

Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA

Dedicated with Love and Devotion to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

"Divine Connection with the Animals"



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Sai's Message

Expand Your Hearts to Include All Beings

It is easy to give up spiritual discipline (sadhana); it is a task to stick to it. But there is no use climbing just one step; ascend higher and higher into the purer air. Climb until you see the hills and valleys as one flatness, all the ups and downs as of no



concern. ... You are a hero, a lion in the forest, only when you neither exult nor droop, whether good fortune or bad assails you.

... Each of you are the pet children of four mothers: Truth, Righteousness, Peace, and Love. Do not ridicule them by your acts; honor

them and be grateful to them. Do not claim Injustice, Ill-Discipline, Falsehood, and Evil Behavior as your mothers, instead! Expand your heart, taking in all humanity into the circle of your kin, even the birds, beasts, worms, insects, trees, and plants. The Vedic prayer asks that the aspirant's heart may be expanded: 'Brhathe karomi' (I make myself vast)! The vastest is Brahman (God), which word comes from the same root, brh, meaning "to enlarge." (October 9, 1970)

Spirituality does not mean performance of ritual worship. It calls for the removal of the animal traits in man. Only then will sacred feelings arise in him. That is real spirituality. (November 23, 1993)

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Sai Gita: A Mystifying Tale of Unmatched Love

Sai Gita, Swami's elephant, passed on from this world on May 22, 2007, after a divine association with Swami of some forty-five years. We include here some inspiring anecdotes of Sai Gita's life, adapted from the January 2007 edition of *Heart2Heart* e-journal, Radio Sai Global Harmony website.

A Day Like No Other

This happened in the early 1990s, on a serene morning in the hallowed hamlet of Putta-



parthi. As the sun cleared the dispiriting clutter of the night with its pleasantly penetrating rays of soothing morning light, Bhagavan, with his divine *darshan* (appearance before those assembled), had filled the devotees' hearts with the warmth of his love. The *bhajans* (group devotional singing) ended as usual at 9:30, and Swami retired to his room. The ashram was again enveloped in powerful silence.

As the devotees dispersed, carrying the serenity of a blissful morning in the chalice of their hearts, their minds and senses were submerged with only one thought: When

can I next have the Lord's darshan? To hear the darshan music once more waft through the silent settings of Prasanthi Mandir

and still their bliss-seeking souls, they knew they would have to wait at least five hours.

This would be true, had it been any other day. But on this morning they were in for a pleasant surprise. At 11:30, quite unexpectedly, they heard the siren of the police pilot that precedes Swami's convoy! Suddenly, excitement was everywhere, as if the ashram were in one instant catapulted into fifth gear. Swami had started out on one of his unscheduled drives, when at times he would go as far as the super-specialty hospital, located about five kilometers away.

But where exactly was he going that day? Would he visit the hostel? Or the hospital? Or the school? Or was it just a drive? The guessing game was on in everyone's mind. Both sides of the road were bursting with devotees craning their necks so as not to miss this bonus blessing of the day. All the students from Easwaramma High School and the hostel lined up on either side of the road. As his car neared the hostel, it slowed, and Swami's hands raised in blessing for all the beaming faces jockeying to gain a precious glimpse.

Sai Gita Pleads with Her Master

At that time, Sai Gita, Swami's elephant, had a huge vaulted-roof enclosure, right in front of the senior boys' hostel. Apparently, upon hearing the sound of the siren for Swami's motorcade, she rushed toward the gate, and had it not been for her caretaker, she would have crushed it. She was out on the road even before the boys lined up. She seemed unduly excited that day, making it difficult for her mahout to hold her in check.

Swami's car approached, and Sai Gita moved forward. All had seen Sai Gita raise her trunk in salutation whenever she saw Swami, and they witnessed that day an unusual scene. Instead, her stocky trunk lay heavily on the hood of the car, and she refused to budge, despite many urgings. She flapped her ears at an alarming rate and seemed disturbed.

The glass window beside Swami slid down noiselessly, and before anyone could crowd around, her trunk slid slickly off the

hood, into the window, and ever so gently touched Swami's cheek and hair. It was such a delicate, charming, sweet sight. A silence descended over the gathering. None wanted to miss even a millisecond of this divine play. Something subtle transpired between the two, perhaps a message understood only by the truly pure-hearted, and she slowly withdrew her trunk from the window of the car. Next, at a signal from Swami, the boy seated in the front seat swiftly opened the door.

Swami stepped out of the car, and immediately the flapping ears stilled to a gentle wave. Sai Gita undulated backward as Swami moved toward her, he murmuring endearments while her trunk reached to caress his feet. He touched her, and the ones closest could see a ripple run across her huge frame as she rejoiced at the blessing. Only the ones in the closest proximity could hear the sweet conversation between Sai and his beloved Gita. Swami, in his sweet Telugu, spoke to her softly.

"Come on, Gita, I have to go," he said, patting her trunk.

She protested softly, and her trunk rose to rest on the hood again. It was a very firm "No!"

"I want to go, Gita; come on, come on, move," said Swami, reaching up to stroke her cheek. And suddenly a diamond glistened, a dewdrop coalesced from her love for him, a silent expression of her feelings: a tear found its way down the very cheek upon which his hand rested. As students and devotees watched, more tears coursed down, wetting his hand. He looked up at her and

nodded understandingly. Her ears stood still, unmoving, her massive domed head drooping.

“Okay, okay, I will not go!” said Swami sympathetically.

Immediately the ears moved a whisker. She had not stirred an inch. Perhaps she did not want to break the contact. Perhaps she did not want her Lord to remove his hand. She stood motionless, with her head bowed, listening to her master.

“Go, go back to your shed,” said Swami, patting her, then lowering his hand. She shook her head gently—another big “No.”

“Will you go back if I return to the ashram?” asked Swami.

She stepped back a fraction—but only a fraction—and her trunk still lay on the hood.

“Okay, okay, I will not go. I am going back to the ashram. Are you happy?” he asked her.

She visibly trembled with joy and replied in her own language in the affirmative. He, of course, understood.

“Good girl, good girl,” said Swami.

Sai Overpowered by Sai Gita’s Love

He then turned to the students and accepted a handkerchief. Turning back to her, he wiped her tears. Looking at the boys again, he said aloud casually, “I had planned to go to Brindavan (Bangalore) today.”

The words came out of the blue! Dumbstruck, the boys just stared at him. The exhilaration with which they were enjoying the divine romance vaporized! The boys just blinked, for want of a better expression.

“Swami was going to Brindavan? And none of us knew? No message, no hint whatsoever. We would have lost Swami?” All the boys stood there, with their hands folded and heads baffled.

His gaze ran over all the boys. Using the same handkerchief to wipe his hand, Swami continued, “I wanted to go quietly without much ado, but look at her.” His eyes glanced at her, and so did another hundred. “She knew it, she sensed it. She somehow figured out Swami was leaving, and she was crying, poor thing!” He looked back at her, his eyes tracing her trunk, which was now at his feet. Some of the boys dropped their gaze and saw that she had gently moved aside the robe resting on the ground and was caressing the Lotus Feet. He gently yet firmly pushed her, and she withdrew her worship.

“See, see!” he commented, looking at the boys as he sat in the car. “She loves Swami so much that she can feel Swami’s feelings. She came to Swami when she was a small baby. So many years have passed, but see? Her love has only increased—expansion love. That is devotion.”

The Sacred Saga Begins...

It was on a trip with a few devotees to the Muddumalai forest in 1962 that Swami first noticed the tender and tiny toy of joy that Sai Gita was then. His love and affection for the infant elephant, who had lost her mother immediately after birth, was phenomenal. When the forest officers offered the elephant calf to Swami, he gladly accepted.

Soon the little elephant arrived in Puttaparthi, escorted by four Sai volunteers

in an airy and comfy vehicle. Since then the motherless child has never missed her parents. In fact, the love and warmth she has received, no other being in the whole animal kingdom—nay, the living kingdom—can dream of. She was blessed with a Mother who made all other mothers in the world pale by comparison.

Yes, with Sai Gita and Swami, from the beginning it has been a sweet mother-child relationship in every way. It was Swami who named her, fed and fondled her everyday, found medical experts to check on her, appointed people and allotted tasks to take care of her every need, and as a hardly three-foot-high cute kid, she followed Swami everywhere, even into the interview room!

Years later, Swami confirmed this to Sri B. N. Narasimha Murthy when he said, “What you have seen is nothing; she used to come to my room along with me!” Her first living space was, in fact, right next to Swami’s bedroom.

A small shed with a thick bed of sand was constructed, attached to the Prasanthi *mandir* (temple) on the western wall, and Swami could see her anytime from his bedroom. Sai Gita grew, enveloped in his loving and guarding grace, into a disciplined and devoted soul. She was an example to emulate even as a youngster.

Daily Appointment with God

Recalling the fun’n’frolic days of Sai Gita, Mrs. Gita Mohan Ram, who came to Swami as early as 1943, says,

“I have wonderful memories of Sai Gita, the baby elephant, when she was first

brought to Puttaparthi. We, the children, would follow her everywhere, in the days of old, when hardly a few hundred people would be present in the ashram. We were always amazed at her one-pointed devotion to Swami and her excitement as soon as she could sense his presence even from a distance. Swami, in those days, would quite often visit her shed, and she would know Swami was coming even before we had spotted him.

“She would be up early in the morning at three, and having been taken for a bath in the River Chitravati by the then caretaker, Murali, she would arrive looking very neat with the *namam* and *kumkum* (sacred symbols drawn in holy ash and red sandalwood paste) on her forehead, to run around the Prasanthi Nilayam mandir. With us behind her, she circumambulated the sanctum sanctorum three times every morning. After this, she would wait patiently for Swami to come out near the lotus circle of the old days (where the student Vedam group now sits), and as soon as she spotted Swami, she would spring forward to garland him and touch his beloved feet with her trunk.”

“This never changed over the years,” Sri Pedda Reddy, her most recent caretaker, confided, “even though her agility, with age, got reduced. The first thing she did whenever she got a chance to be in his presence was touch his feet.”

A Match Made in Heaven

In the early 1960s, the regular evening ‘appointment’ of Swami with Sai Gita was a sight that devotees looked forward to with

great anticipation and elation. She would wait at the gate on the ladies' side (where Swami's car now enters Sai Kulwant Hall), and if for some reason darshan was delayed, she would get very impatient. Twisting and twirling her tiny trunk, intermittently flapping her lotus-leaf-sized ears vigorously, and her swift and strong legs jumpy and restless, she would eagerly look at the mandir, unable to bear the delay.

When Swami came, it was a divine thrill in totality, not only for Sai Gita, but for every devotee witnessing the sublime play of pure love. Swami would first walk up to her, and she would almost kneel down—her hind legs half-bent and front legs folded to the maximum possible. Her height now would be a mere two feet, and she would lift her tiny trunk up and down three times in salutation. After she had offered her prostrations at his feet, she would take a garland, raise her nimble trunk over the five-foot frame of her beloved very carefully, and then with lots of glee slip it down Swami's opulent hair onto his shoulders. Swami, in turn, would flash an enchanting smile, pat her cheeks very affectionately, and speak to her softly.

Time would stand still as all bore witness to the Lord so much at ease with his dear

devotee. Like a teacher who never tires of talking to his best student, the Lord too was most happy to be with his perfect devotee. Swami would then feed her. There would be a bag full of fruits (all offered at the shrine in the mandir) and a bucket of *teertham* (consecrated liquid) for her to drink.

One by one, Swami would put apples

(her favorite) in her mouth; she would be fed no other way. Sri Pedda Reddy said, "She would not accept fruit from Swami in her trunk but would insist that Swami put it personally in her mouth. But if it were anybody else, she would either refuse it or accept it only by her trunk." Just like a child who is most comfortable and secure with her



mother, Sai Gita felt the most peace and bliss while with her Swami.

God's Neighborhood

Only after Swami spent considerable time with her would she reluctantly let him go and continue the evening darshan. This drama went on for many years while she was still a teenager. In those days, she lived just next door, and it was as if she shared the mandir with Swami. But as the number of devotees multiplied, Sai Gita had to be moved, and Swami instructed an ashram officer to erect

a shed for her on the northern end of the mandir, facing Bhagavan's residence, just in front of the *gopuram* (main gate tower), where the idols of Lord Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita now stand.

Her small enclosure was airy and had a drinking well beside it, but it faced east, which meant Sai Gita could not see Swami during darshan. She could not bear this; only if her home faced south could she watch Swami coming in and out of the mandir. Apparently, Sai Gita was so upset with the orientation of her new shed that in a rage one day, she brought the whole tin-and-concrete structure down with her massive trunk and sheer muscle power. The officer was, of course, later reprimanded for ineffectively executing Swami's command, and Sai Gita, in no time, had a new room that faced south. The happy elephant could now see Swami uninterruptedly, directly from her home.

Sai Gita spent many good years in this home close to the mandir during the late 1960s and early 1970s. But when preparations began for Bhagavan's fiftieth birthday celebrations in 1975, Sai Gita had to be moved from the mandir premises, in order to accommodate the mammoth crowd expected. (It was during this birthday that Swami gave darshan to the teeming crowds from a helicopter.) She was placed in a big shed in the southwest corner of the ashram.

Rocks and Boulders Not a Barrier

In this year, the Sri Sathya Sai Gokulam (dairy) was inaugurated by Swami, and soon Sai Gita was relocated to live with the cows.

