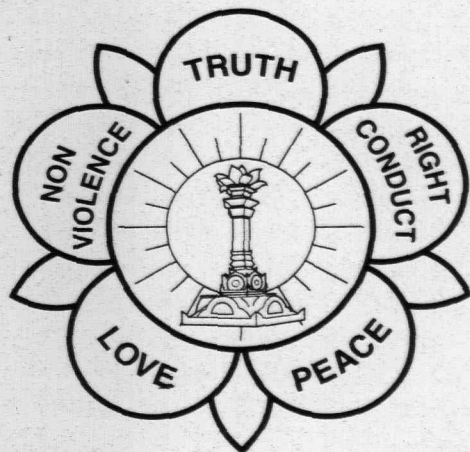




SATHYA SAI NEWSLETTER, USA

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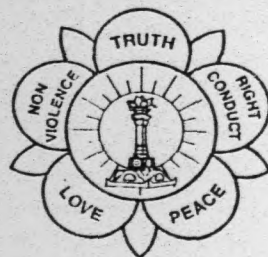
*This publication is dedicated with love and devotion to
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

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Sathya Sai Service Opportunities *Judith Wechsler, Editor*

***The Sarva Dharma symbol of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization depicts
the five qualities from which all human values emanate.***



The *Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA* welcomes photographs, drawings and literary contributions. Sorry, but we are unable to return any material which is sent to us, so please keep a copy for your files. We reserve the right of discrimination in selecting and editing material for publication. Kindly send any material to: **Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA, c/o Sathya Sai Book Center of America, 305 West First Street, Tustin, California 92780-3108 or Fax (909) 337-5270.**

—Barbara Bozzani, Editor

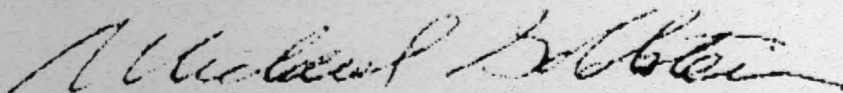
Important Notice

A monthly newsletter is being circulated under the title, "SRI SAI LEELA"—Sri Shirdi Sai Baba Temple from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In this newsletter, reference is made to Sri Sathya Sai Baba and Puttaparthi in several places. Appeals for donations in association with a "Peace Yajna in Puttaparthi, Sri Sathya Sai *Durga Maha Rudra*," are contained in this literature, giving an impression that this has the Blessings and Approval of Swami. We want to make it clear through this Notice that no such Blessings or Approval is there. Reference to Swami therefore is unwarranted. **Invocation of Swami's Name in association with a scheme to collect money is inappropriate.**

On many occasions, the Sathya Sai Baba Organization has informed Sai devotees and the public that Swami does not condone solicitation of funds. If any literature is sent to Sai Centers regarding collection of funds, it should be given to the President of the Sai Center who should send it without delay to the President of the Sathya Sai Baba Central Council of USA. If any verbal appeal for money is made to Sai devotees invoking Swami's Name, then the President of the Sathya Sai Baba Central Council should be informed immediately.

Swami has made it very clear to the world that He does not ask for anything from anyone, and that He does not want His devotees to ask for anything from anyone. As Sai devotees, it is our duty to follow this clear and good instruction. As members of a spiritual organization, it is our duty to uphold the sanctity of Swami's Name and prevent abuse of the Divine Name by unscrupulous people.

In the Service of Sai



Michael G. Goldstein, M.D.

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Man is equipped with a return ticket when he takes birth. Holding it in his grasp, he earns and spends, laughs and weeps, rises and falls, forgetting the end of the journey. Although he forgets, the wagon of life moves toward the cemetery which is its terminus. It brings no glory to man if he is tied helplessly to the wheel of birth and death. His glory and greatness consists in disentangling himself from that revolving wheel.

Before death nips life and thrusts him onto another birth, he must, by means of his spiritual discipline, learn the mystery of Indwelling Divinity. When death comes, one must be glad to meet it, knowing that one has come for the last time.

One weeps when he is born; one should not weep when one dies. One must die triumphant over death. Otherwise he lives only to consume food and is a burden upon the earth. One seeks to escape pain and grief, but these are inescapable.

Life is like a dream, in which you experience joy and grief; but when you realize that both are unreal, when you



Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

awake into the consciousness of Divinity, you will no longer have the thrill of joy nor the despondency of pain. You will not have fear of death nor anxiety about the future; you will have pure bliss.

—Sathya Sai Baba

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. VIII

Swami Says, "You Are Not the Body"

During an interview, Baba asked me, *What do you want?* I have had daydreams about having such a chance, letting a very long list of magnificent gifts play about in my head. When the miracle happened, and Baba actually asked me the magical question, I found myself speechless. I groped for the thoughts and words to express all of my dreams, but no words came out. I was mute.

Baba looked at me, smiling, waiting patiently. Finally, I heard the words tumble from my mouth, "Only you Swami, only you." Baba continued to smile, but he then turned and began talking to a man next to me. I was dumbfounded with my answer. Here was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ask for anything I wanted, and I blew it. But I was pleasantly surprised to learn that perhaps I was not as greedy as I had thought.

Sitting there feeling sorry for myself, I waited and, when Swami finished talking to the man, in a panic I called out in a pleading voice, "Baba, I am very afraid of dying. Could you help me?" Again Swami gave me a broad smile and said softly, *You are not the body, you will drop it like an old worn-out overcoat.* This time as he turned away, I cried out, "Baba, please help me; I need to talk to you about death." Patiently he looked back and asked when I was leaving. I told him in about a month. He said, *I will see you in Puttaparthi.* At the time we were in Whitefield. He never did give me the second interview.

Ever since I was a child, I was afraid of dying. I feared facing the last-minute struggle for my last breath, for the final

moment when I would be no more. As an adult, I read and searched for an answer; but nothing I found ever satisfied my basic belief that when we die, we just cease to exist. Why were we any different from all the other plants and animals on the planet?

At some point, I gave up my search recognizing that there was no answer; and that in all probability, our lives would just end, and it would be as if we never existed. Mourning my fate, I remembered a poem by Shelley, "Ozymandias." The poem tells the tale of discovery in the desert of a large broken tombstone. Found in the shards and rubble were some stones with these words carved on them, "My name is Ozymandias King of Kings, look on my works ye Mighty and despair!" The message is clear; no one or nothing, no matter how great or grand, lasts. It seems we have little choice but to move on and enjoy this life while it lasts.

I had both read and heard about Baba saying that we are not our bodies, that we are the *Atma* (Soul, Divinity within), and our souls are immortal. Somehow these words did not shake my fear of obliteration. When Swami told me in the interview that we drop our bodies like old worn-out overcoats, I felt sad and let down. I knew that, in some way, I did not understand that he was giving me the answer; instead, I felt as if he had left me right where I always was, still fearful, still without a clear-cut promise of eternal life.

It is now over 10 years since that interview. During this time I have tried to

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have lost practically 8% of that which I call myself. No, as a matter of fact, I am rejoicing over the loss of [the body] self.

I am beginning to see a crack in this image I have of myself as the body. I don't lament or wonder where this missing part of myself has gone. Gleefully, I wonder what has happened to all my fears about this body. I notice that I feel lighter and even more vital and alive. Will the shedding of the rest of this physical body bring me a similar sense of pleasure and relief? I remember reading somewhere that life in the physical body

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ence is only the beginning and that in time, by his grace, he will allow me to totally know that I am not this body. I can already feel the pleasure in being free to love and care for my body, and to know beyond any doubt that it is just a glorious vehicle that I have the privilege of using during this lifetime. I am not there yet, but I thank you dear Swami for letting me have this glimpse of the freedom we will have when we relinquish the body.

—**Jack O. Scher**
Faber, Virginia

The glory and majesty of the Divine are fully revealed in splendor only when death is investigated. Death should arouse no fear.

Those who have the inner urge to achieve higher wisdom which confers liberation have, therefore, to reflect upon and investigate the phenomenon of death. . . . Inquiry into death is really inquiry into one's reality.

—**Sathya Sai Baba**

Sanathana Sarathi, Vol. 22, No. 1, Jan. 1979, pp 4-5

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It is now over 10 years since that interview. During this time I have tried to

let Swami become the driving force in my life. Being near him has gradually softened the edges of my fear of death. There are times when I totally accept his words that we are not our physical bodies. My problem is, I want to experience that we are eternal while I am still alive. I know that it takes a leap of faith, but my mind continues to plead for the experience.

This morning, I think that Baba has begun to give me the experience I have longed for. As I looked into the mirror, I thought with some pleasure that since my last trip to Puttaparthi, I have maintained my weight at 155 pounds. For the last several years, I have weighed, or my physical body has weighed, 168. So I have lost 13 pounds or almost 8% of my body's weight. Suddenly it dawned on me that I have no concern over the fact that I have lost practically 8% of that which I call myself. No, as a matter of fact, I am rejoicing over the loss of [the body] self.

I am beginning to see a crack in this image I have of myself as the body. I don't lament or wonder where this missing part of myself has gone. Gleefully, I wonder what has happened to all my fears about this body. I notice that I feel lighter and even more vital and alive. Will the shedding of the rest of this physical body bring me a similar sense of pleasure and relief? I remember reading somewhere that life in the physical body

is like living in a tight shoe, and at the moment of our death, we will experience an enormous sense of freedom and relief as we kick off the old shoe. Hopefully, we will find and embrace our true Self.

I feel as if Baba has given me this important clue by letting me truly experience that there can be pleasure, and not pain in losing part of my physical body. Most importantly, it is not an individual part of my body like an arm or a leg, but rather a part of what I had thought of as being "truly me." Now I am beginning to see that this me is not the body, that I can lose 10 or 20% of my body's essence and never miss it. Instead of mourning, I am experiencing a new-found lightness and strength that makes me better able to enjoy this great adventure of life.

I believe that this morning's experience is only the beginning and that in time, by his grace, he will allow me to totally know that I am not this body. I can already feel the pleasure in being free to love and care for my body, and to know beyond any doubt that it is just a glorious vehicle that I have the privilege of using during this lifetime. I am not there yet, but I thank you dear Swami for letting me have this glimpse of the freedom we will have when we relinquish the body.

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—Sathya Sai Baba

Sanathana Sarathi, Vol. 22, No. 1, Jan. 1979, pp 4-5

God's Love

God is love, live in love. I love you more than a thousand mothers. Sai Baba assures us again and again that he loves us because we are all his children. He resides within us as our very Self. Why then, do we wallow in guilt, hold onto resentments and fear for our survival? I have spent years striving to earn God's love. I imposed severe austerities and restrictions upon myself until Swami revealed to me so clearly that I was punishing myself unnecessarily. As a child in a western culture, I was raised with the idea of original sin and the label of "sinner." I believe I had come into this lifetime with these convictions already imposed upon the mind. But society and religion were not responsible for these false impressions. Guilt is an intrinsic quality of the ego, that which sees itself separate from divine consciousness. Feelings of unworthiness and insecurity stem from the belief that we have done a great wrong by forgetting our relationship with the Father.

These feelings motivated my desire for penance and self-denial. I clung to this austere path until Baba performed

a "spiritual operation" and removed the guilt and feelings of unworthiness. A feeling of incredible relief poured into me as I could clearly see that the path of perpetual hardship was the path of the ego. Swami wanted me to experience his love and grace, living in happiness and abundance. For two years I healed the wounds from the ego-operation. The old self which strongly identified with suffering was gone; and I had to start life all over again. I became a completely new person with an unfamiliar but loving God.

