

Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA

Dedicated with Love and Devotion to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba



“BEING Divine Love”

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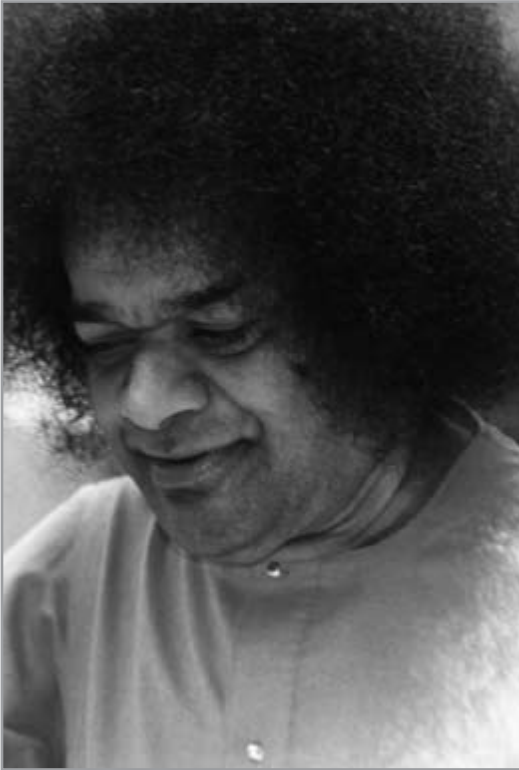
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www.sathyasaibooksUSA.org

SAI'S MESSAGE



Pure Love

Pure love is like a well-paved, one-way road with no speed bumps. You can rush along it to God at whatever speed you want. Rivers also illustrate this principle. All rivers speed down from mountains. They flow fast and swift to somewhere. Where to? To the ocean. In the process, they go over boulders and rocks, skillfully avoiding obstacles along the way. They never stop, but keep moving all the time toward the goal.

Life must be a river rushing toward the ocean called God. The flow should never stop or falter. Overcoming all obstacles, you must keep rushing toward God. That must be the characteristic of your spiritual journey. Be strong-willed, resolute, determined, and sincere. There should be no room whatsoever for weakness. If your vision, hearing, thoughts, feelings, and actions are good, you will experience nothing but bliss.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Summer Showers, May 21, 2000, “Buddha’s Message”

BEING *Divine Love*

Divine love is different from human attachment. It is timeless and constant, not a passing cloud. Make divine love your sole idea. It is inherent in you. All you have to do is manifest it in the proper direction.

— **Sri Sathya Sai Baba** (SSS 30:6, Mar. 7, 1997)

All I ever wanted to do in this world was to love. I can see that now, but looking back, it wasn't always so clear. It seemed that I lived my life surrounded by an invisible protective bubble that made me safe from most harm. I felt different than other people, and vaguely wondered: who is this person who feels and thinks so unlike almost everyone else? Who am I and why am I on this planet?

My mother planted in me the seeds of a wonderful answer to those huge questions. She taught me to love, love, love. In a thousand ways she conveyed this message. She would say, "Remember to love everyone and everything, Weezie, and always be happy." She would reach out with both hands and pinch my cheeks and repeat slowly three times, "I love you! I love you! I love you!" I loved it, and adored her, and I reveled in her love for me.

Many years further along in life I met my dearest one, Sathya Sai Baba—and realized that he truly is love incarnate. Love is not only something he does, it's what he is! Swami took that mother's love she had planted in me—surely the sweetest and highest form of human love—and he purified it, transforming it, and me, into something a great deal higher. He taught me to actually *be* divine love.

I hope to shed some more light on what this means, but I'm determined not to complicate it. Love is simple and I want to keep

it that way. I don't want to figure it out, I just want to *be* it—and, if possible, to get it across to you. Please be aware, however, that I will be using ordinary American English, worldly words, to try to convey cosmic-level information about high spirituality. Specifically, you need to be extra aware when I use the appellation “I”—as when I say “I” did this or “I” didn't do that. At those times I am mostly referring to my absolute highest Self “I”—the Atma, the “I” as Soul, as life-force, as the divinity within me. It's the “I” beyond even high spirituality. At this altitude, there is no separation whatsoever between “I” and the Divine. At other times I will be using “I” in the conventional way, to indicate this person in the world, me.