For the first time, she was physically far away from her beloved, but that never diminished her devotion for her Lord by even an iota. Sri Pedda Reddy narrates a revealing incident from her stay in the *gokulam*:

"It was the year 1976. The primary school and college buildings were under construction at the foot of two hills. The terrain was obviously broken, with big rocks, sharp-edged boulders, and thorns. On Swami's bidding, the engineers had constructed a bund (embankment) to facilitate the accumulation of water flowing down the hill. It was primarily to allow the buffaloes of the *gokulam* to cool off and bathe with pleasure. The distance between the primary school work site, where Swami would visit occasionally to oversee the construction work, and the *gokulam*, where Sai Gita lived with the cows, was about four hundred meters. One day when Swami was on such an inspection tour to the school site, Sai Gita somehow felt his presence, immediately set herself free, and ran in Bhagavan's direction. Completely ignoring the terrible terrain, she jumped across rocks, bounced on the boulders, disregarded the bund, and in minutes had crossed the half-kilometer 'obstacle course.' Once at the feet of Bhagavan, she bowed down obsequiously, a picture of peace and serenity. Swami was deeply moved with her love and devotion. He lovingly caressed her and said to all the devotees around, 'See her devotion? In comparison, you are all *dunnapotu* (buffaloes).'"

Though an animal, Sai Gita truly had divine instincts, while we, though human

by birth, give way to animal instincts many a time. Perhaps one of the most profound demonstrations of her steadfast dedication and purity of devotion happened in the 1980s. Sai Gita was staying in the high-rise shed constructed exclusively for her in front of the senior boys' hostel. She was moved there once the number of cows increased in the *gokulam*; a need was felt to give her more space and increasing attention.

The Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust then purchased an additional piece of land in front of the hostel, and thus was born a spacious, fifteen-foot enclosure, padded with thick beds of sand, surrounded by coconut trees, and actually nestled in a mangrove. It had plenty of space for her to rove and relax. Moreover, the adjoining land was cultivated for her fodder. Of course, Sai Gita was bereft of any company there, but that is how she wanted her life to be. She was happy when alone, happier with her caretaker, and happiest of all when Swami was beside her.

"She Has Come Only for Swami"

During this time, certain elders mentioned to Swami the idea of sending her back to the forest temporarily, for breeding. Swami, from the start, never seemed convinced about this proposal. Nevertheless, he gave in, after the dogged persuasion of senior members of the ashram. And so it happened that the reluctant Sai Gita was sent to the forest, along with two caretakers, Vasant Rao and Sathyanarayana. "It was a thirteen-day journey on foot, with sufficient rest periods on the way at various locations," recollects Sathyanarayana.

"Once we were there, Sai Gita showed not the least interest in any elephant of the jungle; she would never go near the elephants of the wild, let alone find a companion. We used to put two baby elephants near her to kindle in her the desire to have a family, but she would allow the small ones to be with her only as long as we were around. Once we were out of sight, she would disinterestedly drive them away.

"Many nights, she would quietly escape from the forest, and sure enough, we would find her the next morning on the road to Puttaparthi. We would follow her big footprints and the marks left on the soil by the thick iron ring and chain, and usually find her six to seven kilometers away. This went on for three months; nothing could budge her focus from Swami even to a microscopic extent." The mahouts had exhausted all options.

"Finally Swami visited the forest one fine day, totally unanticipated. The forest had a canal, and Swami's car stopped at the left bank while we were over on the right bank. The moment I shouted, 'Swami has come!' Sai Gita, who had been grazing nearby, became as one possessed by a gigantic force. Without a second thought, she jumped into the canal and started swimming vigorously. Concerned about her, I too jumped in and tried to catch hold of her ears or neck, but nothing could stop her that day. If we reached the other shore safely that momentous morning, it was purely His grace.

"Swami immediately opened the car door, and Sai Gita was in bliss as Swami fondled her, patted her, and enquiringly



spoke to her with the utmost love and concern. It was as if the mother had found her long-lost daughter. Bags of fruit were in the car, and Swami lovingly put a few apples in her mouth. Sai Gita was too overwhelmed to eat; she just held them in her jaws, without chewing or swallowing them.

“After a few minutes, Swami got inside His car and gave me instructions to stay on in the forest for some more time. As the car drove off, poor Sai Gita’s condition became pathetic. She simply could not accept Swami’s leaving. It was as if she had been dropped from heaven to hell in an instant. She spat out all the fruits and started crying loudly. I have never seen anybody so despondent in my life. I too wept. We were helpless. She was inconsolable. Dejected to the hilt, she went on grumbling, and from then on her night escapades to Puttaparthi became more frequent.

“We concluded that she was never, ever going to mate with any elephant and sent a message to Swami conveying Sai Gita’s frame of mind. We were delighted, therefore, when we received instructions that we could return to Puttaparthi.”

But the story does not end there. In fact, this particular divine drama was only just beginning. After Sai Gita returned to Puttaparthi, again at the insistence of the elders, a veterinarian was called in. Upon testing Sai Gita’s urine, he pronounced, “She is pregnant.” Sathyanarayana and Vasant were sure beyond a doubt that no mating had taken place in the forest, but nobody believed them. Even Swami, apparently, went along with what the doctor said. The news that

Sai Gita was going to deliver a baby spread like wildfire in Puttaparthi. The doctor who had come from Kerala stayed with her in the shed to attend to any eventuality, and after a few days even declared, “Sai Gita is going to deliver in a few weeks.”

In no time, a fence rose around her living area to give her ‘needed privacy,’ and everyone was now more than convinced that Sai Gita was going to be a mother. Not only this, even Swami used to visit her often and inquire about her to the doctor. On one occasion, it is said he even pointed to Sai Gita’s belly and said to Professor Kasturi, “Kasturi, can you see the baby moving in her stomach?”

D-day was approaching, and the doctor finally announced that she would deliver in the next week. The much-awaited week arrived. The air was thick with anticipation, and everyone awaited the good news with bated breath and enthusiasm. One, two, three...slowly all the weeks’ days rolled by, with no activity in the Sai Gita shed. People’s suspicions grew, and the whole bubble burst a month later, when the doctor did a complete U-turn, declaring, “She is not pregnant.” Swami’s immediate reaction to this news, we do not know, but we are sure he must have smiled heartily and mischievously. The whole drama was an alluring mix of comedy and mystery, was it not? But one wonders, “What was the purpose of this divine play?”

Sai Gita: Epitome of Purity

The purpose became crystal clear when immediately after this episode Swami emphatically declared to the devotees

around, “Sai Gita is a pristine and perfect celibate. She has come for me. She has never and will never mix with any elephant.” At this point, one is reminded of the appalling tests that Mother Sita underwent (in the sacred epic, the Ramayana), even though the omniscient Lord Rama was fully aware of her purity and integrity. Every single twist in the Lord’s story takes place to teach humankind a lesson. And he teaches in a way that the lesson’s impact resonates in the sphere of man’s mind for centuries to come.

The bond between Swami and Gita only strengthened after this whole drama; her unwavering devotion to Swami was an inspiration that no one could easily ignore. Whenever Swami used to go to Brindavan for long periods in those years, He would also make arrangements for Sai Gita’s stay near His residence in Bangalore. On most occasions, Sai Gita would walk the journey to Bangalore, escorted by her caretakers and Sai volunteers, with proper rest stations arranged at appropriate distances along the route. An indelible part of Bhagavan’s life story, Sai Gita’s moments and movements on this earth were closely intertwined with her beloved’s.

A hilarious incident, narrated by Sri B. N. Narasimha Murthy, Warden of the Sri Sathya Sai Hostel in Brindavan (Bangalore), concerns Sai Gita’s arrival in Brindavan:

“This happened in the early 1980s, when Swami used to stay in the old Brindavan bungalow, and Mr. Rama Brahman, the caretaker of the Bangalore ashram, also used to sleep inside this building. Once, late at night, maybe past midnight, Rama

Brahman’s sleep was disturbed by weird sounds outside the doors and windows. They were not very loud, but a mystifying, muffled clatter and some kind of hissing noise, in addition to other sounds. Perturbed, Rama Brahman looked through the window, under strict instructions from Swami that he should not open the door unless he knew the person.

“What he saw through the window at that dark hour was only a trunk, and he got really panicky. Interestingly, at the same instant, Swami came out from inside; Rama Brahman at once blurted out, “Swami, something has come.” Swami only smiled and calmed him saying, “Do not worry; it is Sai Gita.” Then Swami opened the door, pacified Sai Gita—who was hungry for darshan, made arrangements for her stay, and only then retired to his room.”

Such is the Lord’s mercy. When the devotee’s love is pure, the Lord does not care whether it is midnight, mid-air, mid-forest, or mid-ocean.

Inseparable Love

Sai Gita’s more than four decades of association with Swami is not only a love story, but also a tale that in its every facet demonstrates how inseparable the bond of pure love can be. Recalling a sweet experience from Sai Gita’s days in Brindavan, Mrs. Gita Mohan Ram says:

“In February, 1972, Swami was preparing to leave the Brindavan ashram to come and stay in my parent’s (Dr. R. S. Padmanabhan and Kamala Padmanabhan) house in Bangalore city for two days. It was the time

of the Akhanda Bhajan celebration—and incidentally, it was my father and grandfather who actually initiated this concept of twenty-four-hour, nonstop devotional singing, in those days. I was a young child of eight then. Four of us—my brother, aunt, father, and I—had gone to Brindavan to bring Swami to our home in Jayanagar.

“As Swami was getting ready to leave, we could hear Sai Gita trumpeting loudly from far behind Swami’s residence. She somehow knew that Swami was leaving, and you could make out from her voice that she was desperate. Swami responded to her call and walked to the rear of the building. We followed him as he marched towards Sai Gita. Once there, he caressed her, gently stroked her cheeks, fed her with apples, and finally as he turned to leave, she put her trunk around his shoulders and pulled him gently but firmly to her side. She held on to him securely and would not let him go. Swami could only sweetly plead, and he kept saying in Telugu, “Please let go, Gita; let go, please; I have to go, it is late. Golden One, I will come back soon, let me go, please!”

“Only after five minutes of gentle persuasion by Swami did Gita let him go reluctantly. And as he moved away, she

lifted her trunk and still held on to his right arm and would not let go again for a few minutes. Swami tried offering her some fruit, but the apple was no consolation. She refused to accede. Finally, after a lot of cajoling, Swami extricated himself from her,



but by now his robe was covered by her saliva, as she kept nuzzling him throughout. Unmindful of the dribble on his gown, Swami turned to all of us, and what he said then was very profound. He said, ‘Your devotion should be one-pointed like hers. She is not even tempted by the fruit I offer. She wants only me and thinks of me at all times. When you are like her, you then receive *darshanam*, *sparshanam*, and *sambhashanam* (the fortunate blessing of

seeing, touching, and conversation with the Lord).’ He then gave her one last loving pat and left. He had to go back to his room to change into a new robe, and we were ready to leave.”

How wonderful was her relationship with the Lord! How fortunate she was!

—**Courtesy: Heart2Heart e-Journal**
www.radiosai.org

To be continued...

Thank You, Sai Gita

The Devoted One

It was back in 1974 that I first saw Sai Gita, on my first trip to Prasanthi Nilayam. She was still young, and her love for Baba was intense. There was no doubt who mattered most to her.

You could feel and see it. Each day in the afternoon she would come to the dirt road on the ladies' side to wait for Baba. When she saw him, she trumpeted and waited impatiently for Baba to come to her so she could garland him. Also, she would get down on one knee, paying homage to the Lord.

She was the lead in many parades held on holidays and other special occasions. Richly decorated, she was majestic and royal. It was a joy seeing Sai Gita walking down Main Street on the way to the ashram with her caretaker nearby. Sure she was an elephant in form, but her presence conveyed joy. She was in love with Baba. You felt it even at a distance.

As she got older and conditions changed, devotees were no longer able to witness her garlanding and bowing to the Lord—thus missing out on one of the greatest displays of love for God by anyone in animal form except maybe Hanuman.

Now she is buried in a place especially designed for her, but really for us, the devotees, so we can pay homage to her. Six months earlier, we were told that this new home was for Sai Gita, as she wanted to be near people.

In reality, it was Baba's *leela* (divine play), as only he could know that she would soon be leaving her physical body. Workmen were already constructing the indoor stadium, so men and material were readily available to build her beautiful new quarters. The new home was dedicated one day before the stadium and six months before she merged with Baba.

The lovers are united, she at peace in his divinity. The love he returned to Sai Gita was in proportion to the intensity and purity of the love she had for God. She was his best devotee. Baba often said that we should learn from her. Sai Gita had only one focus in her life, and that was God in the form of Sai Baba. Rama had Hanuman. Sai Baba had Sai Gita.

Baba has said that Sai Gita has not yet had a human birth but will take a human birth in her next life, and that she will take birth soon and come to him again. Will the divine drama bring her to Prema Sai so she can again be near her Lord? I only hope that someday I will develop even one-tenth of her devotion. Thank you, Sai Gita, for showing me and the world where our attention should be and how to be a good devotee.

—Gerald Dominick
Ojai, California

Lessons to Be Learned from the Animal Kingdom

From the Discourses of Sri Sathya Sai Baba

A seeker after spiritual realization went off into a jungle and was plodding across an infested region, through the thick undergrowth, when he heard the angry roar of a lion; he climbed into a banyan tree to escape from the beast, but the lion saw him among the branches and roamed round and round the trunk in a terrific rage. While in the tree, the seeker was attacked by a bear, so he slid down the roots that descended from one of the branches. Luckily, there were two roots hanging from that branch, so he could hang on in mid-air, clinging to them, one in each hand.