Gradually, I began to experience Swami's outpouring of love. The door of my heart opened as he showed me that I am worthy of his love, which is greater than I ever imagined. The love is wholly forgiving and flows in an endless stream. Swami truly loves us more than a thousand mothers; words cannot express the bliss and peace his love brings. His love is all we need. It is infinitely more than all the riches and power in the world. We are *Premaswarupas*, Embodiments of Divine Love.

—Cathy DeGrandpre
Seattle, Washington

"Wake up brothers and sisters! We call ourselves 'devotees.' Are we really? Baba, with infinite patience and love is still teaching the same truths that he has taught for years. He tells us very simply: *Love all, serve all. Help ever, hurt never. Be happy.* Baba constantly emphasizes five predominant basic values: Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Nonviolence. . . . But are we following these precepts?

"Baba has given us everything. He has given his earthly life to teach us. When we are in India he gives us *darshan*, usually twice a day, sometimes more often. What do you think about while at *darshan*? Are you focused on Baba, his teachings and energies, or are you taken in by the little 'games' and gossip? WAKE UP!"

From an article to appear in the next *S.S. Newsletter*
—Adelene and Robert Grauch, Boynton Beach, Florida

The Ultimate Journey

When the thoughts in the mind are pure,

Our actions are blessed with success.

If the mind is full of impure ideas,

The fruits of our actions are tainted.

Embodiments of the Divine

The fruit of love grows on every tree of life. However, it is covered by lust, anger, envy, and ego, making it difficult for us to taste the hidden sweetness. Only those who can peel off the outer skin can enjoy the sweet juice within; although, anyone is eligible for such an experience. Untainted by selfishness and fear, this fruit is above the distinctions of race, caste, religion and the stage of life called *varna*.*

The supreme Vedic wisdom is called *rasa* or sweetness. This highest spiritual wisdom has love as its nature. To taste this love, one must rid oneself of lust, completely surrender to the Lord, and experience identity with Him. The experience of identity with Him leaves no room for desires, while the feeling of being separate from Him engenders desires. Control of the senses is essential for the attainment of Divinity. One may begin with ordinary love, and achieve the sanctity of total surrender through gradual and constant practice.

Dhruva, who started his penance with the desire for a kingdom, turned

his desire into a longing for spiritual satisfaction after he had been blessed with a vision of the Divine. However, the desire for sovereignty was responsible for his getting the vision of the Lord. Therefore, it is remarkable that a man cannot develop a yearning for liberation without passing through the initial stage of desire for worldly objects.

The Ultimate Journey

The eighth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which compares life to a journey, should be understood. Lord Krishna taught Arjuna about the nature and destination of this journey of life. The various journeys by bus, car, train or airplane, undertaken by man in daily life, are regulated by considerations of time. But the journey of life has been going on since creation began and shall go on forever. Unlike other journeys, this journey can never be canceled or even postponed. It is inevitable for all, be they prince or peasant, messiah or mendicant. Forgetting that this ultimate journey is unavoidable for all those who come into this world with a body, man is foolishly claiming immortality unto himself. Engrossed in the transient matters of the world, he is becoming a victim of misery and suffering.

Childhood is spent with companions and playthings; youth is thrown away on romance; middle age is wasted in the pursuit of wealth; and old age is a sad

**Varna* is the code of conduct, as laid down in the past, for the four castes and the four stages of life. *Varna* represents the duties and obligations of the householder stage of life.

tale of repentance and relentless attachments. Unable to discard evil habits and seek the path of liberation (*moksha*), man wallows in the mire of worldliness and fritters away the precious gift of human life.

The man, who is unable to recognize his innate Divinity and is forgetful of his real abode, the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that divine bliss and perfect love can be attained through surrender and dedication. The absence of trust consumes a man with anxiety and worry. A person, on a tour of another region, staying in the house of a friend, cannot be free to visit the sights of that place if he lacks confidence in his host and cannot leave his valuables in the latter's custody. So also, by not having trust and faith in the Almighty, who is our dearest friend, we are subjecting ourselves to endless worry, difficulty and fear.

The Date of Return

The human body, composed of the five elements, can drop off at any time and at any place. The wise person recognizes the inevitable nature of death and knows the frail mortal body to be a mere water bubble.

Swami Vivekananda used to remind his disciples of this, and tell them that the knowledge and awareness of death enables man to understand the nature of truth.

We often see the cargo wagons displaying the word RETURN, along with the date on which they should be returned to the workshop. The human body is like the goods wagon sent to this illusory world by the Creator. Though the date of the return is not marked on it, the body has to be returned at some- time

or other. Unable to grasp this truth, we seek ephemeral pleasures and subject ourselves to endless anguish.

We are so engrossed in worldly affairs concerning the present moment that we become mindless of our future. One person is said to have remarked that he has no time even for death. How foolish it is to think that way, because death shall never spare anyone. Fascinated by the world of senses, man is not able to know the truth of his own existence. Recognizing the transitory nature of wealth, power and pomp, he should prepare himself for the ultimate journey. When we want to go to a cinema or for an evening walk, we get ready by putting some money in our pockets or putting on our shoes. When we wish to visit a nearby town, we pack our clothes in a bag. But what preparations are we making for the ultimate journey, the voyage of death?

Be Ready for the Photographer

Death is certain. As long as we have this body, we must discharge our obligations in an exemplary manner. When a photographer is taking your picture, he tells you to be ready at the time he clicks the shutter. If you are not posing correctly at that instant, the photograph taken will not be a good one. The Lord is a photographer who takes the photograph without cautioning us with the word, "ready." Therefore, for us to be photographed well in the film of the Lord's heart, we should be always ready.

Our body can be compared to the camera. Our mind is the lens; our heart is the film in the camera; our intelligence acts as the shutter; our thoughts provide the flash. When all these synchronize properly, we attain the stage of per-

fect concentration. Control of the senses is essential for such concentration.

Youth is a Time for . . .

Youth is the best period of life to achieve control over the senses. If the senses are not mastered when one is young, they will be irrepressible later, during old age. "The old monkey cannot move; its eyes have grown dim; its face is wrinkled; its hair has turned grey," saying thus, youngsters gather round and dance mockingly.

Sense control must be practiced when the mind and the intelligence are in proper trim. By turning our vision inward, we should prevent agitation and excitement from entering our minds. With our spiritual strength enhanced, we should be able to wander fearlessly like a lion in the forest of life and undertake service activities. Instead, due to body consciousness, we are becoming timid and nervous like mere sheep.

Every young man should be like the heroic Abhimanyu, who said, "When I wish to pounce like a lion on an elephant, and tear the enemy to pieces. It is proper that you stop me from going, instead of sending me with your blessings!"

*"Though the date of
return is not marked
on it, the body has
to be returned at
sometime or other."*

Faith, Service and Reform

Students must plunge into the field of service and reform their country. They must banish the rampant ignorance, unrest and injustice from their motherland. They must spread the ideals of truth, righteousness, justice and love, and work

for the happiness and prosperity of their fellow men. Where there is faith, there is love; where there is love, there is peace; where there is peace, there is God; and where there is God, there is bliss. Therefore, faith is the basis for the experience of bliss. Faith is like our

life-breath; it is impossible to live even for a minute in this world without faith.

It is my hope that you will develop your self-confidence, strength of faith in Divinity, and discharge your duties in a spirit of absolute surrender. Just as a flashlight is superfluous to see the moon, which can be visualized with the aid of its own light, God, the embodiment of love, is perceived only through love. Thus, in order to realize Him, we should enrich our hearts with the Lord's Divine Love.

—Sathya Sai Baba
Summer Showers 1979



"...Man by his acts in this life decides on the next birth, where and how it will be, even before leaving this world. The new place is ready for him, his foreprints are already there; it is only after his settling that he relieves himself of the hold on this world. Men of this category move round on the wheel of birth and death. To be born and to die, one must have auspicious moments which will guarantee a wise life and a worthwhile end."

Bhagavad Gita

In Learning About Dying, We Often Learn About Living

One of the things about illness is that it draws you inside yourself. When we are ill, we tend to focus on our own pain and suffering. We may feel sorry for ourselves or become depressed. "But" said Cardinal Berdardin of Chicago, who died in November 1996 of pancreatic cancer, "instead, it is during these times when we need people the most."

When he arrived at the hospital for chemotherapy, he never left without visiting and encouraging all the other patients; often he would follow up with phone calls, letters and visits at crucial moments. He was spreading hope and an attitude of "Me too," and "I understand." He needed them too and told them so.

As a Christian, Cardinal Bernardin approached death with a conviction that it is a transition from earthly life to life eternal. That confidence may be the most important lesson that he or any believer has to teach. A strong majority of Americans share this belief, yet they live in terror of death. Much of that terror is fear of the unknown and the prospect of annihilation.

When I was involved in Hospice in Phoenix, Arizona, I learned much about letting go of the superfluous abundance in life from the patients themselves.

In Hospice, a volunteer is first trained in death and dying classes, and then is assigned to one patient at a time, therefore, getting the chance to know them quite well. The patients can be any age, in any circumstance, but most are not expected to live past six months.

I volunteered once a week and at one time was assigned, surprisingly, to someone I had met in a writing class the year before. When I visited Kay, for the most part, we talked, did puzzles or played board games. Other times we'd listen to music, or I'd watch her paint. What she liked most was writing her memoirs. Kay was pulling together painful instances of her life and wanted me to just listen. She wanted to forgive all those who had hurt her. But in her own humorous way, she poked fun at all their faults, including her own shortcomings. I typed the memoirs, helped correct the spelling and, together, we went over, and sometimes revised, the sentence structure.

Although she didn't know it, she was teaching me to face fear of death, and I was supposedly there to console her.

Toward the end, as she grew weaker. She insisted that her daughter, who lived in California, help her plan a special funeral "party" after her cremation. There was to be music, clowns, champagne and cake. She also designated that I read aloud what she had written.

Amidst tears and roars of laughter at the funeral, she had said good-bye to everyone in her own inimitable way.

Kay truly believed that we come into this world with the wonder of "oos" and "aahs," and she intended to go back to her maker the same way. It must indeed have been an awesome greeting!

—Winnie Bolton

From her column, "Happiness Is"
For the *Mount Angel* newspaper
Mt. Angel, Oregon

Highway in Texas

When Baba first appeared to me, I didn't know who he was; he looked like an unusually well-dressed Texas highway patrolman in a uniform straight from Gucci, odd for that stretch of highway between Houston and Texas City. And that black bushy hair and those brown piercing eyes!

The week before Easter, 1991, my favorite aunt had died in San Antonio. My younger daughter, Charlotte, then six, and I had driven from Los Angeles to help close up her house. My older daughter, Emily, who was twenty-one, had come up from Galveston where she was in school—what a wonderful reunion we had—Charlotte was especially thrilled to be with Em.

We left my aunt's house and traveled on to Houston where, after a few more days together, Charlotte and I would go on to Texas City where I had an appointment, and Em would return to Galveston. The plan was for Charlotte to go ahead with Emily in Em's dad's big American station wagon and I'd follow them in our smaller German-made automobile.