My husband and I have roamed the world for years doing seminars on Swami's teachings. Jack has written four Swami-directed, Swami-blessed books on the Bhagavad Gita. Applying these wondrous principles in people's lives is what our work is about. We are aware that it is my dearest Sai who sends us out into the world, and we know that this worldly dance is his. We're also aware that we are mere members of his troupe, still learning the steps, and, hopefully, helping others learn them.

The foundation rock of all our work is of course Swami's principle of divine love. Everything pales in comparison with this ultra-high love. In one of our lectures Jack shares a visual model—“The Six Landscapes of Love”—given to him by Swami in a meditation, years ago when he was struggling to write about spirit in the workplace. The model (chapter 7 in *Reawakening the Spirit*

in Work: the Power of Dharmic Management) shows that love is far beyond what most people think of as love—that is, beyond desires, emotions, relationships, and so on.

The sixth and highest “landscape” is a description of “Love as Spirit: Being Love.” This is love at its pinnacle. Let me quote from the book:

We've come all the way on our mission to love, and begin to realize that love is even greater than we had supposed. This is the place we speak of as Higher Consciousness or Highest Self. In this place, Spirit and Self are the same. Here also, is where Truth and Love are one and the same. Peace of Mind is so great here it's beyond mere worldly quietude, it's an ultimate tranquility. It's as though Peace merges with Truth and Love and Spirit here. This is where they all swirl, indistinguishable from one another.

I absolutely adore this level of love. This is love at the most mysterious, rarest level of human awareness—and even beyond that. This is where I live most of my life.

When people begin to see love as being much more than they thought it was, they immediately want to know how to get it. “How,” they ask, “how can I learn to love more? How can I actually integrate this important force into my daily life?” Let's shed some light on that, too.

Early in my years with Sai Baba, he gave me a simple little song:

*Fill me with your grace, Oh Lord,
Fill me with your grace;
Make my love so ever pure,
Fill me with your grace.*

I sang this song under my breath, many thousands of repetitions, for many years. The more I mentally replayed this little melody, the more it became my own private mantra, a mood that was ever with me, profoundly influencing my whole life.

Eventually I was guided to take it further, to make divine love the object of my whole being. My constant yearning for it developed into a personal *puja* (sacred ritual). For the past twenty years, my first spiritual practice in the morning and last one in the evening has been a modest little process that is now second nature to me. I reach out, take a pinch of *vibhuti* (holy ash), and touch it to various parts of me.

“Grace me to think divine,” I say, touching the *vibhuti* to my forehead. “Grace me to act divine,” putting it on the crown of my head. “Grace me to see divine,” touching my eyes. “Grace me to hear divine,” touching my ears. “Grace me to speak divine,” touching my lips. Then I pause and hold *vibhuti* to my heart saying, “But most of all, dearest one, grace me to *be* divine love.”

This uncomplicated ritual, repeated thousands of times by now, has worked its magic on me. I do feel graced with all these things, and blessed indeed.

Notice the term *grace* in both of my pujas. I know it's all his grace. And I knew early in my spiritual life that grace was not a rare blessing available only to the pious or lucky ones. Grace is an ocean of divine energy accessible to all of us at all times. Our task is to tap into that sacred reservoir and bring grace into our lives. My little prayers are not desires for anything, they're love

songs invoking my own truth, the divinity within me.

When people ask me how to become divine love, I share the following formula:

First, make divine love the very center of your entire life. Focus your consciousness, your entire being, on divine love.

Second, ask and yearn for this highest love. Put the question straightforwardly: “Please, dearest Lord, grace me to *be* divine love.” Repeat this request over and over with every breath, every moment of your life.

Finally, let go of all of your striving and just *be* it. Let grace flow into your heart. Simply decide to *be divine love*! This sounds outlandish at first, but spiritual logic is poles apart from worldly logic. Swami is clear that divine love resides in all of us; it's one and the same with our divinity within. Letting go is a powerful act of surrender, which allows divinity to emerge.

There's an important spiritual principle at work in this process. It's the law of attention: “That on which you place your attention grows stronger.” It's so simple that our rational minds slip past it without grasping this great wisdom. But think about it. If you put your attention on being sad, you're invariably sad. If you turn your attention away from suffering and choose happiness, you're invariably happy.

There's magic in this simplicity, and it has huge ramifications for attaining divine love. I didn't pursue love or search for it. I wasn't interested in walking some long path to it, nor was I the type to sit around praying for love to find me. I didn't stop and think about, define, or explain it. I didn't wait for

a feeling to come. I just wanted to *be* it. I was divinely guided simply to choose to *be* divine love.

