that Meals on Wheels didn't prepare or deliver meals on Saturdays. It was decided that our Center could fill this need. There are 10 to 12 elderly citizens whom we serve on Saturdays, most are in their eighties and nineties.

Our Center is small. We only have about 10 people, and not everyone seems to be available at the same time. Members who can't help with delivery cook something and drop it by. It always works out that 3 to 4 of us are free to deliver. With Baba's help, we always have beautiful, well-balanced, tasty meals.

Wait a minute. . . . Why don't you join me on the route today? You'll see what it's like.

This Saturday, Betty brings pints of milk, Marion makes cookies, Joyce prepares homemade brownies and a fruit salad, Soma bakes vegetable-stuffed rolls, and I make a green garden salad and whole wheat bran muffins. We dish it up in Soma's kitchen and fill the coolers in our cars.

We split up the route; each of us takes a different section of town. There are only three meals to deliver. This allows time to visit with each person. I want to meet the people behind the faces on my route.

My first stop is George, a ninety-year-old resident of Fort Walton Beach. It's about 10:30 in the morning when I arrive. George isn't hungry, so I leave his lunch on the table as directed and place the milk in his nearly empty refrigerator. Then, I join him outside. We enjoy the fresh spring air. He and I sit in the shade of the eaves on his make-do patio couch, a front seat torn out of an old car which rests on stacks of loose bricks. I can hear his police radio crackling through the open window of the shanty he calls home.

George is pleased to tell me stories about the early days in Fort Walton Beach. He was born in 1902, and he is from one of the earliest families to settle in the area. "What did you do for a living?" I ask. "You name it, I done it. I farmed, logged, laid underground cable, served as Deputy Sheriff, started my own taxi service and even built a couple of houses."

When I ask him how he survived the depression, he says, "I lived better then than I do now. I could go fishing in the Gulf and catch all the fish and oysters I needed to feed my family. Back then, nobody thought anything about it. But you can't do that now."

Nowadays, George's eyesight is nearly gone. It's the only regret I hear him mention. He says he can't see my face. "But I got to stay active," he says. His lawn is kept tidy. He does all the mowing and raking for both his yard and his neighbor, Letha, and keeps up with other tasks.

We say goodbye and I walk next door to deliver a meal to Letha, who lives in another house George built on his property. Letha is about 80, but you can't tell. There's not a white hair on her auburn head. I bring her some bags of fabric, remnants I never got around to sewing. Last week she mentioned she loves quilting and makes beautiful quilts. I ask her to create one for me.

I can see that her health is getting better. It's an amazing thing. Baba seems to be healing some of the people on our route. Letha is the second or third person in the last two weeks who shows remarkable improvement in her health. Hmmm, could it be that the food which is blessed by *bhajans*, and by Baba's love has caused this improvement?

She says, "For the first time in over a year, I'm gonna get out of the house and go shopping." I offer to take her, but she refuses. "I feel good enough to go by myself. I'm feeling so much better I want to drive the car." We visit 10 to 15 minutes and then I leave.

It's 11:30 and time to take lunch to the last lady, Bernice. She usually waits outside to greet us and cries when we leave. Bernice explains that she doesn't do that to the regular Meals on Wheels people during the week. She loves Soma and everyone from the Center and says she prefers our cooking.

We sit in her kitchen, and she asks a lot of questions about the Baba Center and what we believe. Bernice has noticed that we are an international group with members from foreign countries. Because of the vegetarian meals, she wants to know if we are Buddhists or Christians. I explain that we respect all religions, that we come from diverse backgrounds and that we are not a particular religion. "We are all One. Love is our religion."

"I believe that, too. In fact, I contribute to an Indian reservation out West. I've always had a special feeling for the American Indian. I have some Indian blood in my family," Bernice says. "So do I," I say, and share with her my knowledge of some of the Indian prayers for Mother Earth, Nature and all of Creation. It is the same reverence for all life that Baba teaches.

When Bernice and I hug goodbye, on this day there are no tears in her eyes. She seems content with the visit, and I drive home feeling fulfilled.

Today, my service was to meet the people behind the faces on Baba's Meals On Wheels route. But what I encountered was Spirit, what I experienced was Atma. In the process of serving others, I served my Self. Hmmmm, maybe we should change the name from "Meals on Wheels" to "Meals by Atmamobiles," or better still, "Love for Lunch."

--Jorja Kelley
Fort Walton Beach, Florida



"An opportunity to be of some service to mankind comes to you as a gift from God. Serve with a sense of gratitude, for it is God who accepts it from you."