The timing of this "chance" trip to Texas was important for personal reasons which at that time meant a great deal to me.

After stopping in Houston, we were walking toward our automobiles, when something strange happened. I heard a voice without sound, felt the words more than heard them, "Today you will see your children die in front of your eyes in an automobile accident," archaic words, not at all the way I spoke. It was as if I had accidentally dipped into the Akashic Record.

What to do? I couldn't, wouldn't, hide in a cave with my kids the rest of our lives. I don't believe in giving in to fear. Also, I had a sense of destiny needing to play itself out.

So we proceeded with our original plan, Em in the lead in the wagon with Charlotte, and me following them.

We got through downtown Houston, started toward Texas City and Galveston on the Gulf Freeway. Something about Em's right rear tire mesmerized me, but I couldn't figure out what it was.

About fifteen minutes short of Texas City, in late afternoon traffic—moving smoothly about seventy miles an hour, late enough for the highway to be crowded but too early for it to be clogged with commuters—we were both in the middle lane of a three lane freeway.

Suddenly, Em's right rear tire blew. Her car was all over the highway, spinning completely out of control.

Em was, and still is, tiny. As she tried to wrestle control of the big wagon, I automatically pulled onto the left shoulder to get away from her, towards safety. And no sooner had I pulled over, than I realized my life would mean nothing if my kids died.

So I did the only thing I could. You've heard those stories of women who lift two-ton cars to free their toddler from under the wheels? Growing up in Texas, I'd watched men work cattle with cutting horses and knew what to do.

I went back out into traffic and drove up and around Emily and Charlotte, separating them from the herd of cars.

The ploy worked. In my own mind afterwards, I reasoned that people were

paying more or less routine amounts of attention to avoiding the wagon, but when they saw a lunatic woman (me) driving straight at them going the wrong way in the 70 m.p.h. traffic, they *really* paid attention.

Em and I immediately pulled over to the inside shoulder to reconnoiter. No sooner had we both opened our doors than the Indian man on a highway patrol motorcycle pulled up behind us, the man with the Gucci tailoring and the hair and the eyes. "Are you all right?" he asked sweetly. His attitude seemed uncomfortably familiar, those brown eyes boring straight into me. I remember thinking flippantly to myself, "Yeah, but where were you when we needed you five minutes ago?" [But of course, he was there.] We nodded and smiled politely, and he disappeared back into the traffic, literally disappearing before my eyes. One moment he was there and the next he wasn't.

Since Em's car was not driveable, and neither of us is a tire-changer, she was forced after all to accompany us to Tex-

as City for the meeting; yet another instance of God's fine hand at work in our lives. I can only say that her presence at that afternoon's appointment was very significant. Afterwards, I drove her back to Galveston, and Charlotte and I returned to California where, a few months later on June 8, I first saw a photograph of Sai Baba.

I didn't connect him that day to the Gucci-clad highway patrolman; nor when he appeared to me fully in the flesh wearing his more usual orange robe. Two days after that, on June 10, in the doorway of a crowded Van Nuys living room, he motioned to me to come with him. I intuited that no one else could see him, and knew also that he meant I was to go to India.

Within three months, funds had magically appeared, I had quit my day job, given up our apartment and put all our belongings in storage. Charlotte and I were on the plane for India.

—Peyton Wolcott

Glendale, California

(To be continued, Part II—In India)



The question is: "Surely it must be Swami who is driving every devotee's car, is it not?"

Sai's answer: *No, It is the driver's responsibility. He must exercise caution and responsibility. It is only at the moment of an accident that Swami takes over the situation. . . .*

There are two things to remember, death and God. And there are two things to forget, any harm done to us by others, and any good you have done to others. . . . There will be future consequences if these are held in the mind. Of course, death should be held in the mind always, for then much good action will result, much harmful action will be avoided.

Conversations With Sathya Sai Baba
by **John S. Hislop**, pp 39 and 67

The Nature of His Reality

In truth, you cannot understand the nature of my reality either today or even after a thousand years of steady austerity or ardent inquiry, even if all mankind joins the effort. But in a short time, you will become cognizant of the bliss showered by this Divine Principle, which has taken upon itself this sacred body and this sacred name. Your good fortune, which will provide this chance, is greater than it was for hermits, monks, sages, saints, and even personalities who embodied facets of Divine Glory.

Since I move about with you, eat like you, and talk with you, you are deluded into the belief that this is but an instance of common humanity. Be warned against this mistake. I am also deluding you by my singing with you, talking with you, and engaging myself in activities with you. But any moment, my Divinity may be revealed to you; you have to be ready, prepared for that moment. Since Divinity is enveloped in humanness, you must endeavor to overcome the delusion that hides It from your eyes.

This human form in which every Divine Entity, every Divine Principle, all the names and forms ascribed by man to God are manifest. Do not allow doubt to distract you. If only you install, in the altar of your heart, steady faith in my Divinity, you can win a vision of my reality. Instead, if you swing like a pendulum of a clock—one moment devotion, another moment disbelief—you may never succeed in comprehending the truth and winning bliss. You are very fortunate; you have a chance to experience the bliss of the vision of the form, which is the form of all Gods, while in this life.

Let me draw your attention to another fact. On previous occasions, when God incarnated on earth, the bliss of recognizing him in that incarnation was granted only after the physical embodiment had left the world, in spite of plenty of patent evidence of their grace. The loyalty and devotion the Avatars commanded arose through fear and awe at their superhuman powers and skills, or their imperial and penal authority. Ponder a moment on this Sathya Sai manifestation—in this age of rampant materialism, aggressive disbelief and irreverence—what is it that brings the adoration of millions from all over the world? You will be convinced, the basic reason for this is the fact that this is the Supraworldly Divinity in human form.

Again, how fortunate you are that you can witness all the countries of the world paying homage; you can hear adoration to Sathya Sai's name reverberating throughout the world, even while this body is existing, not at some future date, but when it is with you, before you. . . .

So utilize the chance of association with me as much as possible, and endeavor as quickly and as best you can, to follow the directives that I have been giving. Obeying my instructions is enough; it will benefit you more than the most rigorous asceticism. Practice truth, righteousness, peace and love, which are dear to me. Resolve to keep those ideals before you in all your thoughts, words, and deeds. That can confer on you the highest, greatest good of merging into the Supreme Substance of Divinity.

—Sathya Sai Baba

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. VI, Chapter 45

SS Young Adult Conferences

Since the first "Sathya Sai World Youth Conference," held in July 1997 in Prasanthi Nilayam, young people have become even more inspired to participate in Sai activities with their peer group. The World Youth Conference has motivated three conferences across the United States, the East Coast, Central U.S. and the West Coast. The results of the three recent conferences are narrated by the young adults:

Sathya Sai Young Adults' East Coast Conference, December 27-28, 1997, Medford, New Jersey

The first East Coast Conference was planned with love, cooperation and unity by the young adults (YA) from the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Southeast Regions of the United States. The planning committee was composed of three young adults from each of the three east coast regions; they had been selected by the regional YA advisors and the YA representatives.

Periodic updates were prepared by the planning committee. The conference was put together in about eight weeks, and various concerns were discussed with the Sathya Sai National and Regional Young Adult Advisors. The final program had the approval from the National Young Adult Advisory Committee, East Coast Regional Presidents and Regional YA Advisors.

There was no charge whatsoever for attending the conference. Food, accommodations and transportation to and from the airport, and also to and from other forms of public transportation were provided free for all delegates. Everything, including the delicious food, was prepared by the young adults.

In all, there were 140 participants at the conference. In addition to the YAs

from the East Coast Regions, there were eight who drove from Indiana, one from California, and six from Canada. The theme for the event was "**Practicing Swami's Teachings in Our Daily Lives.**" Following are the highlights of the program:

Keynote Speaker Hal Honig—YA Advisor, East Coast—spoke on: A Dedicated Life—How to put into practice Swami's teachings in our day-to-day lives and young adult roles in the 21st century.

Workshop #1—Aroon Yusu from Canada spoke on:

The Art of Successful Studying—Based on Swami's teachings about education. Topics included: How to study effectively, time management, memory tools, improving concentration and communication.

Workshop #2—Various Young Adults explored:

Tools of Leadership, Public Speaking—An interactive session that illustrated how to talk to newcomers about Swami. Several situations were reviewed.

Workshop #3—Various Young Adults studied:

Swami's July 19th Discourse—A workshop on the special discourse given to youthful delegates during the Sathya Sai World Youth Conference, [held in

Prasanthi Nilayam, India, July 1997]. The participants had in-depth discussions in small groups. Each group studied a portion of that discourse to increase their understanding of Bhagavan's teachings; later, each group presented a report on the subject matter they had reviewed.

Talks

World Youth Conference Perspectives—Insight into the Sathya Sai World Youth Conference, what YAs learned from it, and how they benefitted.

Reports

Regional Service Presentations—

Reports from the represented regions about their service activities.

Spiritual Q and A

A panel was made up of both Regional Young Adult Advisors and young adults to provide answers to the spiritual questions asked by the participants.

Cultural Programs

There was a display of the various talents of the young adults from all three East Coast Regions. The program included Indian classical music and dance, original piano compositions, an opera solo, a humorous, insightful Sai play and, in conclusion, a candlelight vigil with carol singing.

The first [but not the last] East Coast Conference was a great learning experience for all those who participated and helped plan the event.

Sathya Sai Young Adult Mideast Service Conference, Nov. 15-16, 1997 Indianapolis, Indiana

During the World Youth Conference in Prasanthi Nilayam, Swami emphasized that youth should spend more time in service activities, and he reiterated that,

Service to man is service to God. The first "Mideast Young Adults' Service Conference" was in response to this divine directive.

Dr. William Harvey—YA Advisor Central United States

The group leaders consulted with the Central United States Advisor, Bill Harvey, who monitored ideas and activities. It was decided that they would do crafts, games, etc., with the foster children. They also organized a clothing drive for the homeless. Group leaders were selected to host a service project. Newcomers actively participated in the planning of service projects, and many of them have continued to show great enthusiasm for Sathya Sai Baba and his work by continuing to carry out the ongoing projects. Some of them have begun to regularly attend Sai Center meetings, and they have adopted the regular study of Sai literature.

The two-day conference was attended by over 40 young adults from seven states. The first day was spent doing service at a local children's foster-care home, a treatment center for misguided and mistreated youth, a home for handicapped adults, and in downtown Indianapolis, distributing clothes, food and hygiene products. The second day included a study circle on Swami's message on different types of service: service to family, elderly, distraught, imprisoned, hungry, etc. Swami's message was discussed in smaller groups, and the results were presented to the entire conference.

Foster Group Homes for Boys Ages 14-18

It was a very uplifting day for everyone. The boys were happy that we, out of no compulsion, decided to take some

The Year of Peace

This is the year of peace (*shanti*) as proclaimed by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba and the Sai Organization. As you may recall, each of five years has been designated to depict one of the five values: Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Divine Love, and Non-violence. This does not mean that we, as devotees, should not be practicing all five values at all times. What it does mean, is that it gives us the opportunity to dive deeply into one value at a time and learn its true significance.