Just then, he saw two rats, one white and the other black, which were gnawing at the base of those two roots, endangering his life with every bite. While suspended in this perilous state, a few drops of nectar fell toward the seeker from a honeycomb lodged on one of the top branches. The unfortunate man stretched out his tongue to catch a drop so that he might taste the delicious honey, but no drop reached his tongue. In despair and terror, he called out to his guru, “O Guruji, come and save me!” The guru, who was passing by, heard the appeal and sped to the rescue; he brought bow and arrows and slew the lion and bear, frightened off the rats, and saved the disciple from the fear of death.

Then he led the man back to his own ashram and taught him the path of liberation.

This is the story of every one of you. This world is the jungle in which you roam; fear is the lion that drives you up the tree of worldly activities (*samsara*). Anxiety is the bear that terrifies you and dogs your steps in this world, so you slide down into attachments and binding deeds, through the twin roots of hope and despair. The two rats are day and night, which eat away the span of your life. Meanwhile, you try to snatch a little joy from the sweet drops of egoism and ‘mine’-feeling. Finding at last that the drops are trivial and out of reach, you shout out in agony and renunciation, calling on the guru. The guru appears, whether from within or without, and saves you from fear and anxiety.

When you call out in all sincerity, the response will certainly come! Give up all low desire and call from the anguished heart. Do not merely pray from the lips, as you do now, from a *puja* room that is but a corner of the kitchen—worshiping the Lord with an eye on the dishes cooking in the oven and a nose inhaling hungrily the smells of boiling curries. Your thoughts of God are rendered ineffective by your attachment to sensory objects. There is a vast gap between what you say and what you do, what you are capable of

and what you accomplish! (*Sathya Sai Speaks* [SSS] 5:57, Nov. 24, 1965)

The World Conference of Animals

Man is the noblest of all animals, the final product of untold ages of progressive evolution, but he is not consciously striving to live up to his heritage. The beasts held a world conference to confabulate on the authenticity of man's claim to be the acme of creation and the monarch of all that walks the earth.

The lion presided over the deliberations. The tiger questioned the claims of man; the leopard seconded the resolution with emphatic protest and delivered a devastating speech condemning man:

"Mankind is a standing disgrace to all animals. He manufactures and drinks merrily fatal poisons and is proud of his utter foolishness. He cheats his own kind and spends all his energies and resources in devising diabolical weapons to wipe out his sisters and brothers.

"He prods horses and dogs to run in desperate haste and gambles his earnings away while they gallop along the track; he is cruel, greedy, immoral, insatiable, and unashamed. He sets a bad example to the animal world. Though endowed with superior emotions and intelligence, his behavior is disgusting and demeaning," the leopard put forth.

"We animals, on the other hand, do not know if or where we will get our next meal; we have no sure place of rest. We have nothing to wrap around ourselves, except our skin. Yet the least of us is a far worthier

child of God than this monster called man," he concluded.

The fox rose, adding, "We have a season when we mate, but man, I am ashamed to say, has broken all restraints and cares for no rules. He is a law unto himself and a disaster to the rest."

The lion rose to sum up the arguments. He agreed with the general trend of the tirade against man, provoked by the undeserved claim to supremacy, but he refused to tar all men with the same brush. He distinguished between those men who are bestial or worse, and those who have transcended their bestial past through the proper use of the gifts of discrimination and detachment. The latter group, he argued, ought to be revered by all beasts as masters, while the former deserved severe reprisals and condemnation.

Each of you has struggled upward from stone to plant, from plant to animal, from animal to man! Do not slide back into the beast; rise higher to divinity, shining with the new effulgence of love. The Divine is the energy that animates, the urge that circulates the blood in your veins, and transmits knowledge and experience through the nerves. The Divine is the energy that correlates and collects for storage the impressions your senses gather and the conclusions your intelligence garners! Keep in line with the Divine, by means of love, truth, and goodness. (SSS 9:12, June 26, 1969)

Discipline Your Minds and Succeed

By means of systematic discipline (*sadhana*), it is possible to tap the inner

resources that God has endowed man with and elevate yourselves to the purer and happier realm of reality.

Look at the trainers of wild beasts. They bring the tiger, the most ferocious of animals, like a cat into the circus ring, and make it jump through a hoop of fire or lap milk from a plate, face to face with a goat, while sitting on a chair! They are able to subdue the tiger's ferocity and tame it, reducing it to the position of an unassuming toy! How can they do this?

They did *sadhana*; they made the tiger also go through a regimen of *sadhana*, and they succeeded! If it is possible to succeed with the tiger, can you not also succeed with the ferocious inhabitants of your own mind? You can! That is the message of Navaratri, the Nine Days' Festival (each October) celebrating the victory of the Primal Energy. (SSS 7:30, October 4, 1967)

The Transformation Process

The transformation of man is based on transformation of the mind. When individuals are transformed, the nation is transformed. When nations change, the world is transformed. Hence, if the world is to be changed, there has to be a mental transformation at the individual level.

The human mind should be filled with love. The mind is a remarkable entity. When it is filled with wisdom, it makes a man a

saint. When it is associated with ignorance, the mind becomes an agent of death. Hence it has been declared that the mind is the cause of human bondage or liberation. All change, in education or other spheres, has to begin with transformation of the mind.

Indifference, bad company, disrespect, arrogance, and jealousy—these five tendencies

reduce man to the level of the animal. No one with these vices can be called an educated person. To get rid of these vices, it is necessary to take note of some of the good qualities in animals and birds.

Man can learn any number of good qualities from animals, birds, insects, and worms.

The donkey is usually viewed with contempt, but quite a few virtues can be learned from it. The quality of patience to be found in a donkey is not found even in man. Whatever burdens may be heaped on its back, it bears them all with forbearance. It puts up with any number of beatings, and even when starved of food and water, it presents a calm face. Man has thus to learn the quality of forbearance from the donkey.

The ant is one of the tiniest among insects. But there are many lessons to be learned from it. The ant has a capacity for foresight. With foreknowledge of the rainy season ahead, the ant starts storing food three months in advance.

Then there is the spider, from which lessons can also be learned. Determination is



*The transformation of man is based
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one of its traits. No matter how many times its web may be destroyed or broken, the spider will go on remaking it with relentless determination.

Then there is the dog. The dog is treated with neglect and indifference, but the fidelity displayed by a dog is not found in any other creature. Getting a few morsels of food from a man, the dog shows its gratitude to him by following him and wagging its tail out of affection. But such gratitude is lacking among students who have been nourished, educated, and placed comfortably in life by their parents. Many do not have even a fraction of the gratitude displayed by dogs. Has their education or intelligence any meaning?



Make the Mind Subserve the Intellect

The lion is the king of beasts, the monarch of the forest. Man too is a beast, like the jackal, the cheetah, the tiger, and the lion. The elephant is the largest of the animals; its footprints are bigger than those of any other. When the elephant walks, it plants its feet so broadly and heavily that the footprints of all other animals and inhabitants of the forest are effaced! And the lion and the elephant are mortal enemies.

This illustrates a deep lesson from nature: the mind is the elephant trampling through the jungle of life, restrained by no

fear, regulated by no rule. But the elephant is dreadfully afraid of the lion. The very sight of the lion fills the elephant with panic.

[In this case] the lion symbolizes *buddhi* (the intellect), which crowns you with kingship. All must bow before the throne of

intellect, which confers the highest bliss. The mind is dumb before the dictates of the intellect, but before the senses and their demands, it acts as instigator. Make the mind subserve the intellect; then, the path of man toward God becomes straightened and smoothed. (SSS 9:18, Oct. 10, 1969)

Birds' Supreme Virtue of Monogamy

Next, take the example of the parrots. Conjugal fidelity is a supreme quality among parrots. The firm attachment that parrot couples show for each other is not to be found even among highly developed human beings.

The sage Valmiki was deeply moved when a hunter killed one of two birds who were a loving couple. When one of the birds died, its mate followed suit, unable to bear the pangs of separation. Out of Valmiki's intense sorrow and compassion, the first verse emerged from his lips that began the great epic, the Ramayana.

When its mate dies, a bird will not seek another partner. It will starve itself to death. How many men care to follow the example

of the birds in their devotion to monogamy? Many are ready to remarry after the loss of the first wife. The supreme virtue of monogamy is a quality man can learn from birds.

Thus, there are many useful lessons to be learned from animals, birds, and insects. Book knowledge alone is of little use. In fact, the human heart is the best teacher in the world. Time is a supreme preceptor. This vast cosmos is the ideal book for all. And there is only one true friend, and that is God.

There is no need to go in search of a preceptor. Your heart is enough. If you follow the dictates of your heart, every action will be sanctified. It is necessary also to recognize the importance of time. Time determines many of our actions in life. Time is a great teacher. The universe is a vast textbook. By properly studying what is happening in the cosmos, you can learn any number of lessons. God is your best, unfailing friend at all times. All others are mere time-servers. People waste their lives believing in such petty fair-weather friends. Your best friend is residing in your heart as the Indweller.

Foster the Love Principle

Love and sacrifice are the two most important ideals in life. Love all, even those who hate you. That is the index of your devotion. In the name of devotion, people flock to Prasanthi Nilayam at great expense.

But what is it you have accomplished by coming here? What have you learned? Being a Sai devotee, if you practice even one or two good qualities, like morality and integrity, the nation will benefit immensely. There is neither truth nor morality among most people. "People without morality are worse than monkeys," goes a saying, but a great

monkey served the Divine and became the recipient of his grace. Men today talk about devotion but have no regard for the divine injunctions.

Peace, truth, and love are inherent

in man. Why do you search for them outside? Manifest these qualities, which are within you. You must cultivate forbearance and compassion. This is the way to foster the love principle.

A Dog's Example of Love and Loyalty

Let me tell you a story from my earlier years. I was then staying in the old mandir in Puttaparthi. An English couple were living with me at that time. They presented me with a couple of puppies. They said that the presence of the puppies with Swami would give them the feeling that they were with Swami, even when they were away. I accepted the puppies. They had been named Jack and Jill. [In fact, the two puppies were my childhood friends, Ramesh and Suresh, who took birth as these two dogs to be near me.] How did they live with me? At night when I



Being a Sai devotee, if you practice even one or two good qualities, like morality and integrity, the nation will benefit immensely.

went to bed, one would sleep near my head and the other at my feet.

One day, the Maharani of Mysore came to Puttaparthi. She was a very orthodox lady and would not eat if she heard the barking of a dog. She sent a message to Swami that if any dogs were in his premises, they should be kept confined in a room. In those days there was no direct road to Puttaparthi. The Maharani kept her car in Karnatapalli (on the other side of the Chithravathi River) and walked to Puttaparthi. There were no hotels at that time.

The driver of the car had to come to Swami's place to eat and then return to the car. The Maharani decided to stay in Puttaparthi that night. The driver ate his meal and was returning to the car at night. As the driver would not be able to find his way in the dark, I told one of the dogs, "Jack, you'd better go with the driver and come back in the morning." Jack led the way, and the driver followed the dog. They reached Karnatapalli. The driver slept in the car, and Jack slept underneath the car. The driver got up in the morning. It was chilly outside. He was in a hurry to start the car and get it ready for the Maharani. He backed up the car for a short distance, and one of the wheels ran over the sleeping Jack. The dog's backbone was broken.



Students, scholars, and all others should note how much devotion this poor dog had for Bhagavan. In great pain, the dog came dragging itself all the way to Swami's residence. It had to drag itself over the sands of the river while bleeding profusely. At the gate of Swami's residence sat a watchman called Chakali Subbanna. He rushed to Swami, saying, "Swami! Our Jack's spine is broken. He is crying as he is dragging himself." Bhagavan came out and called out, "Jack!" The dog cried out, collapsed at my feet, and passed away.

See, what devotion in an animal! He dragged himself all the way to give up his life at Swami's feet. Before he passed away, he gazed at Swami. I had some milk brought and gave it to the dog. He placed his two front paws on my palm and gave up his life. What devotion in an animal!

After Jack's death, Jill gave up eating and died a few days later. Today, there is a burial site (*samadhi*) behind the old mandir for the dogs. What loyalty and what devotion in a dog! How much better mankind would be if only people had a fraction of the love and loyalty displayed by that dog. (SSS 30:04, Feb. 13, 1997)

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Hide and Seek

One of Countless Brilliant Episodes in the Life of Baba-the-Goat...As Told by Herself

From *The Auspicious Goat*, by Carolyn Freund-Nelson
(Passages in italics are the words of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.)

Sunsets vary on Long Island according to the time of year. The shortest day of the calendar year is winter solstice, with around ten hours of daylight. As the days would lengthen into the summer solstice, over fifteen hours of sunlight would grace my Long Island home. If you asked, what could daylight length possibly have to do with me, a goat, I'd have to say, "Plenty!"

On the short, cold, and often snowy winter days, I became a homebody in my barn, lined inside with sumptuous bales of alfalfa topped with ripening pumpkins of various proportions. Blissfully I'd meander, poking holes deep into the dark green bales to get at the nutritious tiny green leaves. When finished exploring the alfalfa, I'd chomp a hole into a pumpkin, munching vigorously, as if it were candy just for a goat. I thoroughly enjoyed being milked, prayed, and sung to, followed by an after-dinner grooming and massage.

This, however, was not the case during my summer schedule. Winter or summer, I was milked at seven in the morning and

seven at night. After the milking ritual finished in the winter, it was pitch dark, but not so on the warm, slowed evenings of summer. Milking in the summer left at least another two-and-three-quarter hours of light for me to wander around my pasture.