--Sathya Sai Baba
Voice of the Avatar, Part II

CHILDREN'S CORNER

NIGHTINGALES IN GREY

There is a very old story told about a king who wanted to choose a successor to the throne. He wanted to find someone whom he could train to take his place, so he had a very unusual test put to all the princes who came from neighboring kingdoms.

The king had two birds, a brilliantly colored parrot and a nightingale. They were kept in cages that were hung next to the throne room. The nightingale had a voice as clear as a bell and beautiful as a lute, but it was a small, insignificant bird, grey in color, a great contrast to the gaily colored parrot.

When the nightingale sang, even the parrot listened in admiration. The sweet music penetrated the throne room and when it ceased, the king ordered both birds brought to him. The cages were set on the steps leading to the throne. The visiting princes were asked to come forward and pick out the wonderful songster.

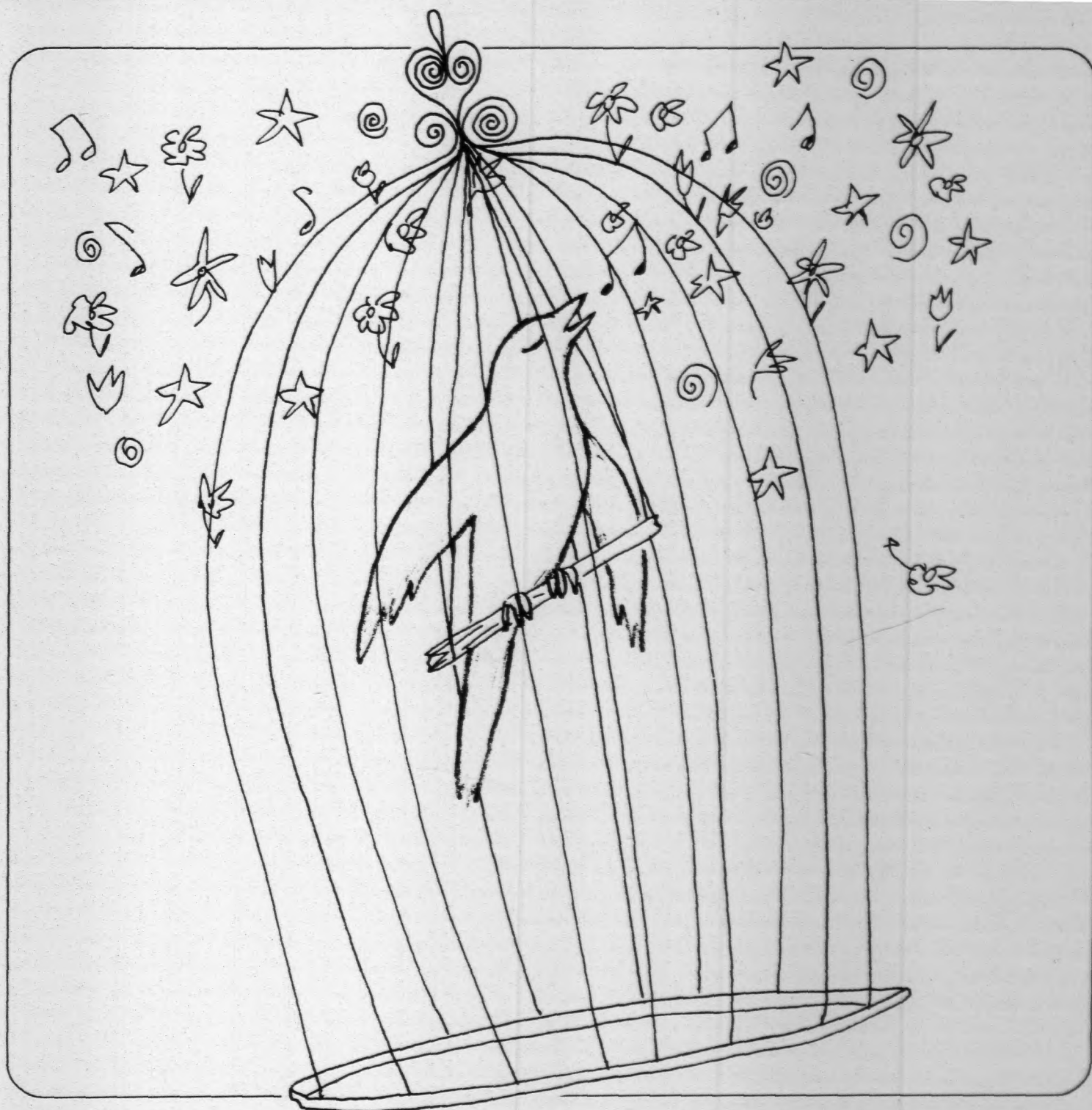
The test was repeated over and over again. Without fail, the prin-

ces pointed to the colorful parrot. At last, however, one prince had the good judgment to choose the little grey bird. The throne and dominion over the kingdom were given to him.