In this year of our Lord, 1998, we shall attempt to do that in the pages of the *Sathya Sai Newsletter*. But please remember that our space is restricted, and we offer but four issues per year. Because of that, may we suggest that all devotees begin by reading and studying *Prasanthi Vahini*, which was written by the hand of the Avatar. (That volume is available at your Sathya Sai Book Center, see page 32). The following is excerpted from that sacred text:

Everywhere, one can hear the cry, "World peace," "World peace," but the number of persons who can tell how it can be attained is very small. There is no one who can even picture correctly what exactly is meant by *shanti* or peace. For if one has acquired true peace and experienced it, the turmoil and confusion of the world will not be noticed at all. You cannot be aware of the absence of peace, if you have it.

Peace means the giving up of the senses. How can such peace be spread and promoted by anyone who has gained it? It can be experienced, but it is incapable of being given from person to person. The best that can be done is to show the way to others, to inform others of its sweetness. How can another's hunger be appeased by you eating your own food? Only the diner derives satisfaction from his dinner. Peace is of such a nature. Each has to earn and experience it for himself, so that all may have it.

Love and fortitude are enough to confer peace. But you should not concentrate on mere outward show; let these

virtues saturate your thought, word and deed. That is also the way to establish world peace.

Certain others declare that prayer can bring about world peace, and they ask people to pray. Of course, it is good to pray, but peace can never be gained by that alone. Prayer must be united with practice. You should not pray for one thing and practice another; such prayer is only a means of deception. The words you utter, the deeds you do, the prayers you pray must all be directed along the same path. While repeating prayers for world peace—if you cannot patiently put up with others, if you slander others and look down upon them—you yourself will have no peace. You will have turmoil instead, and with that turmoil, all the attendant sorrow and pain.

Through world peace, individual peace too can be cultivated. When food is taken by the hand to the mouth, chewed and swallowed, the essence spreads to every part of the body. So also, if the hands are engaged in acts of promoting peace, and the tongue is engaged

in prayers of peace, by these two means, the essence of peace will spread into all parts of the world, which is but the body of the Lord. World peace is the basis for genuine peace. . . .

There are many who argue that self-respect is peace. But they confuse self-respect with the respect given to the inferior vehicle, the body, or to one's status. That is respect to the person, not respect to the Self or the *Atma*. The respect given to the Lord within, that is real Self-respect. Truth is divine; pure love is divine; the Lord is divine; selfless service is divine. Respect for these is true Self-respect; respect for these is, of course, peace. . . .

To earn this, one has to cast aside as worthless, the respect that the world accords to wealth and status, to ignore praise and blame, derision and flattery, and engage in spiritual discipline with full faith in the Lord. That is real peace, pure peace, eternal peace. . . .

All the senses, all the impulses rise up in overpowering strength like waves from the sea, roar in fury, and subside in the waters; they do not confer peace. The wise thing is to forget these waves, and direct attention toward the sea beneath, which is without change. Then only, can you attain peace, swimming about happily in the deep undisturbed waters. Why are those denizens of the deep so happy? The reason is, they have water all around them—above, below, on all sides.

They cannot survive even a second outside it. Even when they have the necessity to come out of it, they struggle frantically to reach water again, for the disaster will bring about death itself. So too, when man is immersed in peace, he will experience the joy and exhilara-

tion of that state in all ways. . . .

Peace is the manifestation of the greatness of Divine Love. It will endow all who come under its authority with tremendous power for good. It can place God within man's grasp and man within God's grasp.

Spiritual discipline can confer higher power. It is the very secret of the Life Principle. It is the highest individualization of the glory of the *Atma* (Divinity within). It is the magic wand in the hands of the devotee of God (*bhakta*); besides, it confers the greatest degree of contentment.

But peace does not mean inactivity, the mere inert life of eating and squatting. You should not spend your time eating and sleeping, saying to others that the Lord will come to your help when the need arises. You must arise and work. God helps those who help themselves, and He will help no other.

Learn from the life history of Prahlada, the lesson that the Lord alone is to be loved, learn also the technique of that process. Do the work that has fallen to your lot sincerely and efficiently. Give up everything that is outside the service of the Lord. Follow the footsteps of Prahlada. You can win through the grace of the Lord, the joy of peace, the thrill of fullness and the bliss of immortality.

Work has to be undertaken in order that time might not hang heavily on you and become a burden. Work is the mission of man. Without it, man will get lost in the darkness of ignorance, and he will be overwhelmed. Ignorance will multiply his doubts; these have to be chopped off with the sword of wisdom.

—Sathya Sai Baba

Prasanthi Vahini, pp 40-43 and 54-57

Sai Conferences and Retreats for 1998

Date and Region	Location	Information
May 15-17 Pacific Region South Region #8	Pilgrim Pines 39570 Glen Road Yucaipa, California (near Redlands)	Harshad Patel 1118 East Colorado Blvd. Glendale, California 91205 (818) 952-9600, fax (818) 952- 9060
May 22-25 Memorial Day weekend Mid-Atlantic Region #2	Camp Akiba Pocono Mountains Pennsylvania	Marion Chew 2415 Jackson Pkwy. Vienna, Virginia 22180 (703) 573-0947, MWChew@aol.com
May 22-25 Memorial Day weekend Northeast Region #1	Russell Sage College Troy, New York (near Albany)	Dr. Dilip Patel 77 Fox Chapel Drive Orchard Park, New York 14127 (716) 837-1090, evening: (716) 662-1300
May 22-25 Memorial Day weekend Mid-Central Region Regions #4 & #5	Camp Wyman Eureka, Missouri (near St. Louis)	Allan Woods 28 Robert Drive St. Louis, Missouri 63135 (314) 524-0345
May 22-25 Memorial Day weekend Southwest Region #9	Camp Charles Pearlstein 3400 Copper Basin Rd. Prescott, Arizona	Naini Mandala 13610 N. 51st Avenue, #205 Glendale, Arizona 85304 (602) 993-0292
July 3-5 Independence Day weekend Pacific Region North #6	Enchanted Acres 1151 Summit Loop Rd. Grants Pass, Oregon	Wilma Bronkey or anyone 1151 Summit Loop Rd. Grants Pass, Oregon 97527 (541) 479-9066, fax (541) 479-2997
July 3-5 Independence Day weekend Pacific Region South #8	La Casa de Maria 800 El Bosque Rd. Montecito, California (near Santa Barbara)	John & Shelley Harrison 2595 Cameron Street Ventura, California 93001 (805) 643-6674



July 11, Saturday EHV Teacher Training++ (no retreat this year) Region #8	St. John's Episcopal Church in Keokea Maui, Hawaii	Julia Fernandes P. O. Box 861 Makawao, Hawaii 96768 (808) 575-2587, fax (808) 575-2587*
September 4-7 Labor Day weekend Southwest Region #9	Bodhi Mandala Jemez Springs, New Mexico (near Albuquerque)	Barbara Pepper 521 Richmond Dr., S.E. Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106 (505) 262-0694, work (505) 265-8577
September 4-7 Labor Day weekend South Central Region #10	Camp Allen (northwest of Houston, Texas)	Rick Raines 16406 Willow Park Drive Tomball, Texas 77375 (281) 370-0833
September 4-7 Labor Day weekend North Central Region #5	Camp Hastings (near Chicago, Illinois)	Shirley Pike 161 Chatham Road, N.E. Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52402 (319) 373-2434, voice mail (319) 399-6490
September 18-20 Northern California and Nevada Region #7	Camp La Honda · Santa Cruz Mts., California (between San Francisco and Santa Cruz)	Duncan Bennett 1757 Clemens Road Oakland, California 94602 (510) 451-1414
September 25-27 Pacific Region South Region #8	Cedar Glen, California (near Julian in San Diego County)	Jim and Connie Fox 2737 Fairfield Street San Diego, California 92110 (619) 276-1356
October 23-25 Pacific Region North Region #6	Oregon State Park Silver Falls Conference Center, Oregon (near Salem)	Lana Steele 1402 22nd Street N.E., Apt 531 Auburn, Washington 98002 (253) 735-9041

++ This year, the devotees of the state of Hawaii felt directed to have a teacher training course for the "Sathya Sai Education in Human Values," program (EHV) rather than their annual conference. For more information contact Julia Fernandes, address, etc., top row, page 17.

What's Up in the Sai Organization?

Announcements

Service Opportunities for Health Care Professionals

Since the 70th birthday in 1996, Swami has graciously allowed visiting doctors, nurses and other volunteers to offer their services at the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital in Prasanthi Nilayam (the small hospital adjoining the ashram grounds). It serves as an outpatient clinic, inpatient ward, laboratory and pharmacy which is operational during the *Guru Poornima* festival in July, and the Birthday festival in November, remaining open for about a week each time. The next medical service will be conducted for seven days from July 7 through 12, 1998, during *Guru Poornima*.

Physicians, pharmacists, EMTs, psychologists and ancillary medical personnel who wish to participate in the above effort are requested to contact: **Raghavendra S. Prasad, M.D., Medical Director, 1923 Greenwood Oaks Drive, Houston, Texas 77062, USA. Phone (281) 480-1505.**

Nurses and non-medical volunteers wishing to help with clerical or housekeeping services may contact: **Barbara Mofield, R.N., Director of Nursing, 764 W. Saugerties Road, Saugerties, New York 12477, USA. Phone (914) 246-1679.**

Volunteers should be fluent in English and have proof of valid licensure. We have a large list of medical and non-medical supplies that can be used for this project. Those wishing to participate, and those wishing to bring supplies are requested to contact me [Dr. Prasad] for full details.

In the Service of Sai
Your Brother

—Raghavendra S. Prasad, M.D., Medical Director

From Michael Goldstein, M.D.

A Divine Message:

In the October 1997 issue of *Sanathana Sarathi*, Swami said, *I am prepared even to give up Prasanthi Nilayam to meet the needs of the people.*

When I was in Prasanthi Nilayam this last November, I asked Swami if he would give me any special message that I could convey in my forthcoming meetings with Sai devotees and organizations in European countries. Bhagavan said, *Tell them that Swami is working from morning until night.*

Swami has adopted an austerity program within the ashram and has instructed overseas organizations to do the same, not to waste resources.

What does this mean? Bhagavan has said that he is prepared to give up Prasanthi Nilayam, the roof over his head, to meet the needs of the people. Swami has said that he is working from morning until night. Swami has instructed Prasanthi Nilayam officials to become increasingly austere in their management, and he has instructed the overseas organizations to do the same.

What Can We Learn from This Message?

Bhagavan Baba tells us that he is always happy, and that we should always be happy. Everything that Swami says and does is for our happiness. The happiness of this message lies in the fact that Swami is demonstrating his confidence that we are ready to put aside childish things. We are ready to deepen our understanding of Bhagavan's universal spiritual message and earnestly apply it to our own lives.

This is not really a new message. It is consistent with what Swami has been teaching us all these years. The newness lies in the great intensity and impact of Bhagavan Baba's recent words and actions.

New Sathya Sai Baba Organization News

The New Year brings constructive new developments:

- New National Sai Information Center. The Sathya Sai Book Center of America in Tustin, California, will assume the responsibilities for maintaining a current directory of Sathya Sai Centers and responding to public inquiries regarding Sathya Sai Baba and the Sai Organization.

- New National Guidelines. The revised guidelines for the Sathya Sai Baba Organization are being completed and will be distributed to the Sathya Sai Baba Centers within the next two months.