In the summer, when milking was completed, I was permitted outside, because it was too early to lock me in my barn. The stately London plane tree, which had been planted to shade my barn, grew quickly, and its shade kept the stalls inside cool—so it was not barn-heat that made me run wild. I would twist, dance, and then hide behind the four little cedar trees that grew naturally near the eastern part of my meadow. I would zigzag and swerve every which way all over the field, then stop and stand beneath the eighty-foot fir tree whose boughs hugged the ground. Between the bottom limbs, I could be seen peering out a daring stare at Carolyn or anyone else who came near me.

The first time I did this, Carolyn showed not much interest, because I had never been a problem. Usually, when it came time to close

me up in the barn for the night, I would be in there too, cavorting around with the other animals. Besides, there were still at least two hours of daylight left, ample time for Carolyn to coax me into the barn. A clump of sassafras trees—which have four different-shaped leaves on the same tree (the local American Indians made sassafras drink and later root beer from such trees)—sat amidst a thicket in the center of the meadow. These seven trees, planted by nature and entwined with each other, had been attacked by me many times. I had peeled their bark almost all the way around, but could not girdle them completely because they grew too close together. Each tree had a vertical length of bark down its trunk that I could never quite gain access to, because another sassafras tree guarded it. Over the years, I won the war with one tree, stripping its bark all the way around and killing it, because it stood a foot away from the others.

These trees became my main hideout when twilight came upon my meadow. The overgrown vegetation of brambles, briars, sassafras shoots, wild grasses, tall mugwort herbs, and dangerous sprigs of shiny-leafed poison ivy, all assisted in camouflaging me.

The first time this happened, Carolyn became convinced that I was not even in the yard. After much searching, she felt like crying, “Why does Baba-the-Goat have to put me through this? I know she is here somewhere!”

You must cultivate love toward everyone, regardless of what they are like or what they do. You have no right to judge whether a person [or animal like me] is good or bad, or

whether an action of his is good or bad. Leave all judgment to God, the only judge of persons, things, and actions.

*What you must do is offer love to others. However hateful or unendearing a person may be, you must show love, affection, understanding, tolerance, sympathy, charity, and compassion. All these are ... God-qualities. ... Love is the only remedy, the only cure for any human malady, and the only way in which you will get a positive and favorable response.*¹

How could Carolyn possibly express her love for me, when I was incredibly annoying, dreadfully frustrating, and this game was a horrendous waste of time?

Two of the children, Kathy and Karl, answered their mother’s pleas for someone to come and help her find me. Karl investigated the front yard and streets. He was excited, as this was a real mystery, and Kathy joined the “big search” too. With more than one person hunting for me, I had to stand perfectly still behind the trees, only slowly shifting my position when required. Carolyn felt I was really trying to “get her goat.” I was finally found entwined in the lush underbrush of the trees, staying just far enough out of reach so as not to get caught.

The meadow rose slightly up a hill with various-sized clumps of deciduous and evergreen trees dotting it willy-nilly. I took advantage of that, too. The children would run breathlessly, trying to round me up, and be relieved when I would run toward the

¹Charlene Leslie-Chaden, *A Compendium of the Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba* (Bangalore, India: Sai Towers Publishing, 1999), p. 309.

barn. But then I'd veer off to the side, around the barn, and up the hill into the trees again. Unwaveringly, I refused to go into my barn. Often this nightly occurrence dragged out way past sunset and everyone's bedtime.

Salonga, our town, was rural and located on the outskirts of Northport. It did not have its own library, post office, or fire department. The townsfolk used Northport's facilities for all civil services. Being so rural, Fort Salonga was not exactly the safest place for a goat, because foxes and dogs roamed around searching for vulnerable animals to attack. It was only for my safety that my family locked me in the barn.

Carolyn's sister, Lucille, heard about the goat dilemma and became convinced that she had an answer. When Carolyn's birthday came in July, Lucille presented her sister with a long, straight, deep-lustered "shepherd's stick." "I had it made by a local wood carver, and he carved a poem on it for you about how helpful it will be. I know you can use it," she told Carolyn, with a beaming smile.

However, it did not prove to be a good idea to give Carolyn a long, straight stick at this time. Sadly, the beautifully-carved gift did not live up to its reputation or Lucille's expectations. Carolyn wanted to rap me with the stick, so she swung and missed me three times. Then she stopped and thought about what she had just done...and wept.

When you realize that God is in everyone, you will practice nonviolence. God is one, though He may be worshiped in different forms and under different names.²

Standing in the threshold of the barn door, she tried enticing me inside with sweet

talk, because she remembered that *truth is the utterance of what you think. If you tell the truth, tell it clearly and sweetly. Do not tell the truth in an unclear way or tell untruth in a clear way.³*

But that is exactly what Carolyn had done. Did I recognize the insincerity in her enticing, sweet words?

"Come on, Baba, don't you want me to tuck you into your barn? It's late and dark. We love you; you are such a good goat. Come here, and I'll give you a treat. Come on, Sweetheart, let's go snuggle in your barn."

Eventually Carolyn's impatience overtook her. "Petkins, don't you want to go into the barn for the night—you big, fat, royal pain in the neck!" She ran madly after me, flailing her arms in the air, swinging the stick wildly, violently wishing she could whack me on the head or the behind.

Actually, if she had only smacked me once, she would have felt satisfied, but the honeyed words she used were worthless.

"I feel as if I'm going backward spiritually. What is happening to me?" Carolyn pondered.

A mosquito comes and sits on your nose. You try to drive it away, but it comes a second and third time. You become impatient and try driving it away with greater vigor. Here it is! A small insignificant mosquito can cause you to lose your innate sense of peace and become agitated. This is your weakness. The moment

²Sanathana Sarathi, August 1995, p. 222.

³Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Discourses On the Bhagavad Gita* (Prasanthi Nilayam, India: Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust, March 1988), p. 84.

*you arrest this weakness, you will become a spiritual aspirant.*⁴

Carolyn experienced this as a lesson in patience, and *patience is all the strength a man needs.*⁵ How could she get this patience? She would be worn out from a full day's work, and even more so from running around determined to trap me. She became even more tired—unbearably overtired—cranky, and not very patient or loving. She would return to the house, mission unaccomplished, to catch her 'second wind.' At times, she would lie down in the field, feeling as if she were going to fizzle into the ethers, hoping to be revitalized, and wishing I would feel sorry for her, be concerned, come down, and give her a comforting nudge. Indulging in this wishful thinking was creative and inventive, but I never reacted the way she wished, and her bizarre behavior continued.

By fantasizing about me, Carolyn hoped she could make her daydreams come true, but they had no effect on me whatsoever. Trapping, fooling, coaxing, luring, snaring, threatening—she utilized all these methods at one time or another, but none of them brought me back into the barn. Carolyn even contemplated not letting me out of the barn in the first place, but then the barndoor-butting would be heard all over the countryside. Most of the time, I could not be kept in the barn, because only parts of the door were still left standing, and Carolyn's husband, Nels, did not want to fix any more doors, windows, or anything that I had wrecked, for that matter.

It was blackmail: "Put me in the barn, and I will destroy it and any sheep or other

animals you put in there with me. I promise to jump and butt them in the stomach."

Another time, Carolyn thought she had the answer. Nels could attach a thick, long, bright-yellow nylon rope to a brass clip. Carolyn trembled with excitement at the prospect of grappling me and latching the rope to my collar. Crouched and concealed in the sassafras trees for what seemed like hours, it suddenly dawned on Carolyn that I must have heard the rattling of the large brass clip and bolted away, for I was long gone.

There did finally come a solution, after many summers of frustration, many summers of trying to outwit me. We enjoyed many play times together every day, but this night hiding was depressing. So finally, Carolyn just plain gave up.

*Unless you give up, you cannot acquire—that is the rule of life. Even trivial things cannot be won without parting with something. One has to pay to secure the most precious of all gifts, the gift of the awareness of the Soul.*⁶

Were all her efforts worth all the time spent, energy exerted, and inner peace lost, or were God and I teaching Carolyn a lesson? It was Carolyn's will against mine. She decided to part with her will and give up her ego.

"You are God's goat. I have done my best; now she is yours, Sathya Sai Baba, she is all yours!" Carolyn screamed, as she threw up her hands. "I give up! I give up!"

⁴Sathya Sai Newsletter USA, 1986, vol. 11, p. 35.

⁵Sign at Sri Sathya Sai Baba's Ashram at Prasanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi, India.

⁶Sathya Sai Speaks, 11:28, p. 162.

*There is one thing that comes into man from the outside. That thing is the ego, which is formed by attachment to outside objects. With desire for the world cut, ego automatically vanishes.*⁷

It was the first time Carolyn had ever given up something she knew was correct. She knew I did not belong outside at night. Well, guess what? Too bad! Carolyn was sick and tired of being discontented. She severed her attachment with my summertime theatrics. I could dance in the meadow all I wanted, but the show was over for Carolyn. She was not watching or participating in it anymore.

*The ego is most easily destroyed by devotion to God, by dwelling on the magnificence of the Lord.*⁸

It was difficult for her, because she had never before given up, especially if she knew she was right. It looked as if she might slowly be learning, but little did she know how much this was going to help her immensely in her everyday life.

*Everything is the will of God. For every small act, God's command is the cause. Without His will, not a blade of grass can move. Good and bad are projections of your feelings, but in the eyes of God, everything is the same.*⁹

Carolyn also learned that her desire to have her own way, in many areas of her life, was destructive to her well being.

Because desire is an unnecessary burden in your life's journey, you must reduce your desires to a minimum, as it may not be possible to give up desire totally. If you analyze the difference between God and man, you

will find that life plus desire is man, and life minus desire is God. Confine your desires to primary necessities for sustaining life, such as food, clothing, and shelter. When you have excessive desire, you become restless.

*Desire increases our attachments, and thereby weakens our memory and intelligence. Once the intelligence becomes weak, we become inhuman. Thus, desire has the capacity to ruin our life. If we understand the nature of desire well, it will disappear from us in one moment.*¹⁰

After years of summer barn conflicts, Carolyn was done. Guess what? So was I. The first night after completely, unconditionally, turning everything over to God, Carolyn decided at 11:00 p.m. to see what I had done. There I was, all tucked in my barn. Carolyn could swear she saw a big smile on my face, and the east wind carrying the whispered words to her, "Another job well done, Baba!"

—Carolyn Freund-Nelson
Northport, New York

⁷John Hislop, *Conversations with Sathya Sai Baba* (San Diego, California, USA: Birth Day Publishing Company, 1978), p. 61.

⁸Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba* (Tustin, California, USA: Tustin Book Center of America, 1974), p. 81, no. 4.

⁹Sri Sathya Sai Baba, "Divine Discourse by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba" (Prasanthi Nilayam, India, November 17, 1996).

¹⁰Sanathana Sarathi, May 1994, p. 116a.

The Red-Shouldered Hawk

As part of my morning habit, I take the creekside path to say hello and give thanks to Swami. Along the way, I pass on a greeting to Thomas, “Sai Cat,” who is buried next to the bronze statue of Ganesha.

I have such fond memories of Thomas, my companion for over twelve years. Because of Swami’s grace, he was able to purr love and affection on all who came to visit and successfully—thanks again to Baba—outwit the coyotes, mountain lions, bobcats, great-horned owls, and rattlesnakes, which otherwise could have done him some harm.

Next, I stop a moment to talk with Ganesha. He sits in a waterproof enclosure with glass in front and back, which allows a natural light to bathe and reflect off His wonderful form. Some nine years ago at Whitefield, Swami raised both his hands to bless the statue. What a sweet moment that was, as I could feel the God-warmth coming from Swami’s hands.

Moving up the path, I reach for a gong that hangs peacefully from a creekside oak and pull the clapper rope a touch. Subtle reverberations of *OM* echo off the hillside and throughout the property. I continue over the bridge to the *puja* altar, where a treasured photograph of Swami hangs at

the center of three trees, a perfect natural prayer spot. This is how the normal day begins for me.

This morning, however, was to be very special. I lingered at the altar awhile, thinking many monkey thoughts about what I had to do to finish installing a slider in my new studio house. Thanking Swami for his help, I began to walk back to my construction project.

A few steps from the altar, I turned to look at the fish pond, and what I saw stopped me instantly, for there, fewer than eleven feet away, sitting on the rim of the angel birdbath, was the largest and most beautiful red-shouldered hawk I had ever seen and would ever hope to see again. A few water drops glistened on her head like the purest diamonds, her piercing eyes showed absolutely no fear, and her powerful yellow talons seemed larger than life—such power vibrated out of those claws!

But what kept me truly transfixed was the dazzling, explosive color of her chest feathers—a totally breathtaking, pulsating mix of orange and red energy. I stood immobile as we looked at one another, eye to eye. I managed finally to speak: “Good morning . . . thank you so much for being here and saying hi to me . . . how beautiful

you are.” Each time I paused without words for a moment, she would cock her head and look at me a bit more directly, if that could be possible.

She (the larger of hawks is always going to be a female) kept her gaze directly on me; her eyes never left mine. I continued talking softly to her and finally, after a few more moments, offered, “I’m going to work on the slider today; if you wish, come on down and watch me. You can stay as long as you wish.” Slowly I turned away, my heart pounding excitedly and my *Atma* (soul) giving thanks to Swami for His incredible form and gift.