A good many of us are like those princes who made a mistaken choice by selecting fine feathers as the proof of real worth. The boy who wears cheap clothing may possess a wealth of wisdom. The girl who dresses in silk is not always rich in thought. Appearances are often deceptive.

That is one of the odd things of this world; it is full of nightingales who sing in grey feathers and in unexpected places. Find the nightingales in your neighborhood, in your class, in schoolboys and girls who may have no fine feathers, but who possess real worth. Make these your friends, and you will be as fortunate as the prince who won a kingdom because of his own good judgment.

--Excerpted from *Sri Sathya Sai Bal*
Vikas Quarterly, Vol. 10, No. 4



***Are there any people in your school or neighborhood who want to be your friends? Get to know them, even if they're not popular. They might be lonely and need a friend; they may be interesting once you know them.**

***Listen to the birds sing outside your house. Are the good singers always pretty to look at?**

***When your parents ask you to choose, do you pick out something of value or something that is flashy and advertised a lot?**

Election vs. Selection

In this connection, there seem to be some doubts among our members regarding the international aspect of the Sathya Sai Organization. The role of members of the Council is not properly understood. Some members in certain countries wish to elect their representatives. Should the representatives be "elected" or "appointed," and who is to appoint them? Such questions are being raised by devotees in some countries. By such questions, there is a danger that politics may enter the Organization. In the fight for an office through elections, the love that should prevail among the devotees will be lost, and the devotees will become the victims. Our love will be misused in the process. If we are to build the Sathya Sai Organization on the basis of love and confidence, we must have SELECTION. If elections are allowed, there will be factions, all kinds of controversies and differences.

Grains of Dust

Embodiments of Love, the whole world knows what sacred ideals inspire the Sathya Sai Organization. It is true that in a big bag of rice a few grains of dust may get in. Any human organization is bound to have a few black sheep. But that alone will not affect the whole Organization if it is true to its principles. The kind of service and sacrifice which the Sathya Sai Organization is rendering is indescribable. The basis for that is the love that prevails among the members. From ancient times, the *Upanishadic* prayer has said, "May He protect us all. May He nourish us all." The spirit of Oneness proclaimed in this mantra is preserved today only in the

Sathya Sai Organization. That sense of Oneness can only be promoted by the practice of love, not by any other means.

Take an Active Part

Look at what has happened at the World Conference (November 1980). Many wealthy people who have had a life of ease, many who have not done any arduous labor in their lives, have come here for the Conference. People who had been accustomed to living in commodious houses have had to stay here in small, overcrowded apartments. They put up with many inconveniences and did not ask for more comfortable facilities. Wherever they were accommodated, they accepted the place out of their devotion to Swami. This kind of spirit and readiness to bear discomfort and difficulties cannot be found in any other Organization or in any other gathering. Moreover, there are any number of organizations in which the young and the old render different types of social service. But only in the Sathya Sai Organization can you find people rendering service in a completely selfless spirit. *Lakhs* (one *lakh* equals one hundred thousand) of pilgrims gather for the conferences and festivals. The magnitude of dedicated service rendered by the Sathya Sai Organization--by men and women at these functions--can only be realized by those who see them. Again, in anticipation of Swami's birthday celebration, the members of many Sathya Sai units participated in hospital-ity camps for devotees and visitors going to and returning from Prasanthi Nilayam. Politicians say, "Service to mankind is service to God." But only members of this Sri Sathya Sai Organization actually live up to this principle.

The decisions which were made at the World Conference should not remain resolutions on paper. They must be put into practice. Everyone of you must live up to the ideals of the Organization. Some members transgress the rules. Some others do not live up to the ideals or carry out the programs. Such persons have a discouraging effect on other members. We should not be interested in money, office or position. Our sole aim is to promote love. All activities should be carried on in the spirit of love for each other. There is no greater source of strength, wealth or position than love.

Embodiments of the Divine Spirit, all those who join the Sathya Sai Organization should bear in mind that they should be free from egoism. They should not lose their heads over such positions as Regional Director or Center President. As long as this egoism remains, one is not fit to hold any office. It is better to get rid of such officers. You must prepare yourself to be an exemplary *sevak* (servant) and not a leader. Only a *kinkara* (one who is prepared to do any work) can become like Sankara (Lord Shiva). You must, therefore, try to gradually suppress any sense of ego.

The other evil which you need to get rid of is envy. There are people who cannot bear the sight of others achieving prominence or advancement. Envy is a ruinous disease; it destroys all human qualities. It converts a human into a demon. You must see that the demon of envy does not enter your mind. A third evil against which you have to guard yourself is ostentation.