- New young adult committee, program, guidelines. Young adult guidelines have been incorporated into the new national guidelines. The young adult committee is being formed and the programs are being developed.

A New Beginning

Swami says, *Celebrate the new second, not the new year*. He teaches us to appreciate the beauty and sanctity of life now. He wants us to be highly conscious of the imminent divinity in each moment, to live life now, not then or when, but now!

In the Service of Sai
—Michael Goldstein, M.D.

What About Children's Literature?

It has been brought to the attention of the *Sathya Sai Newsletter* staff by Mrs. Beatrice Flaig—a long-time teacher in public schools and for the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values program—that there is a conspicuous lack of books and other materials for children in the U.S. Sai Organization. Mrs. Flaig says, "Some time ago a new Sai devotee asked me for some children's books which would tell about Swami and would offer stories appropriate for children. I realized that outside the *Sathya Sai EHV Teacher's Training Manual*, I had little help to offer."

Bea Flaig continues, "I did mention the *Sai World, A Newsletter for Children and Youth*, and it was then that I realized how little publicity that publication receives. There are not many devotees who are even aware of it, so perhaps, the children's newsletter should be addressed in the *Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA* in bolder terms. What do you think?"

This editor thinks that whatever good material can be offered to children is a superb idea. Let us begin by suggesting the publications that are already available.

Mrs. Flaig is correct, we do not mention this fine publication for children often enough. It has games, stories, illustrations and puzzles that are fun for children of all ages. To obtain this quarterly publication contact:

• *Sai World, A Newsletter for Children and Youth*
P.O. Box 7722
San Diego, California 92167

There is a \$5.00 fee for a one-year subscription (4 issues).

• *Chinna Katha, Volumes I and II*

These charming stories for children have been taken from Sathya Sai Baba's discourses, and have been reprinted in two volumes. For the most part, the stories relate to Indian lore while teaching good morals and values. They are available at the Book Center. See page 32 for the address.

• *Sathya Sai Education in Human Values*

This Sathya Sai EHV loose-leaf folder is filled with stories and projects that children can enjoy while they are learning values; it is also recommended for teachers. Available at the Book Center. See page 32 for the address.

New Flight Schedule to and from Puttaparthi

This schedule has been in effect since January 1, 1998 and is valid at this printing. Of course, the airline reserves the right to change schedules at any time, so contact your travel agent or Indian Airlines to confirm any timings:

Tuesday & Saturday IC-969—Airbus A-320

12:15 hrs. depart Chennai (Madras).....13:10 hrs. arrive Puttaparthi
13:50 hrs. depart Puttaparthi.....15:20 hrs. arrive Mumbai (Bombay)

Monday & Thursday IC-970—Airbus A-320

09:20 hrs. depart Mumbai (Bombay).....10:40 hrs. arrive Puttaparthi
11:20 hrs. depart Puttaparthi.....12:15 hrs. arrive Chennai (Madras)

This schedule is based on local time.

Everyone should see to it that they have love in their hearts. Such love is rare today. Many of you have worked in the Sai Organization for some time. Then you direct that love toward the world, and you are bound there. Later, Divine Love diminishes as attachment for the world increases. This is ignorance. It is foolishness if you consider worldly love to be of primary importance. You should know the proper meaning of Love and serve society.

—Sathya Sai Baba

Dates to Remember in 1998

Mark Your Calendar

All festivals of India are full of inner meaning. They are not celebrated for pomp or show. They are for your illumination and transformation. —Baba

February 25, Wednesday, *Mahashivaratri* is observed during the new moon, symbolizing a renaissance and rededication to spiritual life.

March 28, Saturday, *Ugadi* is the Telugu, Lunar New Year.

April 5, Sunday, *Rama Navami* is the day to honor the birth of the Avatar, Rama.

May 6, Wednesday, *Easwaramma Day* is recognized as the time to pay homage to the memory of the mother of Sathya Sai Baba.

July 9, Thursday, *Guru Poornima* is a time to pay respect to one's spiritual guide or preceptor.

July 26, Sunday, *Global Handicapped Day* is a time for helping the handicapped and to remember that they need help throughout the year.

August 14, Friday, *Krishna Jayanti* honors the birth of the Avatar, Krishna.

August 26, Wednesday, *Ganesha Chaturthi* honors Ganesha who is the remover of all obstacles and ignorance.

September 4, Friday, *Onam* is when the people of Kerala commemorate the sacrifices of emperor Bali.

September 20, Sunday, *Blood Donation Day* remember to give blood at your local hospital, Red Cross, or blood bank. Check with your doctor first.

October 1, Thursday, *Dasara or Vijaya Dasami* is a celebration of the victory of good over evil.

October 19, Monday, *Deepavali* the festival of lights commemorating the victory of righteousness over wickedness.

November 7-8, *Akhanda Bhajan* devotional singing in Sai Centers around the globe for world peace. The 24 hours of singing begins at 6:00 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 7, and ends at 6:00 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 8.*

November 19, Monday, *Ladies' Day* is to recognize the spiritual qualities of women.

November 23, Monday, the 73rd Birthday of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

December 25, Friday, *Christmas* the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

—Central Office
Prasanthi Nilayam

*Subject to confirmation.

time off on a weekend and spend that time with them. One of the boys at the foster home could not believe that some young adults drove 14 hours just to be with him. Such dedication and enthusiasm on the part of the YAs really touched the boys, and we hope Swami will help these boys join mainstream society.

Foster Group Homes for Girls Ages 11-14 and 14-18

The program we implemented with these girls was entirely based on their needs and interests. The variety of activities that we all engaged in ranged from clay modeling, coloring, collage and singing. Five of the YA girls spent an afternoon with six girls doing crafts and getting to know them. We shared our love with these girls, and we received much more in return. They were a real delight to spend time with; spending time with them was like being with our own sisters. We clearly felt Swami's presence.

Mentally Handicapped Group Home for Adults

One of the highlights of doing service at the home for the handicapped was not what we did for them, but what they did for us. After singing with them, we all went upstairs to eat pizza. We were surprised at what gracious hosts they were. One resident even did some magic tricks for us. They had so much love to give. We all enjoyed our visit as much as they enjoyed ours. It did not feel like a service project. It seemed as if we had just gone to a friend's house for a couple of hours to have a really pleasant time.

Clothing, Hygiene Products, Sack Lunch Distribution

In preparation for this activity, a winter clothing drive was held at Purdue University, Indiana. A booth was re-

served in one of the university buildings for a day, and the young adults took turns manning the booth. A few local associations were also contacted to assist in collecting warm clothing. The YAs in Indianapolis went to the downtown area beforehand, and approached some of the homeless to inquire about their needs.

When they went back to distribute the articles, due to a heavy snowfall, the young adults were unable to find a single homeless person. Finally, a few of the homeless were located near the public library. Once those people were served, the word spread fast, and in the next couple of hours, about 70 to 80 people were served hot coffee and sack lunches, and were given warm winter clothing, socks and various hygiene products. Swami's ways are mysterious.

Sathya Sai Young Adult West Coast Conference, January 16-18, 1998, Glendale, California

The conference was coordinated by young adults from California, Washington, Colorado and Arizona. It was an opportunity for Sai youth in the West Coast Regions to get involved and get acquainted. They discussed ways to improve the young adult programs, broaden service projects, and stay on the spiritual path at this crucial time in their lives. They focused on Swami's discourses given during the World Youth Conference in India, July 1997. (Those discourses were published in *Sanathana Sarathi*, August 1997). The participants were told to read the discourses before the conference, so they would be familiar with Sai's divine message.

Divine Discourse Workshops

Saturday morning, we divided into four workshop groups, each to discuss one of the four discourses Swami gave us last summer [at the Sai World Youth Conference]. The goals were more profound than simply to review the teachings. We had to inquire, "What is he asking us to do?" "How successful are we at this?" "How can we improve?"

Keynote Address by Phyllis Krystal, YA Advisor, West Coast

Following the divine discourse workshops, Mrs. Krystal gave an inspiring talk, sharing her personal experiences with Sai Baba, and her insight into the "Sathya Sai Ceiling on Desires" program.

Regional Reports and Action Planning

At the opening and the closing of the weekend, each region met to discuss their service activities and to plan future events. Regional representatives presented their work on Friday night. Posters, summarizing their activities, were displayed throughout the Young Adult Conference.

Q and A Panel

A question and answer panel comprised of Mrs. Krystal and some young adults addressed important topics of concern for young adults.

Workshops and Service Options

The young adults had a choice to participate in a service project of painting cabins or attending one of four workshops: "Speaking from the Heart About Swami," "Dharmic (Righteous) Leadership," "Planning a Study Circle," or "Being a Role Model."

You should have a simple life and high thinking, not a high life and simple thinking.

—Sathya Sai Baba, from the World Youth Conference

Sharing

Saturday evening, Sai sharing was an hour of impromptu speeches and testimonials by young adults as to how Swami has touched their lives,

Speaking About Swami

This interactive workshop was an opportunity for all YAs to talk, think about, and practice their skills at sharing Sai Baba with an outside audience.

Nine Point Code of Conduct Treasure Hunt

This Nine Point Code of Conduct was a list of nine small group tasks from brainstorming service project ideas, to discussing the Ceiling on Desires, each one related to a point in the Code. This list of tasks was given out early in the weekend, and YAs were to complete these tasks during their free time.

Sunrise Service

After enjoying *Omkar*, *Suprabhatam* and *Nagarsankirtan* on Saturday morning, YAs participated in an interfaith service on Sunday. The theme of "Peace," was carried out through devotional songs, readings from Swami's discourses, and prayers and readings from a variety of religious traditions.

Closing Circle

To conclude our uplifting weekend, everyone stood in a circle, and each one shared briefly what they had learned. Many expressed their thankfulness for the weekend. As we went around the circle thanking Swami, it became clear that, together, we had succeeded in creating a meaningful conference, so that each was going home with a new energy and enthusiasm for living Swami's teachings.

Children's Corner

A Sixth Grade Sage

We take advantage of every opportunity that comes our way to learn the truth.

One morning, about 11:00 a.m., there appeared in the doorway of our classroom an old woman. We all gazed at her, astonished to see such a person, obviously elderly, wrinkled, bent over, leaning on a cane. How did she ever make it up to the third floor, and what was she doing there?

I finally recovered, and asked if I could help her. She introduced herself as Mrs. S. from the United Nations, here to give the children their certificates. I recalled that the students had indeed entered essays to a U.N. organization describing the problems facing the world today, and that the essays had been well-received.

I apologized to Mrs. S. for not knowing of her arrival, so that we could have met her downstairs. She proceeded to tell the class and me that it was just fine, not to worry, for she was "getting in some practice for mountain climbing this summer in Vermont."