About ten minutes into my work, I just happened to look up into the trees, and there she was, sitting on a limb no more than fifteen feet from me. Evidently, she had been watching me and everything I was doing. “Hello! Thank you for coming. How wonderful; you’ve come to watch me. Please stay as long as you wish!” She would cock her head in the same manner as before, always looking directly into my eyes. And indeed, she did stay; occasionally I would look up, and there she was, not bothered by the noise I was making. Finally, after about two hours, she was gone and not to be seen for the rest of the day.

As extraordinary as this gift of grace from Swami was, there is still more. The next mid-morning, after I returned from getting coffee, a very excited neighbor told me what he had just observed: “Hey, you’re not going to believe what I just saw!”

I was perplexed, “What are you talking about?”

He continued, “As you were pulling in, this huge, gigantic hawk landed on your roof rack, while your car was still moving. It was side-stepping over, like she wanted to see you on the driver’s side. I couldn’t believe it! Then when you stopped and opened your door, she flew away back into the trees behind your car. You never saw her, did you?”

Well, I tried to gather my senses together and say something profound to him, but I think all I said was possibly “whoa” or “wow.” (I have found out that, at least for me, not all people are ready for or can understand the wonderful *leelas* Swami gifts us with.)

Then I didn’t hear from her or see her for many months, until one noontime as I took a lunch break under the trees. Just above my head, the loudest “key, key, key” cries I have ever heard rained down on me in supercharged salvos, perhaps fifteen to twenty of them without a break (unheard of for hawk behavior). I looked up to see her and I couldn’t! Nowhere was she to be seen.

I continued to sit and smile to myself. “Sai Ram, Sai Ram, dear Lord,” I repeated, and reflected upon His words that are on the *puja* altar:

GOD IS ALL.

GOD IS ALL FORMS.

GOD IS ALL NAMES.

THERE IS NO PLACE

WHERE GOD IS NOT.

—Nicolai

El Cariso Village, California

Baba's Horse

In July of 2005, my four horses, all of whom participate in equine-assisted therapy programs, attended a Sri Sathya Sai Baba retreat in Colorado. As a gracious consideration, the event hostess, upon learning that my regular horse-sitter was unavailable, accommodated my four in her pastures, thus enabling me to attend. We were all blessed in so many ways, and the group in attendance kindly came out and gave the horses a special Gayatri blessing, anointing them with vibhuti and lingam water. " —Alicia Nation

I stumbled on something tonight:
I knew that my horse was not right.
He rolled and rolled, then lay deadly flat.
It can't be again. No! Not that!

As he saw me approaching him to lead,
He jumped up running, but not normal speed.
His head hung so heavy, I prayed he would stop.
He looked so distressed, and I feared he would drop.

O God, it simply cannot be;
We can't do another surgery!
Not again, not again, not this time.

I knew there was no time to play.
I knew just what the vet would say:
"I must operate now, or put him away."

But I just didn't have money to pay,
And this just wasn't a usual day.
He'd had surgery twice before—
Not this time, my friend—no more!

At the first sign of colic, one must call
a vet, as recommended by all.
So, I had but a moment in which to choose,
Which belief, which power to use.

I thought at that very point in time,
A miracle would be quite fine.
So I put the telephone away
And stood next to my horse to pray.

I know it seems entirely nuts;
A horse can die from twisted guts.
Yet I stood there praying, deciding to trust—
If there was hope somewhere—
In God, then, I must.

"Baba, I know you are very busy,
The world being such a mess,
But if I could have a moment,
This horse is in distress."

"Baba, if you wouldn't mind,
This horse is a very special kind;
He's such a blessing, to me, divine;
I'm so grateful that he's mine."

"Please help him;
he's suffering so this night,
And surgery is such terrible strife.
You can heal this, I know,
without use of a knife.
I'm asking you, please—for his life!"

I stood there then,
just holding the space,
And a calm look came over Mr. C's face.
And instead of ever-worsening pain...
My horse seemed to grow calmer again.

His eyes grew brighter,
Rapid breath became calm,
He sat up now, watching,
With no signs of alarm.



And as I stood by
on that freezing cold night,
With stars giving only the dimmest light,
Two arms worked inside him—
untying the knots—
Restoring the horse in the night.

Those arms, never seeming to tire,
Were clad in bright orange attire.
For an hour they worked, so deep inside,
As I stood, in the cold, by his side.

Then my horse was quiet, at rest.
And I knew my prayers had been blessed.
For years I've been healing—
my work also blessed.
But never before had I made a request
That truly put Baba to the test.



"Baba's Horse," Alicia Nation

I stumbled on something late that night,
Because my horse was not right.
Yes, I stumbled on something that awesome night—
The Presence of Love, clear and bright.

Even with wars and chaos all around,
My horse was now healthy and sound,
And I had proof of a message profound:
It helps to keep God around!
This God-Man cares about me—
Plain old me—and my beautiful horse, Mr. C.

And with the love and compassion He's shown,
"C" is Baba's horse now, not my own;
From His kindness to heal, to release, to reveal,
My heart knows for sure, His great Love is real.

—**Alicia Nation**
Santa Fe, New Mexico

REGION 2: MARYLAND ■ NEW JERSEY ■ NEW YORK ■ PENNSYLVANIA ■ VIRGINIA

Bringing Smiles to Seniors' Faces

Richmond, Virginia: Crump Manor Nursing Home

Most Saturdays, the Crump Manor Nursing Home in Richmond, Virginia, gives the Sai center of Richmond, Virginia, an opportunity to reach out to the elderly and brighten their lives. Our simply being there brings a smile to many a face! The nursing home administration arranges group activities for the senior residents, for whom help is required, especially those who have physical, emotional, or cognitive impairments. We provide assistance such as bringing the seniors to the recreation room, wheeling them back after an event or game, and engaging them in conversation with a few kind, loving words. The volunteers also assist during the bingo session, and encourage the residents to participate in this game in an attempt to provide stimulation for their minds.

—Ravi Swaminathan

Sai Center of Richmond, Virginia



Warm-Hearted Service at Chicago Warming Shelters

An organization called Residents for Effective Shelter Transitions (REST) has provided emergency shelter, support services, and interim housing for homeless men and women in Chicago since 1979. REST has three facilities: a men's warming shelter, a women's warming shelter, and a walk-in warming shelter. The three locations provide various services to about two hundred clients.

Members of the Chicago Metro Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center have been providing breakfast and dinner service to REST clients at all their locations since May 2002. Members bring all the necessary ingredients to the shelter kitchens, prepare healthy and hot vegetarian meals, and also join the shelter clients at breakfast and dinner.

The Metro Sai Center provides five dinners and two breakfasts per month, for about 110 clients per meal. Young adults, in addition to exclusively hosting one of the breakfast sessions, participate in preparing and serving the meals. Sai members also put on a monthly birthday celebration for shelter clients and have them help cut the cake, hopefully making them feel that they are among Sai family.

In winter, the Chicago Metro center provides REST clients with winter essentials—caps, hats, scarves, gloves, socks, lip protector, coats, and lotion. In spring, members collect

and provide essential toiletries, such as soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, toilet paper, and washcloths. Periodically, Sai center members also donate computers, TVs, microwaves, furniture, and office supplies to REST offices and homes. In 2006, members contributed six dining tables to one of the shelters, where the clients had no tables for sitting and eating.

The young adults also coordinate a sandwich project, providing about eighty clients with cheese sandwiches, fruit, juice, and cookies every Sunday. They assemble the sandwiches at the center premises and later deliver them to one of the REST locations.

Women members of the Sai center take an active role in identifying the needs at the women's shelter and work toward providing solutions to those needs, in addition to dinners. Doctors in the young adult group have been approved by the REST staff to provide health checkups for their clients during one of the breakfast sessions. The medical reports are then forwarded by the REST director to the organization's visiting physician.

Sai members have a goal of taking this project to the next level, of working closely with the REST office to provide expertise in areas where they can help the REST clients to be self-sufficient and stand on their own.

SAI SERVICE: LOVE IN ACTION



The following are some of the comments received from the staff and clients at REST:

“The Sai group is wonderful, always consistent in bringing meals promptly and serving them with a gracious attitude.”

“I don’t believe there has been a week in the past two years that we have not had at least one Sai group serving at one of our shelters.”

“It is wonderful to see how the number of volunteers has grown over the past two years. Now there are two or three groups serving both breakfast and dinner, and at more than one shelter.”

“Sai volunteers share their expertise in medicine by presenting health information to our clients.”

“The support and care shared by the Sai volunteers is felt and appreciated not only by the clients but also by the staff.”

“If there is something our clients dislike about the volunteers or their food, I’ll definitely hear about it.”

“The food is good.”

“The Sai group is always enthusiastic and shares a gracious and loving attitude with us as they prepare and serve meals.”

“Would any one from the Sai group be interested in serving on the Board of Directors of REST?”

The REST website is: <http://www.restweb.org>.

—**Narendra Rao**, Buffalo Grove, Illinois

—**Dr. Raj Kumar**, Highland Park, Illinois

Free Medical and Veterinary Screening Camp

Carlsbad, California

Doctors should infuse courage in the patients and speak soothingly, radiating compassion and love. The kind approach of the doctor will have greater healing effect on the patients than the medicine itself. Doctors must instill courage in the patients.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 26:4, Feb. 6, 1993)

The Sathya Sai Baba Organization of America, Region 8, conducted a free medical and veterinary health screening day at Pilgrim United Church of Christ on December 9, 2006, in Carlsbad, California. The objective of this first, free, Sai-organization-sponsored health screening project in San Diego County was to offer quality screening services, emphasizing disease prevention, nutritional counseling, care of women and children, health education, and referrals to free or low-cost clinics.

Free medical consultations were provided by doctors of pediatrics, family practice, internal medicine, cardiology, endocrinology, dermatology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, and dentistry. Other medical professionals—psychologists, nurses, physical therapists, and dietitians—were also onsite. Free services included blood sugar and cholesterol screening, dietary advice, and pap smears and mammography for women. Test results were reviewed and made available to each patient for follow-up care if needed. In addition to the medical camp, qualified veterinarians provided veterinary services (see page 36).

The planning/steering committee of devotees included medical and health professionals as well as lay-persons, with twelve core team leaders supporting this committee. The physician and health care team of thirty-two doctors, eight dentists, and twenty-seven nurses received specialized training in the Sai organization's approach to medical screening camps. The camp was also supported by several local community clinics and a number of social service agencies, including the Vista Community Clinic, Carlsbad Health Community Clinic, San Diego County Child Protective Services, Carlsbad Unified School District, Stand Up 4 Kids, Brother Benno's Social Service Program, Women's Resource Center of Oceanside, Catholic Charities, and others.

A total of 282 patients (112 males and 170 females) were seen and helped through the free screening tests, with loving attention and care. The primary care center assisted 157 patients, and 89 went on to see specialty physicians; 62 children visited the pediatrics department. The dental department screened 193 patients,

It is the happiness of the patients that gives Me happiness.... The patients' welfare must be your topmost priority. Serve them with dedication. Service to patients is service to God. There is no service higher than this.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

SSS 36:11 July 6 2003

while the vision department saw 140 patients, and 316 lab tests were performed.

Dr. Poniachik, an internist on staff at North County Health Services, kindly volunteered at the camp and commented, "After having been involved in numerous charitable medical activities, the Carlsbad Free Medical Health Screening was the most well-organized community clinic I have ever participated in. Even more important, all the patients were extremely happy with the care they received."

Prior to the camp's opening, several devotees, including Dr. Sam Sandweiss, conducted training for volunteers, focusing on Swami's message of love, and placing emphasis on treating both the patients and each other with respect and love, as embodiments of divinity. True to Swami's teachings, the registration team received and greeted patients with sweet words, loving kindness, and genuine concern. After registration, volunteers escorted them through the various parts of

the camp, visiting the primary care, medical specialties, vision, and dental screening areas. When they had seen all the necessary medical professionals in the screening areas, each participant was taken to an exit interview, conducted by another medical professional, to ensure that they had received all the care they had required and/or requested, that their questions had been answered, and that they understood all the recommendations made. Patients needing follow-up care were referred to appropriate agencies, several of which were represented onsite.

As evidenced by their smiles and elated expressions, all present, patients and volunteers alike, appeared to be truly moved by the experience. These days much can be said about what is wrong in the world, but through Swami's grace and guidance, we are creating, participating in, and witnessing what is right and beautiful with the world.



Free Veterinary Camp

Our “Pet Wellness Day” truly began with a comment made by Swami while he was viewing photographs of previous medical screening camps coordinated by the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization in the United States. Very sweetly, he inquired, “What about the animals?” Taking to heart Swami’s words, the Pacific Region South designed, developed, and implemented our first (of many to come, we hope) veterinary camp in December 2006. Conducted concurrently with a “human” medical camp, the camp for our four-legged friends took place in Carlsbad, California, north of San Diego. In addition to veterinary exams, evaluations, vaccinations, de-worming, flea and parasite control, blood analysis, and grooming, the family members received animal-care education. Research conducted prior to the camp demonstrated the need for pet owner education in nutrition, disease prevention, early intervention in flea and parasite infestation, proper grooming, and dealing with behavioral problems from a base of love and compassion.

A spay-and-neuter clinic was also provided onsite, completely free of charge, by SNAP, a charitable organization. Pets needing follow-up care also received referrals to local low-cost clinics and charities.

Dr. Sam Sandweiss, in his training talk to volunteers prior to the camp, focused on Swami’s teachings of “Love All, Serve All” and encouraged all to treat the patients, pets, and each other with love and compassion. Community support brought an outpouring of both supplies and direct participation; more than ninety percent of the volunteers were non-Sai devotees, all operating in the spirit of love. Eighty-eight dogs and thirty-five cats were seen by the veterinarians during the camp, plus another fifty-seven who were spayed or neutered. All the animals were treated with care and consideration; many of them had never been to a vet before, and their owners were anxious yet hopeful for a clean bill of health. Tears of joy flowed for those pets deemed healthy, and tears of relief for those who now had a better understanding of their pets’ problems. As the pets and their families left the camp, they were given bags filled with food, toys, and educational material.