For example, if somebody offers sweet rice as *prasad* (holy food), another wants to show off by offering *laddus* (an Indian sweet). There can also be competition in spending money on various activities.

Money

The Sathya Sai units should see that no money is wasted on unnecessary ostentatious arrangements. Misuse of money is evil. There is another practice which should be discouraged. Even for carrying out very small functions, money is being collected by some units. Every unit has some well-to-do persons, and if one or two of them can participate, many activities can be carried out without raising funds from all and sundry.

Take, for instance, the great World Conferences that are held at Prasanthi Nilayam. Many who do not know the facts must be wondering how funds have been collected and how much money must have been spent to finance these Conferences. The truth is that not a single *paisa* (penny) was collected as a donation. The Conferences, which are an expression of love by the members, have no need for money. Everyone has taken care of his or her own needs and discharged their duties without worrying about difficulties or inconveniences. This attitude has given you great bliss. No money is needed for deriving this kind of happiness.

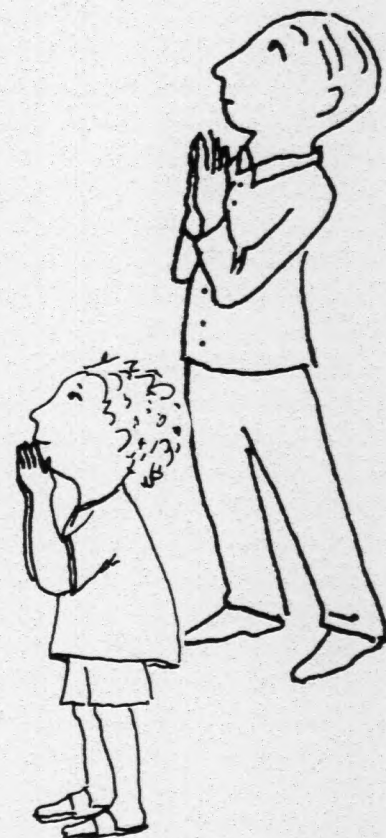
It is deplorable to hear that, in some states, funds are being collected for trivial activities. Even if some officers are inclined to adopt that method, I do not want members of the Sathya Sai Organization to encourage that kind of asking for funds.



Sathya Sai Baba in Brindavan

Feed The Needy

There is one last thing that I should like to impress upon you. Everywhere there are numerous poor, helpless and diseased persons who suffer from hunger. There are *lakhs* of members of the Sathya Sai Organization and even a larger number of Sai devotees. Let each of you resolve to feed at least one poor person each and everyday.



When anyone comes to your doorstep asking for food, try to feed them with a sense of compassion. You should relieve hunger without anybody knowing about it. If all our Sathya Sai Units engage themselves in service to the poor and the needy--without any fanfare or exhibitionism--they will be giving expression to their sense of divine brotherliness and put into practice Sai's teachings.

--Sathya Sai Baba

Excerpted from discourse, November 1980

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Americans Abroad

One of the Sai Organization's Regional Travel Coordinators has discovered an important phone number: **(202) 647-5225**. This is the number of the Citizen's Emergency Center, a division of the U. S. State Department. They offer several services that include but are not limited to:

- * Providing travelers' advisories
- * Assisting Americans who are in trouble abroad
- * Aiding in medical emergencies
- * Publishing brochures with useful information such as: "How to Obtain a Passport," "What Health Precautions Are Necessary for Different Countries," and more.

For obtaining further information, we suggest telephoning the Citizens' Emergency Center and keeping the above number handy.

Information Center

For those who may have wondered where to obtain information such as: the location of a Sathya Sai Baba Center near home or office, how to get books and audio tapes, tips on travel to India, etc., we now have a central location offering help.

A **Sathya Sai Information Center** has been established to provide some basic answers to inquiries. This is a service for those who are new to Baba and His teachings. Upon request, an information packet will be sent containing:

- * A brief biography of Baba and a short description of His teachings
- * A catalog from the Sathya Sai Book Center of America
- * Sai Baba's address
- * A courtesy copy of the *Sathya Sai Newsletter*
- * Travel information to India, along with helpful hints while staying in the *ashram*
- * Information on locating the nearest Sathya Sai Baba Center
- * A cover letter which answers other questions and/or puts one in touch with someone who can answer other questions

PLEASE NOTE: There is absolutely no charge for this service, and no one will call. Your privacy is respected. To take advantage of this information contact:

**Elizabeth Chilcote
Sathya Sai Information Center
Route 2, Box 442
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505**

SATHYA SAI BOOK CENTER of AMERICA

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