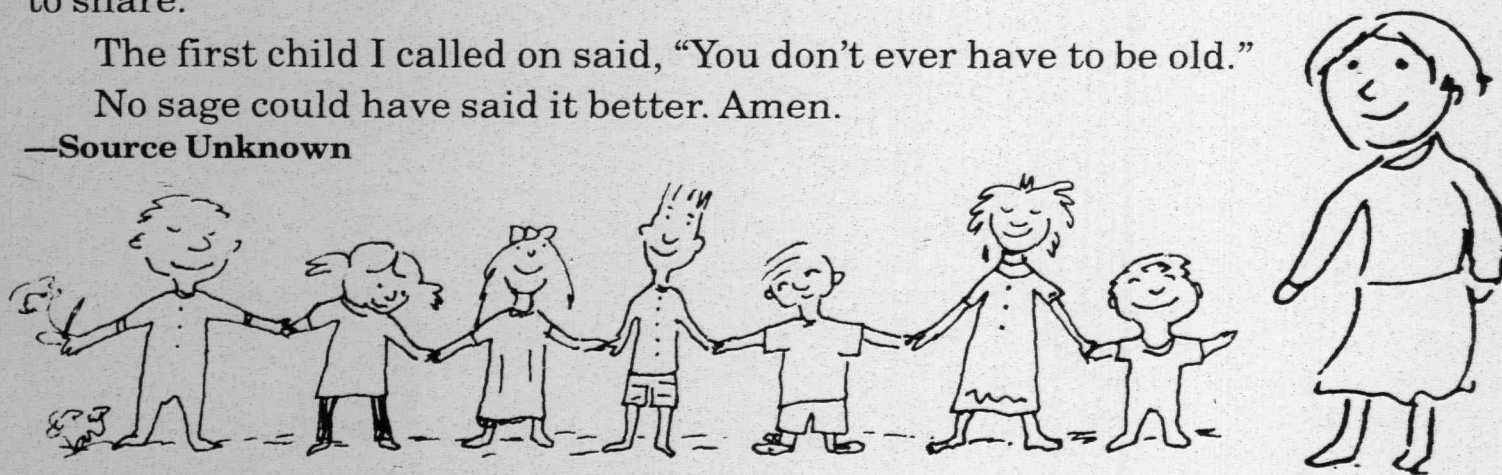
We just looked at her in awe. She then told us that she was 87-years-old and then talked about all the things she did to keep active. Then she asked us to join her and others in stopping wars and in making the U.N. work successfully. She was a dynamo.

When she left, one could feel the deep effect she had on us. I asked the class, "What did you learn just now?" Hands went up immediately, smiling faces eager to share.

The first child I called on said, "You don't ever have to be old."

No sage could have said it better. Amen.

—Source Unknown



Irrespective of age, you should always have some work to do, and do it well, so that you get joy.

—Sathya Sai Baba

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. I, Chapter 15

Ramblings

The Hypocrite and The Cobra

*The other day just outside of the city
An incident occurred worthy of your pity
A cobra bit a hypocrite, as an onlooker cried
The hypocrite just smiled—t'was the cobra that died*

—Hal Honig
New York, New York

Spirit Hands

*I hurt until I felt no more,
and couldn't have cared less.
Then little joys knocked on the door,
of my much wounded chest.
I let them in, and greeted them,
as one would a long lost friend.
They smiled through tears, and touched my soul,
with tender loving spirit hands.*

—Hanna Hamilton

If I had My Life to Live Over

If I had my life to live over, I'd make more mistakes next time. I'd relax, I'd limber up. I would be sillier than I have been this trip. I would take fewer things seriously. I would take more chances. I would climb more mountains and swim more rivers. I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would, perhaps, have more actual troubles, but I'd have fewer imaginary ones.

You see, I'm one of those people who live sensibly and sanely, hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I've had my moments, and if I had it to do over again, I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd try to have nothing else. Just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day. I've been one of those persons who never goes anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat and a parachute. If I had to do it again, I'd travel lighter than I have.

If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would go to more dances. I would ride more merry-go-rounds. I would pick more daisies.

—Nadine Stair, 86 years young
Louisville, Kentucky

Baba Tells of Two Passings

For a human being, the *Atma* (Self) is the master. It is the power of the Self which enables the senses to perform their different functions like seeing, hearing, etc. You have, therefore, to realize that you are the *Atma*, not the body.

The Passing of Karunyananda

Many of you may know what happened. Karunyananda had been with Swami for 40 years. He was a centenarian. But now, his body has merged into the five elements. For the passing of any person, the time, the place, and the circumstances have to come together. Here in this hall [at Prasanthi Nilayam] the recitation of the *Vedas* is going on. The holy rite, *Jnana Yajna*, is being performed. He was listening to all these sacred things; he went to sleep at night and passed away in his sleep. When he came to me a week ago, I asked him, "Karunyananda, what is it you want?" He replied, "I need nothing; I only want to merge in your lotus feet. There is no purpose in my continuing."

I asked him why he was speaking in this manner. He replied, "What more is there for me to enjoy in this life? I have experienced everything. I have stayed and moved with Swami for 40 years." He came with me to Kashmir, Simla, Gaya and Prayag; he came with me to all those places, and wherever I went. Staying with me, he passed away with a sense of fulfillment.

This kind of contentment should come to everyone. One should not end up with a feeling of frustration.

Ask yourself the question, "Who is

the richest man in the world?" It is not men like Tata or Birla [two extremely wealthy men in India.] Who is truly the richest man? He who has the greatest satisfaction in life is the richest man. He who has the most desires is the poorest man. To be free of all desires is the mark of greatness.

All kinds of things are happening all the time in this world. Though you may not know it, births and deaths are like jokes to me. When someone comes to me and wails, "My husband has passed away," I remark, "*Santhosham*" (happiness, joy, contentment). The widow may remark, "How can you be happy if my husband has passed away?" All events are the same to me, I am always happy. One lady comes to me and says, "I am suffering from a stomachache." I observe, "Very happy" (*chaala santhosham*).

Padmanabha Sastri, the temple priest, also came to me 40 years ago. He is known to all of you as he has been performing worship (*poojas*) in the temple every morning. He was engaged in worship morning and night. He also passed away on the same day.

Both Karunyananda and Padmanabha Sastri had been with me for 40 years. They left their bodies when the end came.

Be Ready for the End

Bodies come and go in this manner; they are transient like passing clouds. No physical body is permanent. In human existence you must be prepared for the end at any time. It is like holding still when a photographer wants to take

your picture. If you are not steady, the picture will be blurred. The photographer may give you a warning but, so far as death is concerned, you cannot know when the end may come. That is all according to divine will. Be always ready, you cannot know when the call will come.

Unfortunately, in the world today, few care to listen to the voice of God. They are guided by the prompting of their own ego. This is the mark of the *Kali Yuga* (the most difficult of all eras). All are victims of egoism, so much so, that they have doubts about every word of the Divine. They don't listen, not even to good counsel and, therefore, suffer evil consequences.

During the past three months, I had advised Padmanabha Sastri to realize that he is diabetic. "The wound on your leg is getting worse. Ultimately, amputation may be unavoidable; you are neglecting your leg. Heed my words," I was repeatedly warning him. But ignoring Swami's warning, he continued consuming sweets.

Today, before he died, his blood sugar rose to 400, and he had a severe heart attack. You can see what happens when Swami's warnings are ignored. If they acted upon my advice, it would be good

for them and their families, and I would be happy.

From time to time, I have sung a song about the consequences of people behaving foolishly by not listening to my words. The result is that one comes to grief. This is not proper. You have to heed these words of advice and follow them. My advice is not for my sake, but for your own good.

I shall soon be reaching my 72nd year. In all those years I have never entertained a single selfish thought [there were cheers from the assembled crowd.] Whatever I tell you is for your good, not for my benefit; whatever I do is always for your good. Not recognizing this, many are deluding themselves. What is the use of feeling regret at the end? You must be on your guard from the beginning.

Chant the Lord's name at all times. Understand the role of the intellect. I expect that some will derive benefit from this discourse.

—Sathya Sai Baba

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November 1997, pp 298-299

Bhagavan concluded the discourse with the devotional *bhajan*, "Rama, Kodanda Rama. . . ." The entire gathering joined him in joyous singing.



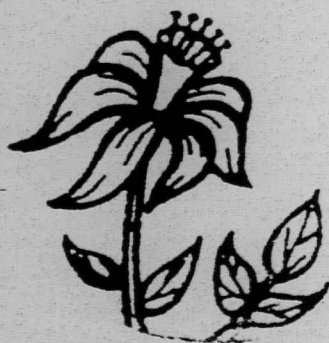
Swami is fond of telling devotees, *Long life, happy life, healthy life*. Once, in an interview, Swami said those words to a devotee. She responded by saying, "Oh please Swami, not a long life." Obviously, the woman did not wish to be caught up in the slings and arrows of an outrageously tedious existence. But her response caused Baba to make a face at her that was many times worse than any verbal scolding.

The painful lesson was learned. We cannot and should not dictate the time of our own demise, that is the domain of God; and we mortals must follow His instructions and not interfere with His sacred work.

—From a Devotee's Journal

The Chrysalis*

*We're never finished products
No matter how long we live.
There's always something we can add,
Like learning to forgive.
It isn't all that easy
To release a long-held grudge.
For years it's been a part of us.
It doesn't want to budge.
I often wonder if that is why
Some of us live so long
In what seems needless suffering.
There's still need to right a wrong?
Perhaps we're given extra time
To clear our heart and mind
Of many thoughts so negative
That peace is hard to find.
Forgiving past offenders
For the harm they did to you
Opens up a channel that
Will let His love come through.
Like a butterfly lies dormant
Awaiting to expand
So waits love's own perfection
In the chrysalis of man.*



—Alora M. Knight
Gardenerville, Nevada

*Chrysalis The capsule-encased caterpillar from which a butterfly develops.

Death—The Dress of Life

My family had known of Sathya Sai Baba for many years before my dad's first trip to see Baba in 1990, which initiated our physical connection. The spiritual journey recently ended for my mother in the sacred event of her passing. I can recall vividly, our last visit to the hospital. It didn't take long for the doctor to tell us that she needed to stay there, and the only thing they could do was a last effort at chemotherapy. He offered us little hope. Mom was much too weak to withstand the chemo. As the doctor walked out of the small sterile room to give us time to decide, the distressed look on his face told us everything. Mom was calm and ready to do anything. My dad had one thing to say about the chemo, which was, if any of us felt that this procedure should take place, he would have to leave. He said he couldn't watch her being treated by that procedure again.

His only request was for her to be home when her time came. We all sat there staring blankly, while our minds went over the options that didn't really exist. I pondered over dad's words. It must take amazing strength to follow what is in your heart at such a time. They say, "Behind every great man, there is a great woman," and dad was losing his.

We were home; it was a few days following that last hospital visit. Dad and I found ourselves rushing to Mom's side; she had just awakened and was crying. She was so frail, it took all her energy to speak to us. She said that she had heard Baba and he was coming for her in about three days. She was crying, not for herself, but because she felt that her young

est daughter, who was only 16, was too young for her mother to leave.

Daddy gave her reassurance, saying that my little sister wasn't hers but actually belongs to Sai, and that he'd always be looking after her. My mom never again mentioned her recovery and seemed to accept her impending demise with calm equanimity.

Later, sitting across the kitchen table from my mother, I listlessly tried to peel an orange, but there was no strength. My dad walked by and advised me to wash it first. Seeing my plight, he snatched it from me and gracefully washed the orange for me. I don't know why, but that simple act pushed me over the edge. I sat there, powerless to overcome my own tears. My mom, in all innocence, asked why I was crying. "Because I'm going to miss you," I choked out. "Come here," she beckoned and waited for me to come into her arms. As though a queen with the utmost compassion for her people, she consoled me.