—Sri Sathya Sai Pacific Region 8 Newsletter
Volume 9, March 2007



Ideal Sai Youth - Messengers of Sai Love

Young Adult Retreat Reflects Theme of World Youth Conference

About thirty-five Region 9 young adults gathered February 9-11, 2007. The retreat workshops were designed by the World Youth Conference (WYC) core team to be implemented by all regions, and the theme mirrored that of the third WYC, scheduled to take place the end of July 2007 in Prasanthi Nilayam. The following are synopses of the Region 9 workshops and their results. Similar discussions on how to live as ideal Sai youth took place in all regions.

✧ Workshop 1: Ideal Sai Youth ✧

This workshop was led by the Tucson YAs. Four breakout groups considered this master question: **Come up with qualities and values that you think make up an Ideal Sai Youth. Is this definition universal, or an individual definition that varies from person to person?** Responses included:

- ◆ Being a good role model, loving, egoless, patient, honest, disciplined, respectful, dutiful, truthful, enthusiastic, focused, selfless, mature, not bound by any one religion, grateful/thankful, and not wasteful.
- ◆ Having leadership qualities, positive energy, respect for all cultures and traditions, a ceiling on desires, and harmony of thought, word, and deed.

YAs felt that these can be universal definitions, but such a list can also be very personal, and personal definitions can feed into a universal definition.

Each group was then given a question to consider:

Group 1: What do we really desire? How can we limit those desires? Responses:

- ◆ *Desires*: anything that inflates our ego; acceptance from society, friends, family; career; the things we can't have.
- ◆ *How to limit desires*: keep mentally and emotionally occupied; take the 'I' out (it's not 'me'); don't get jaded by society's pressures; live in the present; with great power comes great responsibility; be responsible; have confidence and gratitude.

Group 2: How does service help combat our ego? Does it have potential to enhance our ego? If so, how can we practice serving with humility? Responses included:

- ◆ Ego = me / service = cross-out 'me'; service helps us appreciate what we have; service helps put situations in perspective; at times service is mistaken to be service to ourselves (we serve not for ourselves but to better the society); perform service as an end in itself and not as a means to achieve selfish needs.

Group 3: Are we forced to compromise or even silence our spiritual beliefs to gain ‘acceptance’ outside the Sai realm? Responses included:

- ◆ We experience inner conflicts such as should we or should we not; we don’t really need to compromise; our actions speak for who we are; like-minded people come together.

Afterward, each group shared its points with the larger group. Next, all were asked to, anonymously: **List one area where you find discrepancies between your actions and the actions of an Ideal Sai Youth.** Each person’s ‘discrepancy’ was then placed in a basket in front of Swami, to be saved for an activity during Workshop 3.

Group 4: What deters us from being Ideal Sai Youth?

Responses included:

- ◆ Ego, desires, peer pressure, laziness, environment, the roles we play, media and movies, time management issues, ignorance, duty, lack of ambition, apathy.

✧ Workshop 2: Eyeglasses of Love ✧

Workshop 2, led by the Mesa (Arizona) YAs, covered the idea of perception, that we all wear glasses of some sort at any given time. What glasses we wear and how we wear them affects our perception of the world around us. If we wore green glasses, everything would appear green. Similarly if we wore the glasses of love, everything would appear beautiful and lovable. The glasses we wear can help or hinder our progress on the path toward becoming Ideal Sai Youth. The activities/discussion proceeded as follows:

Look silently at a range of pictures and reflect on how they make you feel. Which images would you categorize as ‘beautiful and lovable’ and which not? Why did you feel one way about an image and a different way about another? Responses:

- ◆ Society and media influence us heavily; we associate circumstances with the images, such as war vs. innocence of a baby; our personal experiences color our responses; each picture is a reflection of one’s own life; facts that we know (and personal experiences) add to our perception; the more a photo presents innocence, the more lovable it seems; innocence of character (or lack thereof) is judged based on personal flaws and lack of appearance of innocence.

What kinds of ‘glasses’ do we wear in our lives everyday? Responses:

- ◆ judgment; skepticism; compassion for the elderly; stereotypes; survival (needing to fend for ‘myself’); trust; optimism; frustration; seeing the good in everyone; past experience; positive and negative criticism; living in the present; ‘What can I gain?’ ‘What’s the point?’

How can wearing the lenses of love change our actions? Responses:

- ◆ They’d make us think of people as an emotional bank account; we’d reach out more to people, without expectation or discrimination; we’d see more reality

and have more compassion; they'd make me feel more peaceful, and less negative; they'd help me think of actions as being from God, with detachment

from emotions; bad words are only sound waves, and bad images are only light waves (our response lies in our perception).

After the two activities above, the facilitators read the stories of the king and his green glasses, and Jesus and the dog. Female YAs then turned to face the wall. While they did so, male YAs went into another room, came back out, and asked the women to turn back around. Three sheet-covered figures sat on the ground. The women were asked to guess who was under each sheet. Almost every guess turned out to be wrong! This activity really showed us how we cannot always judge based on the little we see, and how we should discard the glasses of judgment. The facilitators asked all YAs to take on a challenge and leave at least one of their many habitual sets of "glasses" behind, upon leaving the retreat.

» Workshop 3: Creating a 'Toolkit' «

We had worked on our definition for Ideal Sai Youth, challenged the glasses we wear, and surrendered our personal discrepancies. It was finally time to put thought into action and find tools to help us work on our discrepancies and continue on the path toward being Ideal Sai Youth. Our regional YA reps deviated a little from the original workshop outline. Instead of using case studies as recommended, they decided to use the discrepancies we had shared the previous day as our basis for creating a regional toolkit. We divided into two groups, each taking a number of discrepancies to discuss, by coming down to everyday basic activities. The goal was to find everyday objects that one couldn't help but notice. This way, daily objects could become constant reminders of our discrepancies, and tools to help us with our personal *sadhana*. Here's the list of discrepancies we came up with, paired with the everyday tools for helping to eliminate those discrepancies:

- ◆ *Fear of not being accepted by others and hence not being honest:* **keyring** (a key fits a certain lock and won't work in the wrong lock; we are meant to be in a certain place at a certain time; if you don't belong there, don't try too hard; find the right lock!); **mirror** (look at what you reflect; is it what you really want to show?).
- ◆ *Moving from ego to awareness: 'ti-vo'* (hit the pause or stop button, breathe, restart from a fresh perspective).
- ◆ *Fear of being put in the spotlight; fear of failure:* **flashlight** (light is always on you; turn it around and show the way); **candle** (instead of the light being on you, spread the light to others).
- ◆ *Family takes up too much time:* **book chapter** (contains all the characters but in set situations with set amounts of time).
- ◆ *Distraction/lack of focus:* **binoculars/microscope** (need to focus them to see clearly); **Swami's photo** (meditate).

- ◆ *Lack of discipline:* **hairbrush, toothbrush** (simple actions practiced daily in a certain order; daily disciplined habits)
- ◆ *Ceiling on desires; not being content with what I have:* **markers** (putting cap on limits the potential mess: remember to put the cap on!); **vibhuti** (it all ends up as ash); **garbage disposal** (get rid of negatives/trash); **calendar** (wait a week and reassess your need for something); **cookie jar** (if you try to take more than one cookie at a time, your hand gets stuck).
- ◆ *Judgment:* **cell phone ringer** (set the same ringer for everyone vs. having individual ringers).
- ◆ *Judging from past experiences:* **blank slate** (start fresh); **yearbook/notebook** (tear out a page to release the past)

- ◆ *Expectations:* **rubber bands** (stretched too tight, they break and cause pain; be flexible about results).
- ◆ *Inability to limit desire to party:* **watch** (don't waste time); **alarm** (limit time spent on desires); **'tupperware'** (take out a little at a time, like you do when you eat leftovers; apply this 'portion control' each time you go to a party).

Other everyday, concrete tools for reminding us to practice Swami's teachings:

- ◆ **computer** (it's all *maya*, illusion; the WWW is all virtual; hit ESC or CTRL-ALT-DEL to come back to reality); **electrical outlet** (power source cannot be seen, but we believe it's there, just like Swami's omnipresence).

➤ Workshop 4: Best Practices for Keeping Sai in Your Lives as YAs ➤

A recent increase in undergraduate YAs who are experiencing self-responsibility in many new ways led to the thought that it might be beneficial to have a study circle where 'older' YAs could share experiences that had helped them stay connected with Sai and build mentoring relationships within the group. The Denver YAs led this workshop, since that group consists of all working professionals. In a fun 'wheel of fortune' game, we covered situations such as: *What do you do when you come to college and need to find out who around you is a Sai devotee? How do you deal with situations and people that test your faith?* and so on.

After each round of guessing answers, YAs shared personal experiences, asked questions, and discussed best practices and the situations where each practice may or may not work. YAs left feeling a sense of unity and awareness that they're not alone. Every YA goes through similar challenges, and we found there are tools and support systems for ending up strong and even more connected to Swami in our own ways.

—Ramya Kumar and Sagar Damle
Region 9 YA Representatives

Multicultural Program at Coler-Goldwater Medical Center

Young Adults of Region 2, New York City Sai Centers

With Swami's grace, the Sri Sathya Sai Baba centers of New York City gathered on March 17, 2007, to present a multicultural program to patients at the Coler-Goldwater Specialty Hospital and Nursing Facility on Roosevelt Island, New York. The complex is a medical, recuperative, rehabilitative, and long-term care facility with about 1,000 patients. For over fifteen years, New York City Sai centers, aided by the Goldwater Auxiliary Department, have conducted various service projects, including regular monthly visits celebrating patients' birthdays and welcoming newcomers. More recently, young adults and SSE children from the area have participated in special holiday service projects on Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Swami's birthday, Christmas, and so on, to encourage and inspire the patients with Swami's selfless love.

The multicultural event grew out of a program held in October 2006, wherein the hospital administration presented the YAs and SSE children with a Community Service Award acknowledging their service for the welfare of the patients. In December 2006, Swami blessed the program in an interview granted to the Mid-Atlantic regional service

coordinator, by viewing a booklet that included a report and photos of the program. Swami's comment in the interview room that "there are no personal touches in American hospitals," reinforced our faith in his inner guidance, which has inspired us to include more and more personal interaction with patients in our projects. With that guiding thought, we planned the 2007 multicultural program with loving dedication and enthusiasm.

Despite a few inches of icy snow from the previous night's storm, more than 150 devotees from all over the New York area gathered to bring joy and happiness to patients at the hospital. They personally escorted some 120 patients in wheelchairs into the packed auditorium, where doctors, nurses, and other staff members also joined the audience, totaling over 300 people.

Reflecting New York City's diversity, the hospital represents a true melting pot: half the patients are African American; a fourth, Caucasian; a fifth, Hispanic; and about a tenth Asian and Indian. They speak fifteen different languages, with fifteen percent speaking limited English. With this in mind, the SSE children, YAs, and other



Sai center members prepared a program of Indian, Hispanic, Japanese, American, and African-American dances and songs, hoping to fill patients' hearts with pleasant memories of their mother culture.

The SSE girls from the Flushing Sai center opened the program with a dance portraying Sathya Sai Baba as the Kali Yuga Avatar, and offered it to the Swami in all. Through beautiful teamwork, they expressed His messages as the embodiment of love and truth, the bestowing of love and service upon mankind, and the unity of all religions. Then, a Krishna dance, portraying the devotion of the *gopis* (cowherd maidens) for Lord Krishna, was performed by a YA dancer with the help of her dance school. They performed another dance later in the program, depicting the harvest festival in South India. The amazing display of skilled expression filled the audience with joy.

Next, a performance, of traditional Japanese dances was offered by a Japanese devotee along with her dance group. Instead of

The multi-cultural program included performances of Indian, Hispanic, Japanese, American, and African-American dances and music.



the traditional specific choreography set to traditional music, they performed new choreography set to new songs, while wearing traditional Kimono outfits. They danced gracefully to the Japanese music, a rare treat for the patients, and at the end of the performance, a thunderous applause filled the auditorium.

"Baby Beluga," a beautiful choral piece, was sung by children ages three to seven from the Brooklyn Sai Center, who had been trained and directed by Sai youth. The little ones sang and danced to the song by Raffi, known worldwide for his loving songs and caring concern for children. This very special gift brought the beautiful innocence of small children to the audience.



Then the YA boys performed an upbeat musical dance representing a fusion of North/South Indian and Western music, and the audience responded with lots of joy and laughter. A Punjabi dance, of Northern India, was then performed by teenage girls from the Flushing Sai center, filling the entire auditorium with its energetic sounds and tempo.

The following performance, a dance from an Indian musical film, featured SSE students portraying boys trying to start a dance school by inspiring others with their talent. Then the Metropolitan Spanish Sai Center offered a lively set of “Songs from South America,” which included Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” in Spanish, along with Spanish popular songs. The joyful vibration of Hispanic rhythms and tunes filled the auditorium with energy and love, as the audience clapped and sang along.

Another “fusion” dance by Brooklyn center YAs and SSE students reflected the American musical styles, hip-hop, reggaeton, and soca. An Indian dance using sticks, presented by the YA girls, concluded the

individual performances with beauty and harmony. Finally, all performers came onstage and invited the audience to join in singing “Amazing Grace” and “This Little Light of Mine,” with the chorus resounding through the hall, “Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!”