The next day was my parents' 27th anniversary and the third day as foretold in the dream. Baba didn't take her that day, but she spoke of having seen him through a white veil. He told her to clean the white veil by "washing" it over and over. He wanted it spotless. "If that's what he wants, that's what he'll get," she notified us, as though she was ready to take on the world.

That weekend saw an endless stream of visitors through our home. We actually had to post a note on the front door asking visitors not to knock but to just come in. As though caring for an infant,

my duties to her became a 24-hour job. The wholly absorbing task of serving her left me with little time to brood over the situation.

People and conversations whirled around me. I found it difficult to tear myself away from her side, even for a five-minute shower. Not only did she refuse all medications and stop taking food, but actually gave instructions on how I was to care for her, sometimes speaking of herself as a third person. She seemed intricately in tune with a level of understanding above ours.

She received her visitors with an air of majesty, seemingly unaware of her own withered condition. My dad stayed by her side the whole time, giving her moral support.

More than 200 people passed through our small home. The house overflowed with the love that they brought. They came to console, but were themselves consoled. Her love was like a magnet, drawing them to stay, sometimes even for hours. It was a strange phenomenon, for normally in such a situation, people are anxious to end a visit with a dying person as quickly as possible. All her relationships, even the longstanding bitter ones, became healed in that intimate time people spent with her.

Our home was the ideal setting for such healings; they never could have been possible inside the hospital. Her fearless and loving state was inspirational to the many who came. She was purity incarnate. The more she lost physically the more she gained spiritually; it was something that not everyone could see or understand.

If you had known my mom before her illness, she wouldn't even have had a con-

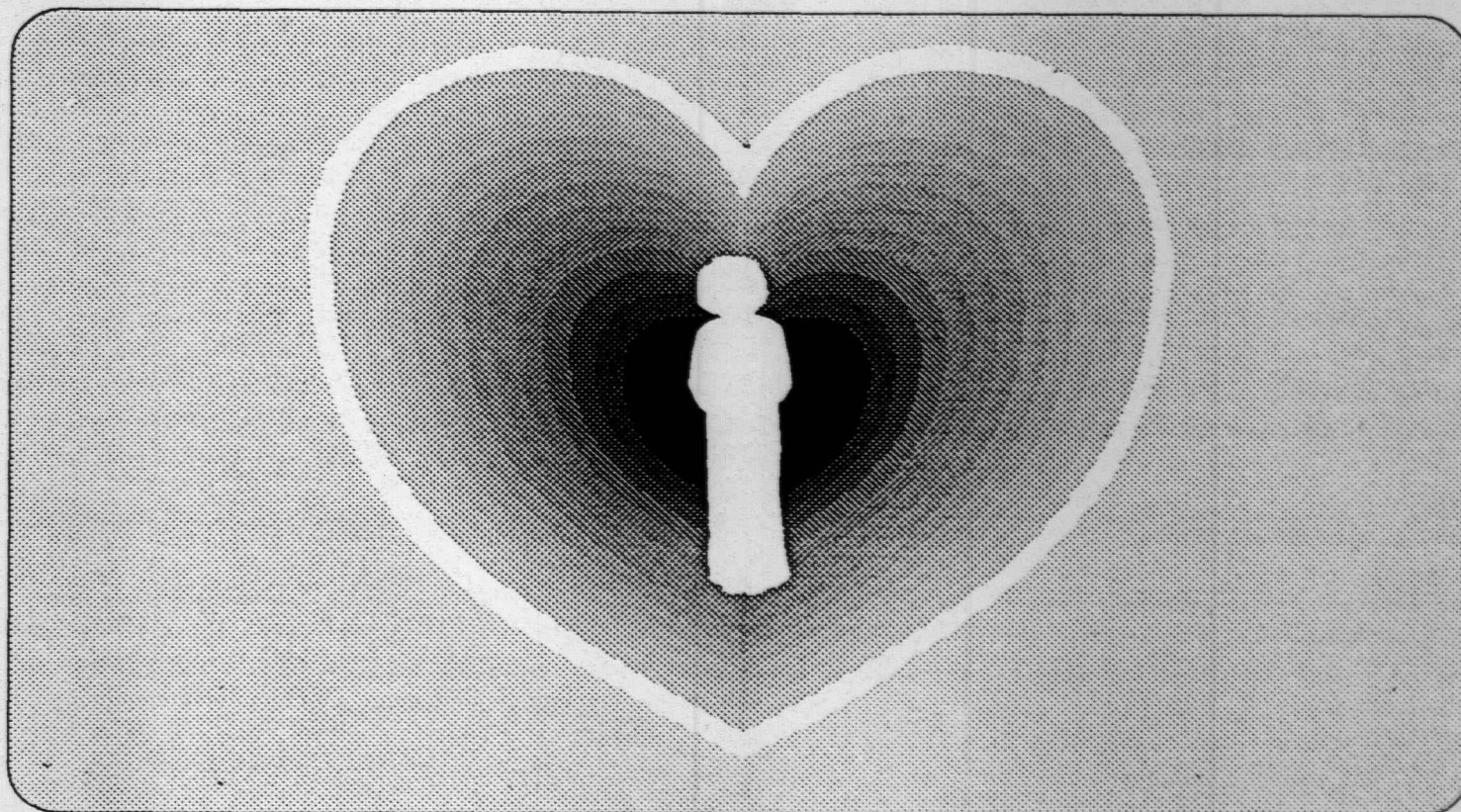
versation with you about death. Now she faced it like a champion, putting death to shame and shining a new light on many of us onlookers.

And what about the pain that accompanies cancer? The doctors were baffled; her head was full of tumors, but she never had a headache. Our lives seemed to be infused with miracles.

Even the moment of her departure was of planned perfection. It had been two long weeks since that last visit with the doctor. She continued to give reports of seeing and hearing God, and that the veil had been lifted. That evening, no one visited as they normally did each day after work. Even the phone lay silent and listened while we sang her favorite devotional songs. A major change in her breathing signaled that the end was near. Just the family was present. Dad, my little sister, my brother, his wife and I gathered around her bed in song. Slowly her breathing lagged and at 6:20, she took her last breath—without fear or pain—as if she were being reborn. Pierced with love, the environment around this transitional event allowed her to die without fear. When there is less fear, there is less pain, which in turn lessens the need for artificial interference. We had done the right thing by keeping her home.

In many ways, her passing was a gift. Even as you are reading her story, you are receiving a little of that gift. What she gave us was a powerful lesson on how to die. I never knew it could be like that, nor did the many others who were so inspired. . . .

Swami assures us, *That which is subject to birth, is subject to death.* So why can't we recognize death as part of the life process?



*Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glint on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you wake in the morning hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush.
Of quiet birds in circling flight,
I am the soft starlight at night.
Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there; I do not sleep.*

—An Anonymous American Indian Prayer
Seattle Post-Intelligence, Aug. 19, 1981

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Swami assures us, *That which is subject to birth, is subject to death.* So why can't we recognize death as part of the life process?

Some ancient civilizations had dedicated their entire lives preparing to die; while we are dedicated to prolonging life, often at the cost of the quality of death. And because death is often seen as a failure of modern achievement, that makes it harder to die [with dignity]. As we avoid death, fear increases, thus creating a society that is uncomfortable in the face of death. And when it comes to dying—a truly critical period—many people are separated from spiritual guidance and have their dignity stripped away. Redefining death as a conscious act means a moment that can be sacred when prepared for and not resisted.

Recently, I was in India and had the good fortune of speaking with our

beloved Sai. He addressed my concerns of my deceased mother in a reprimanding manner, questioning me as to why I worry about such things. He gave the message, *Death is the dress of life.*

Pondering these divine words, I knew it was true, for what meaning would life have if not accompanied by death? Life is our journey; birth is the entry and death is the exit. Of these three, we need have no fear, for God is with us constantly, and he is our very being. Sai Baba said, *Everyone has to make his exit someday; that moment should not be a moment of anguish. One should depart gracefully with a smile and a bow.*

—Jennifer Racquel Morelock

An Indian Prayer for Survivors

Do not stand at my grave and weep.

I am not there; I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow.

I am the diamond glint on snow.

I am the sunlight on ripened grain.

I am the gentle autumn rain.

When you wake in the morning hush,

I am the swift uplifting rush.

Of quiet birds in circling flight,

I am the soft starlight at night.

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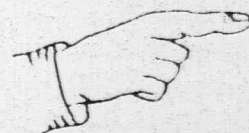
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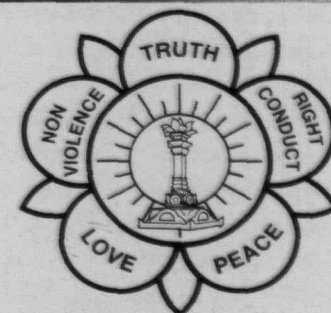
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Sathya Sai

Service Opportunities

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MID-ATLANTIC SERVICE CONFERENCE: AN EXAMPLE OF LOVE IN ACTION

Over 100 people gathered in New Jersey on April 26 for a full-day conference on "The Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba and Community Service." The event featured workshops, reports on service activities from around the Mid-Atlantic Region, and inspirational talks on personal experiences of Sai service.

An attempt to respond to the changing face of service in the region, the conference was designed to meet the current needs of Mid-Atlantic Sai Centers. "Reports indicate," says the Regional Service Coordinator, "there is a tremendous amount of service activity in our region, and participation by Center members is on the increase." Participants in service activities, he says, have gone beyond the "We know it's good to do service" stage

and now need to look at project-related difficulties and resolve them.

"The focus of the conference," the coordinator continues, "was to examine ways in which we could improve our present projects, and help people who have not yet joined Center activities to begin their involvement."

During the four area service reports, the emphasis was not only on what the region was presently doing, but on how it could improve and do better. These afternoon presentations pointed out the importance of creating and maintaining a sense of Sai brotherhood and unity among Center volunteers.

The workshops, held earlier in the day, had also discussed this process of bringing unity and love into

Center projects and had helped those present to gain a better understanding of Sai Baba's teachings. At a workshop on children doing service, participants discussed ways of cultivating the spirit of helpfulness in the home and the importance of parents as models of active service involvement. Attendees at a workshop on Baba as an example of service heard spellbinding tales of His helping prepare food for the poor and aiding the sick during the early days of His ashram. Other topics included basic teachings of Sai Baba on community service, beginning participation in service, service as a spiritual practice, developing unity in the Sai Organization.

The young adults held a work-

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Service is the adoration of the Lord as viswa-virataswarupa, as having the multifaceted form and immanence of the entire universe. The Vedas [Hindu scriptures] describe Him as thousand-headed, thousand-eyed, and thousand-footed. The thousands of hands and eyes and feet that have come here [to Prasanthi Nilayam] for the festivals are all His, the Lord's. Worship Him; that is the purpose of your service. And He is none other than your own self.

Get up, place the rosary in its bag, and engage yourselves in relieving distress; that is the true spiritual path. Do not waste all your years with stone images, pictures, or idols; learn to see in every living, vital, active person the embodiment of all energy, all beauty, all beneficence, namely God.

∞ **Sathya Sai Baba**

"Thought for the Day";

1,008 Gems from the Sri Sai Manasarovar

Mid-Atlantic Service Conference

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shop on the importance of service and a story-sharing group discussion on service activities as a catalyst for inner change. Two girls gave a beautiful report on young adult service activities in the region. Their talk, inspiring for both adults and young adults, showed that, beyond a doubt, the young adults are moving forward and getting involved in the service wing of the Sai Organization.