The program afforded many service opportunities for devotees—escorting and interacting with patients, backstage and audio production, food, artwork, and dancing and singing performances; many were able to offer their skills and talents to the maximum extent. With Swami’s grace, these activities not only benefited the patients but the devotees themselves.

Intense positive energy, exchanged between the performer/volunteers and the patients, filled the auditorium with love. We witnessed countless smiles and happy faces among the patients, who expressed how they enjoyed the loving and dedicated performances as they took home the love and joy generated that day by Swami’s grace.

—Toshi Ando
Project Coordinator



Indy the Wonder Cat – a Cat's View

Indy Cat Goes to Darshan

Hi, everyone. My name is Indy Cat. I'd like to tell you about my first darshan of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

My mom told me that Sai Baba could make bugs, and I was very excited to see him! I had just made a new friend, Darshan Dog—"D.D." for short—who wore a blue scarf and helped me find my way to the darshan area. I wound up sitting next to a little monkey. Being very polite, I said quietly, "Hi, little monkey. I'm Indy the Wonder Cat. This is my first time here. What's your name? Have you come here before?"

The little monkey answered, "Hi, Indy. My name is Eshan. I've come a few times with my family. My *nana* (grandfather) has been a devotee of Swami for many years. Maybe we can talk and play a bit after darshan. That is, unless Swami gives either you or me an interview."

"What's an interview?" I asked.

"That's when Swami invites your family into the room through that door up there," said Eshan, pointing to a doorway on the veranda. "It's really neat. My family sometimes gets an interview because of Nana. Swami talks with you and materializes presents and food. One time, Swami even made some ice cream for me. It was **amaazing**."

“That does sound neat,” I said. “Have you ever seen him make a bug? My mom said he can do that.”

Eshan said, “No, I’ve never seen him make a bug, but Swami can do anything, so I guess he could do that. That would be **amaazing**.”

“Does Swami give everyone an interview?” I asked.

“No, Indy, he doesn’t,” Eshan replied. “No one knows why Swami chooses some for an interview and not others. Maybe you’ll be one of the lucky ones. I hope you will.”

“Thank you, Eshan,” I said. “There’s a lot to learn here in Prasanthi Nilayam.”

“Don’t worry about it, Indy Cat. I’ll help if I can, and the *seva dals*, the ones wearing those blue scarves, will answer your questions,” said my new friend Eshan.

Suddenly, I heard some music start, and everyone got still and quiet. “Swami is coming,” said Eshan. “This is **amaazing**.” (Eshan really liked that word a lot.)

In the distance, I could see a man in an orange robe with really neat fur on his head. His fur seemed to reflect the sunlight. It made a glow around him. Everybody was watching him, and I couldn’t take my eyes off him. As he got closer, I saw that he didn’t look like any human I had ever seen before. He was small for a human, though quite large for a cat. As he passed in front of me, he smiled and said, “Hello, Indy Cat. Where are you from?”

Wow! He knew my name. “Hi, Mr. Swami, sir,” I replied in my most polite voice. I told him where I was from.

“How long?” Swami asked smilingly.

“Counting my tail, about fourteen inches,” I replied.

Swami laughed and said, “No, no, Indy Cat. How long will you be staying here?”

I felt a little embarrassed and said, “I’m sorry, Mr. Swami. That’s up to Mom Cat.”



“Yes, yes,” said Swami. “We all must listen to our mothers. I will see you later.”

Swami started to walk away, then turned and asked, “Indy Cat, do you have a question?”

I couldn’t think of one at that moment, so I said, “No, Mr. Swami.”

“Are you sure, Indy? Didn’t you have a question about bugs? And you may call me *Swami*. We are near and dear, so there is no need for the ‘mister’ between us,” said Swami.

I thought for a moment and said, “Mr. ... I mean, *Swami*, Mom Cat told me that you made everything, even bugs. I always believe her, but a human making bugs is hard to believe.”

Swami laughed and said, “Mom Cat told the truth, Indy. I did and do create everything.” He moved his hand in a circular motion and turned it over real fast, closing it at the same time. Swami held his hand in front of me and opened it. Guess what was in his hand? You got it—a bug!!!! Now, I had been watching him very carefully, and I know there was no bug in sight (cats have very good eyes). I also know nothing came from up his sleeve. Where did the bug come from?

Swami laughed again and said, “I know this is hard to understand, Indy. Everything you see, hear, and feel—and even the things you can’t hear, see, and feel—were made by me. Not only that, but it is my will alone that sustains everything, and eventually, everything will merge back into me. I have willed everything into existence—even you.”

Even me????!!!!!! As I started to think about what Swami told me, he said, “You know, Indy Cat, bugs are very nice to play with, but you might like this better.” He blew on the bug—and I kid you not!!!!—the bug changed into a cat treat right in front of my eyes. Swami gave it to me, patted my head, and scratched my ears just the way I like it. He even gave my tail a gentle little pull, just like my human does. As he started to move away, he looked at Eshan, who was bouncing up and down with excitement.

“Very happy, very happy,” he said to Eshan.

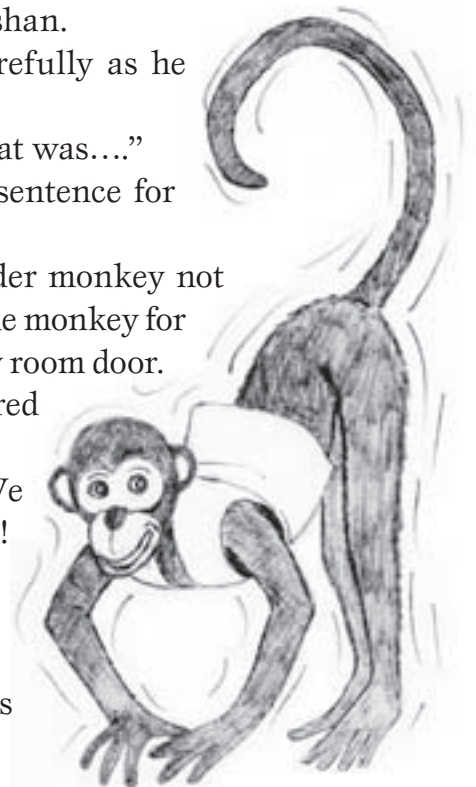
Both Eshan and I watched Swami carefully as he headed toward the veranda.

Eshan leaned toward me and said, “That was...”

“**Amaaaazing**,” I said, finishing his sentence for him. We both laughed.

On the veranda, Swami came to an older monkey not much bigger than Eshan. Swami talked to the monkey for a moment and then pointed to the interview room door. As he left, the monkey stood up and gestured to some of his family in the crowd.

“That’s my *nana*,” cried Eshan. “We got an interview, we got an interview!!!! **Amaazing. Amaazing.**” Eshan jumped to his feet and said, “I hope I’ll see you again, Indy Cat. Enjoy the cat treat.” He hurried toward the veranda and his grandfather.



“Have a great time, Eshan!!” I said just before he left. “I’m very happy for you. Hope I’ll see you soon, and you can tell me about the interview.” I did feel happy for Eshan and hoped that someday Mom Cat and I could get an interview.

Swami took Eshan and his family into the interview room and closed the door. The music stopped, and everyone got up to leave. I asked a *seva dal* dog what was going on. He explained that Swami would be in the interview room for a while and that I should go get something to eat and come back later. I realized that I would like to share my cat treat with Mom Cat, and that a little milk would taste quite good with it. As I moved toward the exit through the big crowd, I thought about this bug-making human named Swami. I certainly wanted to see more of him.

As I left the hall, I got a bit scared. How would I ever find Mom Cat in the huge crowd? Suddenly, my buddy, Darshan Dog, appeared. He looked kind of shimmery, and his fur seemed a little orange, except on his head, where it seemed darker than normal. No, it must have been my eyes playing tricks. At second glance, his fur seemed perfectly normal. Was I glad to see him!!!

“Hi, Indy Cat,” he said. “How was your first darshan? You can tell me about it while we walk together. I’ll take you to your mom cat.”

“Thanks. I was feeling a little bit lost,” I said. I broke off a piece of the cat treat that Swami had given me and offered it to him.

“Indy Cat, Swami made that for you,” said Darshan Dog.

“D.D., you’ve been so kind to me, and besides, my mom has taught me to share with my friends,” I replied.

“Thank you very much,” said D.D., accepting a piece of the treat. “We must always do what our mom asks us to.”

“That’s what Swami said in darshan,” I told D.D. “Swami is amazing, but why does he live in Puttaparthi? He could live anywhere, on a beach, or in the mountains, or....”

“Indy, Indy, slow down. I’ll tell you,” said D.D. “When Swami was about fourteen years old, devotees started coming to see him from all over India. His mom was worried that he might move away, so she asked him to please always live in the village of his birth. Swami listened to his mother’s wishes. He wouldn’t refuse her request, so he lives here to this very day.”

“Wow, even Swami obeys his mom,” I thought.

“Well, Indy Cat, your mom is waiting for you by that tree. Thanks for sharing the cat treat with me.”

With a wave of his paw, Darshan Dog made another cat treat appear. “Please share this one with your Mom Cat,” said D.D.

“Wow!!! Can everybody in this place materialize cat treats???? I’d like to learn how to do it too.”

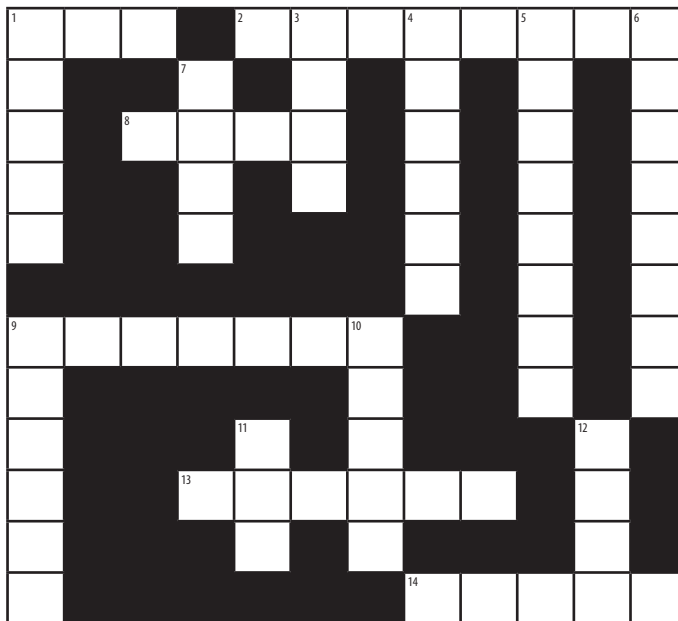
D.D. laughed and said goodbye. Once again, he started to shimmer as he walked off. He seemed to be getting orange again.

“This place is strange,” I thought as I headed for my mom. “There’s a bug-making human that created everything, even me, and a dog that makes cat treats and shows up just when you need him. Eshan has it right—this place is **amaaazing**. I’m going to like it here!”

Well, that’s all for now. Till next time, this is Indy Cat saying Sai Ram and good-bye.



World of Animals Crossword



Across

1. Most intelligent mammal! (3)
2. Sai Gita (8)
8. Flightless bird, now extinct (4)
9. These do not lay eggs. (7)
13. Jesus rode on a _____ into Jerusalem. (6)
14. The "great white" is one (5)

Down

1. Lord Ganesha's vehicle (5)
3. Narasimha was half man and half _____. (4)
4. Bird seen in Sai Kulwant Hall (6)
5. The animal listed first in an English dictionary (8)
6. The Avatar of Vishnu known as Kurma took this animal form. (8)
7. Swami's pets, Jack and Jill, were these. (4)
9. In the Ramayana, Sugriva was the king of the _____ hordes. (6)
10. You will find one draped around Lord Shiva's neck. (5)
11. Krishna used to play the flute while these animals grazed. (3)
12. In the Ramayana, the demon Maricha helped Ravana abduct Sita by appearing as a _____. (4)

Puzzle solution: see page 55.

Swami, We Invite You to America—with Love

From Southern California

My Dearest Baba,

Please accept my humble *pranams* (salutations) at your lotus feet. I came to know that you got my last letter. So, dear Baba, when are you planning to come here? I have always been waiting for you with my family members and my Sai friends. Please come soon and fulfill my wish.

Always loving you, your child,

— **Ramesh Mulchandani**
Cerritos, California

Dear Swami,

Pranams at your lotus feet. We invite you to visit America and the Sathya Sai Baba Center of Lomita in your physical form. We hope to receive your blessings there and anxiously await your arrival. Thank you, Swami.

Yours only,
— **Nirmal and Naresh Gupta**

Dear Sri Swami,

We all love you, Baba.

—**The Ugalat Family: Shankar, Shanta, Prabha, Pranay, Priya and Pravin**

Dear Lord Swami, Sri Sai Ram,

I invite you wholeheartedly to bless us with your visit to the USA, especially to Los Angeles and the Sathya Sai Baba Center of Lomita. We are all waiting for that moment.

Yours,
— **Puja Gupta**

Dear Swami Sathya Sai Baba,

I am writing this letter with lots of hope that you will come to the States and give us your darshan.

Waiting for your darshan,
— **Leena, Bhagwan, and Maya**





My humble *Mamastha*, Dear Swami,

It gives both my family and me immense pleasure and honor to be able to connect to you, my dear Father and friend. We were pleasantly surprised to hear that we [may] invite you to the U.S. Your presence and form would fill our life and being with fulfillment and divinity. You have been an inspiration and strength in all our endeavors. We have felt your courage and comfort during our moments of sorrow. We have felt you in our loneliness, and we have felt you in every moment of success and joy.