In the course of the conference, talks were given by three guest speakers: National Coordinator for Young Adults Hal Honig, the regional Vice President, and the UN (NY) Center's Bowery Food Service coordinator. They all spoke to the

group about how their service experiences had helped them on the spiritual path. Then several other devotees came forward to acknowledge the incredible efforts the three individuals had made in sharing Sai love in the service of their communities, and the guest speakers were recognized for their "many years of Sai service," each receiving a desk clock engraved with the symbol of the Sai Organization.

In addition to the workshops, reports, and talks, conference attendees engaged in two on-site service projects. Almost 780 sandwiches were prepared for distribution to the poor in Atlantic City. Volunteers also packaged a mountain of clean clothes collected during a recent regionwide clothing drive. Afterwards, Center members took these packages back home for the needy in their areas.

Throughout the day, devotees learned what it means when Baba says service to society is a spiritual practice and should be looked at that way. Other vital lessons included the need for individual commitment in service and the importance of acting not just out of duty, but with love.

"It was clear to all those who attended this conference," says the Regional Service Coordinator, "that we must continue with more intensity, yet all the while deepen our understanding of His methods and teachings on how we can practice and maintain His love and unity. We have a tremendous amount of Sai service in our region, and with His help and love, He will continue to guide us in these efforts."

~ Adapted from *Sai Sarathi*,
June 1997

SAI IN SERVICE

A new column featuring stories of Swami in the act of service

Swami has said many times, "My life is My message." As a child growing up in Bangalore, India, in the early 1960s, I spent my vacations in Prasanthi Nilayam and had a chance to experience this message firsthand. Since there were few devotees then, my family had many unique opportunities to interact with Swami at close quarters and to learn innumerable life lessons by watching and listening to Him as He went about his usual activities, including His community service work. One such occasion that still remains vivid in my mind shows how Swami pays attention to every minute detail while doing service.

The incident happened during Dasara, a nine-day festival, when we would stay at Prasanthi for 15 days and join in the celebration. On those days, Swami would serve food and distribute clothing to the poor from the surrounding areas. This activity would begin at 10 A.M. and would go until 1 P.M. or 2 P.M. For

the entire time, Swami would tirelessly serve everyone in person, making sure that each had been fed well.

This particular time I saw a woman with a baby on her lap, sitting amongst the people on line, waiting to be served. Swami walked up to her and asked her the age of the child. The woman replied that he was a year old. Then Swami called to some of us who were standing there and told us that since the child was too young to eat the rice being served, we should bring a cup of milk for him. No sooner had Swami spoken than we all ran quickly to the kitchen to get the milk, eager to show Him how enthusiastic we were to serve Him. However, by the time one of us had brought the milk back and handed it to the mother, He had moved ahead to serve others. But, before the mother could feed the child, He suddenly stopped in His tracks, hurried back to her, and took the cup. He touched the milk, turned

to us, and said, "The milk is too hot for the child; it will burn his mouth." He then asked for another cup, which someone brought to Him. What happened next will always stay firmly etched in my mind. I can still see Him standing there patiently, pouring the milk from one cup to the other, cooling it till it was the right temperature. After giving the milk back to the mother, He turned to us and remarked, "Serve at the time when needed, in the most beneficial way possible, paying attention to the Sai in all."

~ **Geetha Ram**

South Bethesda, MD, Sai Center

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SERVICE TO THE ELDERLY

An edited version of a presentation given by Charles and Edith Gregory at the Northeast Region's Conference on Selfless Service on September 6, 1997. A portion of Edith's words are presented here as a first installment.

When we joined the Sai Organization in 1989, we learned quickly that Sai Baba urges all of His devotees to do service as a spiritual discipline. As we had come with a deep desire in our hearts to thoroughly study Swami's teachings and implement them in our lives, we were determined to obey, as well as to please, Him.

We live in a rural area in northern New Hampshire, where service opportunities are fewer than in big cities. The nearest Sai Center at the time was about 120 miles away. To achieve our goal without wasting many hours driving back and forth, we decided to develop our own service projects, just for the two of us. So we started making inquiries to find out about local needs. Soon we began a couple of food delivery projects, but after a year we felt as if Swami wanted us to work more directly with the elderly and were led to go to a nursing home 20 miles down the road. The home had a good-size volunteer program, but no one who visited with the residents one-on-one as we offered to do. We were especially interested in seeing residents without family or friends nearby.

The recreation coordinator liked our idea and was eager to implement it. She prepared a list of residents she considered suitable for the project and reviewed with us their recent history. She also acquainted us with all the nursing home rules applicable to our activities. Finally, we were permitted to see the residents.

At first, my husband and I went together on these visits, and all the residents who were still somewhat alert seemed to respond well to us. But to make the most of our time, we started separate visits and achieved equally good results.

I am a nurturer by nature, and

spending time with these residents was very enjoyable for me. While I found it challenging at the start to arouse their attention, it was very easy to love them. Swami was teaching me to forget myself and focus strictly on Him when looking at my elderly friends. I did just that, and it always brought light into our little get-togethers.

I was soon able to get close to each one of them, becoming their friend and confidante. At times they shared their worries and problems with me, and occasionally I was able to provide help indirectly by discussing their problems with the recreation coordinator or the administrator, who were unaware of these.

At times we talked about God and dying, a topic that was always initiated by them and that they found comforting.

The nursing home staff observed the results of our visits with great appreciation and sometimes with sheer amazement at the changes that occurred. Yet we never thought about results, only about obeying and pleasing Swami.

When I first visited Barbara, she was known to be quite impatient, used to throwing things at the nurses, even hitting them, or she would yell or not communicate at all. I must admit that I was a bit worried and silently asked Swami what I could possibly do in such a situation. He counseled me to find her positive points.

At age 90 and in a wheelchair, she still had a strong will and considerable determination. She was interested in everything, read a lot and, most of all, loved to talk about her church, her past church activities, and the little stories she had written for her prayer group. I became Barbara's girl Friday, and we had a wonderful time together. The

nurses soon remarked how patient and kind she had become.

Beula was totally different. She presented a strange mixture of dementia, humor, and eloquence. She had no one left in the world and was very grateful for any friendly word coming her way. A stranger saying hello was immediately identified as an old family friend, and she loved reminiscing about her family and friends and pets she once had.

Some of Beula's stories could become quite "spicy," and I felt uncomfortable listening to them. Every time she reached a "spicy" point, I would put my forefinger on my lips, say "Shhh," and then ask her an unrelated question to gently maneuver her around the obstacle. One day, when Beula again reached one of those spots to be avoided, she suddenly stared at me, put her finger to her lips, said "Shhh," laughed with glee, and changed the subject herself. That was the end of her "spicy" stories. She often commented, even to the nurses who might drop by, on how we understood each other well—like no one else.

At other times, it was obvious that Beula was frightened by something invisible. She would grab my hand and beg me not to leave her just then. I would hold her hand and stroke it gently while silently concentrating on Swami until she squeezed my hand and told me that all was well. Then I could leave.

Marleen was an unusual case in the nursing home. She was still young, barely 50. We were told she was dying of multiple sclerosis and had only a short time to live.

She had been an abused child and wife and had become an alcoholic. Her husband had divorced her when her deteriorating physi-

(Continued on page 4)

YOUNG ADULT SEVA AT THE WORLD YOUTH CONFERENCE

Last Summer's World Youth Conference (WYC) provided me with an opportunity to experience service in its purest form. The conference brought together 12,000 young adults from 66 different countries—all united as one and striving towards the common goal of spreading, by personal example, the five human values of truth, right action, peace, love, and non-violence. We were Swami's warriors, fighting against the evil that has embedded itself in our world. Above all, we were all children, brothers and sisters, having one common father.

I arrived at Prasanthi Nilayam several weeks before the conference. During those weeks, I was actively involved in washing dishes in the Western canteen. Since the kitchen is run by volunteers, it is in constant need of help. I began by washing floors and wiping tables after lunch and dinner. I found I enjoyed this activity.

One day I walked past the back of the kitchen and saw the dishwashing room, basically a six- by eight-foot hollow cinder block with sinks and a drain pipe. For those of you who have never seen the cooking pots, which come rolling one after the other into the room at meal time, they are BIG. I knew I never wanted to go near them! And I told myself I would never do service in this room but would just stick to the easier task of wiping down tables.

Swami, however, had something different in mind for my soul. Two days later, His divine game taught me a lesson. When I walked into the kitchen area, the head volunteers directed me towards the dishwashing room. From the doorway, I saw only one free space. To my dismay, it was right in front of the huge cooking pots. What Swami had in store for me I did not know, but I saw my responsibility as doing the service of need, not the

service of convenience. Surprisingly, two hours later the hardships of the work involved were forgotten and I found a sense of accomplishment filling my heart. I had taken a small, humble part in helping my fellow man. For the next two weeks, I deliberately went to this same room for service. I was enjoying the work that I had, at one time, thought to be undesirable.

When the conference began, the U.S. and Canadian delegates were asked to be *seva dals* (crowd control volunteers) for the events in Poornachandra Hall, the first time such an honor had been bestowed on foreigners.

Our goal was to be the best *seva dals* ever in Prasanthi Nilayam. As we smiled and poured love on the masses who we were assigned to keep in order, something amazing happened. I found that the more loving I was, the more willing the crowds were to follow my directions. Rather than being abrupt and giving no reasons for my actions, I made sure that I explained myself when I instructed my fellow del-

egates. For this consideration, they were very thankful, and gratitude poured from their eyes.

Serving as a *seva dal* had a profound impact on my life. As I greeted the people entering the hall, I learned to beam happiness and pour love on whoever passed in front of me. They, in turn, no matter what their previous mood, returned my love as a mirror reflects an image. When I looked at these people, I did not judge them by their race, expression, or appearance. Somehow I was able to go past these illusions and instead see the inherent divinity that resides in us all. This newfound ability was the gift Swami gave me during the conference. It was greater than any materialization, more potent than any interview, and more powerful than words.

Service is the gift of God. We have the choice of staring at the gift wrap and *wondering* what is inside, or of unwrapping the gift and *knowing* what is inside.

~ Aaron Daub
Medford, NJ

Service to Elderly

Continued from page 3

cal condition required professional nursing care, and her children did not want to see her. She was very bitter and did not want to talk to anyone.

Charles and I wondered how we would fare with Marleen. We felt nervous, but the recreation coordinator was anxious to have us meet her in the hope that we might be able to reach her.

We found out that Marleen had some artistic talent and, armed with our prayers for Swami's help, we visited her together. As soon as she saw us, she smiled, started talking, and just opened up as if we were her long-awaited best friends.

She appeared to receive much joy and even some peace from our visits. We always visited her together, on our scheduled days and in between, which happened more and more frequently, as her condition appeared to be weakening. The staff knew she was always waiting for us, and they were astonished at the results of this relationship.

Marleen died 11 months later. Her family came to her deathbed and thanked us profusely for the love we had brought into the last few months of her tragic life. All we could do was to thank Swami for letting His love for Marleen flow through us.

(to be continued next issue)

~ Edith Gregory
Ithaca, NY