Seeing your form here would not only satisfy my family and friends, but the entire U.S. Please do visit us. We would love to be in your divine and humble surroundings.

Love and anticipation,

— Danny, Kasturi, Avikar, Shikash, and Syushka Singh Gharib

Dear Baba,

I offer many *pranams* and *padnamaskar* to you, Baba. If you come here everyone will be so happy to have your darshan. We see you in pictures and in our hearts every day, but we especially want to have your physical darshan. Please have mercy on us and come here.

My Lord, please, please, please come here and give us your darshan. I can't wait to have your darshan, touch your feet, and receive your blessings. Baba, I know that you are with me always each and every second, and you and I know what I have experienced. Still, I want your darshan. Please fulfill my wish. You know better than I what is best for my life. I completely surrender to you. Please accept lots and lots of *pranams*. *Jai, Shri Krishna!*

Yours,

— Falguni M. Patel

Dear Swami, *Mana Bangaru Parthi Baba*,

Babagaru, what shall I say; you know everything. This is a request from the Southern California devotees who all want you to come and visit us here. We would do everything humanly possible to make your visit comfortable. We all would be overjoyed to serve you and the people who come with you.

Swami, many of us are not able to come to India for different reasons, and many of us who come to India are not able to visit you as well. Even though you are in our hearts all the time, we all would get tremendous joy by seeing you in person. Our town and country really needs the blessing your visit would bring.

Inspired by your long-standing presence in my heart, I have been able to lead a normal life and do the best I can for children and my community. I am trying my best to love everyone and my assigned duties. A long time ago you told me that you would take care, and you have kept your promise and supported me in the worst times of my life. The children and I love you and owe our lives to you. Please grant one more wish by coming to Southern California to bless us.

*Baba avo humre shahar me,
Anihar yami darsh deekavo,
Baba avo humre shahar me.*

I know I might be the last person to be asking you, but please come and stay in our house in Los Angeles. The devotees of our area and I will meet all your needs within our capacity. Just thinking that you are coming here makes our hearts dance with joy. Baba, thank you for all the things you have done and are still doing for us. I cannot imagine my life without your presence. We have been waiting for a long time for you to visit us. Please come!

Baba, you know best. We all are your children and will do whatever you tell us to do.

I could give millions of reasons why you should come and grant us your darshan and continue to guide us along our life path, but you already know them.

Koti pranams at thy lotus feet.

With regards and devotion,

— **Usha Nath**

Sathya Sai Baba Center of Lakewood, California

From SSE Children in Atlanta, Georgia

Thank you, Baba, for helping me! Please come here, Baba. Please visit Atlanta, Georgia. If you're coming Baba, please come to the apartment St. Andrews. Please come in real life, Baba, because I've never seen God in real life, and my mother is so sick. She is sick in her shoulder. She's been lifting lots of stuff, and now both of her shoulders are hurting! So, that's why I at least want to see one god in life. Any god could be possible. But mostly I've always seen gods on photos. So, I just wish I could see a god once.

My mom's shoulder pain has to go! Those are my two reasons why I want to see God. I have a third reason! I want to change my behavior, Swami. So, please! Please! Help me and my mom. My whole family should change themselves. I'm talking about me and my brother. My name is Shruthi. My brother's full name is Abhishek. His short name is Abhi. So, please, please, please, please, please come to visit Atlanta, Dunwoody!

All of the time, I love you, Swami. I want to say I will be nonviolent, peaceful, and loveable to my parents! I love you, BABA. Thank you, Baba.

Love,
—**Shruthi Murali**

My full name: Shruthi Murali
Brother's full name: Abhishek
Brother's short name: Abhi
Dad's name: Murali
Mom's name: Viji

Dear Baba,

Will you please come to Atlanta? I want you to teach *Bal Vikas* (Sai Spiritual Education). We want education. If you can, please teach us truth, right-conduct, peace, love, and nonviolence. These values will give us more knowledge. Please come!

Love,

— Arjun Muralidhar

Thank you, Baba, for helping us, and please come to Atlanta and bless us all. Baba, come to our house. I love you forever, and please bless the whole world, and bless me and my mom and dad and brother, and please bless my friends. Baba, thank you for coming to everyone's house. Please, please, please, please, please come to every house, and please come by us. I have never seen you [in] real [life]. Sai Ram, and please come to my school.

— Sai Rashmi Nakkina

Dear Baba,

Can you please come to Atlanta so you can give us blessings? Then I can see what you look like. I can pray to you so you give blessings to everyone here. Then we can reach you.

Love,

—Tejas Manem

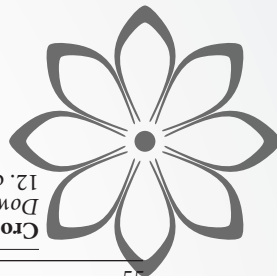
Dear Baba,

We are praying for you in America. Please, Swami, come to Atlanta so you can fill my heart with joy. I love your America with *vibhuti* falling out of your photo. Everyone will feel happy if you come to America.

Love, your friend,

— Raj Kirin Madiseti

P.S. Write back.



Crossword Solution (p. 50): Across – 1. man, 2. elephant, 8. dodo, 9. mammals, 13. donkey, 14. shark; Down – 1. mouse, 3. lion, 4. pigeon, 5. aardvark, 6. tortoise, 7. dogs, 9. monkey, 10. snake, 11. cow, 12. deer.

Announcements

Retreat Dates - USA

Region 7 (Northern California and Nevada) September 22-23, Walter Creek Ranch, Marin County, California (just north of the Golden Gate Bridge). Check regional website for information <http://www.saicenters.org/usaregion7/>.

Region 9 (Southwest) October 5-7, Tempel Hills Retreat Center, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Theme: Serving the Human Family and Beyond. Speakers: Dr. Sam and Sharon Sandweiss, Dr. Valluvan Jeevanandam. Contact: Geetha Gangadharan (303) 750-4445.

2007 Festival Dates - India

For further background on the following holy days observed in Prasanthi Nilayam, please visit: <http://www.srisathyasai.org.in/Pages/AshramInfo/festivals.htm>.

September 4, Tuesday: Krishna Janmashtami A day honoring Krishna, the Avatar of Vishnu of the Dwapara Age, who has taken birth as the Sai Avatar today.

September 15, Saturday: Ganesh Chaturti A day honoring the Lord as "Remover of Obstacles."

October 21, Sunday: Vijaya Dasami "Victory" or culmination day of the Vedic sacrificial prayers and rituals performed during the days of Dasara.

November 9, Friday: Deepavali Festival of lights, symbolizing the victory of good over evil.

November 10-11, Saturday-Sunday, Global Akhanda Bhajan Twenty-four-hour devotional singing for the upliftment of all by Sai groups worldwide, 6 p.m. Saturday to 6 p.m. Sunday.

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Gayatri Energy Drink

Seizing the Opportunity

Opportunities are always all around us, but we must recognize them as such. While the *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam* took place in Prasanthi Nilayam in August 2006, the Shrewsbury Sai center organized prayer sessions for all ten days, involving locations in five towns. The agenda for each session was to repeat three powerful prayers 108 times each—the Gayatri mantra, Sai Gayatri, and Peace Prayer (*Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu*, or “May everyone everywhere be happy”). As this was conducted every evening, we came after office hours and sat for forty-five minutes.

The first day was very difficult, with the monkey mind pestering me, “When will this be over?” As day after day passed, it became easier. I worked up to focusing for the first thirty minutes, but mental discomfort came in for the last fifteen.

The ninth day, an opportunity came my way unexpectedly. That day, the member who usually took care of counting the 108 repetitions was not present, and as I was early, by default the job fell into my lap. I had wondered how people counted to 108 using just their fingers. Although I couldn’t figure this out easily, I still managed to complete the counting.

The tenth session took place in our residence. We arranged blankets on the floor for the members to sit on, and the prayers proceeded as scheduled. The next morning, as I got ready for work, I noticed the empty blankets spread out in front of the altar. Somehow that triggered a desire to sit, then and there, and chant the Gayatri prayer 108 times, with the goal of counting all the repetitions correctly using only my fingers. Without any difficulty, I was able to count to 108 with my fingers, eyes closed. At that point, in my heart I knew that He had helped me take the first step: my mind was able to focus for twenty-five minutes continuously, without interruptions.

Since that day, a focused practice of 108 Gayatri repetitions has become an integral part of my daily schedule. This I see as a second step. I had observed that when we sit for a number of hours, generally the body needs some support, but after chanting thus, I did not feel any such stress. Amazed, I continued chanting 108 Gayatris once daily, and sometimes twice, if feeling burdened by office concerns. After chanting, stressful feelings are gone, the mind experiences an early morning freshness, and it becomes more focused in any activity. Each time

I complete one round of 108 focused repetitions, I truly feel as if I have enjoyed a tall energy drink, scooped out from a big energy bowl.

After three weeks of daily repeating the Gayatri mantra 108 times (the third step), I felt like my life had totally changed. Previously, the office load, along with part-time school assignments and personal family responsibilities, used to feel like pulling a one-ton load single-handedly. But with this routine practice, I can meet my responsibilities (office, school, and family), and on top of it all, be of help to others.

The monkey mind always presents challenges, such as temptations to skip the routine, but then I ask myself, “In a day of twenty-four hours, can we not spend

twenty-four minutes for His sake?” This helps me set other things aside and take thirty minutes of time for spiritual practice. Also, I tempt the mind to drink that glassful of energy, available at an affordable cost of thirty minutes.

At the social level, whenever I used to get together with friends for dinner, I would spend time conversing about unnecessary things, and this really used up my energy. Nowadays, instead, wherever possible, I suggest to the group that we chant the Gayatri mantra 108 times, hoping to share with them the taste of this wonderful energy drink called Gayatri.

—A Member of the Shrewsbury,
Massachusetts Sai Center

Gayatrí Mantra

OM – BHUR BHUVA SUVAHA
TAT SAVITUR VARENYAM
BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHÍ
DHIYO YONAH PRACHODAYAT

We adore the glory of that Light, the vivifying power that illumines the three worlds—gross, subtle, and causal. We meditate upon that radiant splendor, that infinite and divine grace. We pray for that Divine Light to inspire and illuminate the minds of all.

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BOOKS

Aura of the Divine, published by the Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust, India, covers virtually every spiritual topic one may have questions about. Each quote from Swami gives referenced from the original materials. BI-009 \$5.00

The Auspicious Goat, by Carolyn Freund-Nelson, is about a family pet goat that brought the Nelson family close to Baba. It contains beautiful photographs and is narrated by the goat herself. In hardcover, 240 pages. BW-004 ... \$25.00

Dasara Discourses 2004 contains Swami's discourses from the Dasara festival of 2004. Topics include: Having Faith in God, the Only True Friend; Obeying the Divine Wholeheartedly; Cultivating Good Habits; Upholding the Dignity and Honor of Bharat; and Who Are You? In paperback, 79 pages. BA-130 \$3.00

Dasara Discourses 2005 contains Swami's discourses from the Dasara festival of 2005. Topics include: God Is the Indweller; With Courage and Purity One Can Realize Divinity; Purity of the Heart Is True Sadhana; Education without Educare Is Inadequate; and Vision of the Divine. In paperback, 67 pages. BA-123 \$3.00

Meditative Pathways by Cheruvu S. Murthy. A very informative booklet on how to properly meditate, based on what Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has said about the subject. The author covers various facets of meditation, such as repetition of the Lord's name, *Soham*, and the Gayatri Mantra. BI-146..... \$2.00

Message of the Lord as a Practical Philosophy, a 700-page volume in five parts, is intended to help the reader understand not only the original Bhagavad Gita, but also Sri Sathya Sai Baba's *Gita Vahini* and related materials from Sai literature. BI-101 \$12.00

Momentous Moments is a beautiful pictorial account of the first *Ati Rudra Maha Yajna*, held in Prasanthi Nilayam in August 2006, as captured through the lens of Dr. Choudary Voleti. Large size, hardcover, 100+ pages. BI-152..... \$12.00

The Power and Potency of the Gayatri Mantra Published by the Sri Sathya Sai Organization of Sri Lanka, this booklet explains the intricate meanings and implications of the Gayatri Mantra and its recitation. It is presented in a question-and-answer format, with answers taken directly from quotes Swami has given in various texts. BC-011a \$3.00

Sai-chology: Sri Sathya Sai Spiritualizes Human Behavior, by Anil Kumar Kamaraju, Swami's interpreter, chronicles the Sunday talks that Anil Kumar has given over the course of a number of years, based on Swami's divine teachings. NEWBI-163 \$ 5.00

Sai Darshan, by Seema M. Dewan, contains 108 messages the author received, divinely inspired by Sri Sathya Sai Baba. NEW BI-061 \$ 3.00

Tapovanam, by Jandhyala Venkateswara Sastry, presents the sacred life story of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Sri Sathya Sai Sathcharitha) in the form of a holy book for daily reading. NEW BI-104.....\$ 6.00

CDs

Ananda: Sai Prayers and Mantras SCE-62..... \$6.00

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Chants the Gayatri Mantra SCE-119 \$6.00

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Love in Action commemorates Sri Sathya Sai Baba's 80th Birthday in video format, highlighting a wide range of humanitarian projects initiated and inspired by Baba, as well as service activities in various parts of Africa. T-SCE-131 \$9.00

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—Barbara Bozzani, Editor