Some 60 centuries ago Sai Baba, as Krishna in the Gita, laid out the qualities of people who were dear to him. It's a pithy list that includes being forgiving, not getting agitated by worldly ups and downs, not grieving, holding the same attitude toward friend or foe, returning love for hate, possessing firm faith, and several more. It's a veritable checklist that we can use to assess our spiritual progress.

A bit later in the Gita it becomes clear that divine love transcends even those lofty qualities. We learn once again, but more strongly this time, that divine love is divinity itself. There's no separation, no distinction whatsoever. We learn also that when we become the divine love inherent in us, we actually become divinity itself. It's hard to imagine, but we are that divinity! There's no separation, no distinction, between our Self and God. And what's more, everyone else is in the same boat. Everyone is divinity. We are indeed all one. Once we attain this realization, that everyone else is but the reflection of our Self, we have arrived at the basis of the unity of humanity.

The Gita then teaches us, "Divine love is both the way to, and the ultimate goal of, all human existence—the apex of human spiritual achievement." As I ponder this, I have to pause and catch my breath. How wondrous it is!

Then the Gita adds, "To be devotional is the sacred plan of nature." Aha! That is the key to my approach. I don't have to

understand divine love. I don't even have to think about it. I can simply allow myself to become saturated in my devotion. That's all. I can just bask in veneration. And so can you.

My whole world now is love. When I go to darshan, for example, I see everything and everybody as love. People, bullocks, butterflies, monkeys, ashram dogs, birds, insects—everything and everybody—all are love! Love is my state of being, my consciousness, my total awareness, my mind set. Love is my everything! I turn a blind eye to anything other than divine love. Maybe this is my grown up description of that childhood "safety bubble."

And this is not confined to the ashram. Wherever we go, whatever we do, it's all love. It's as true in the bazaar outside the gate as it is in a California mall or a Guatemala mercado. Everything I do, every place I go is now so suffused with divine love that I have no other way of being. Because this is always in my mind, how could my life be other than divine?

It's an audacious strategy, and it may bewilder some people. I'm aware too that we live and work in the world, and "bad" things happen. Yet I have been guided to simply refuse entry into my mind to any of the plethora of negatives that pervade people's lives nowadays. My state of mind, my consciousness, is everything to me. I never put my attention on nonloving thoughts. I'm unperturbed by wars, plane crashes, tsunamis, or any of the ubiquitous "news at eleven" dramas playing out around me in everyday life. Nothing impinges. Not

even our own, or our family's, illnesses and tribulations. Is this positive state 100 percent? It's at least 99 percent—so close to being totally upbeat that when bad things do slip by, they don't even register on my attention radar. My sole purpose on this earth is to love, and to shower divine love on all.

About five years ago, as I was quietly waiting for *darshan* (Swami's appearance), a clear voice inside me said, "Loving is your nature." Intense *shakti* (divine energy) followed that statement, and I sobbed with joy. It was as if God had whispered my inner truth to me: Divine love is me, and God is divine love. There's no difference. A few seconds later, Swami entered the gate and looked intently at me—as though seeing straight into the depths of my heart.

*All I ever wanted to do
in this world is love.*

Instrumented Self-Inquiry

Now, dive deep with me into this stupendous topic from a different angle. Swami says that self-inquiry is at least 70 percent of *sadhana* (spiritual discipline), and that truth has to be both known and experienced. Acquiring high wisdom takes searching within, which is the very foundation of your spiritual development.

On the following two pages is a simple, practical self-inquiry instrument, "How Saturated with Love Am I?" drawn from various teachings in the Bhagavad Gita. Using this instrument brings the lessons home in a personal way.

The idea of application is the beating heart of this approach. My husband and I

utilize such instruments at our seminars and lectures. Participants can choose to use them, or not, and can do so in the privacy of their own inner rooms. People love these simple but profound spiritual tools, and feel helped in a tangible way by them.

Moving into divine love is the central expedition of your life. The teachings presented here may be the most important you ever encounter. Take this seriously, lovingly, and with great cheerfulness. In the final analysis, the only real destination in life is your divinity within. In the end it's all you have.

In this world, no other virtue is greater than love. . . . It is only love that encompasses and permeates the entire world. This love is the very form of God. (SSS 32-2:2, July 28, 1999)

Now open your mind and heart to this instrument (on pages 8 and 9) and to the flow of love within you, and apply it right now in your life. Proceed with Divine Love. I love you, *Om Sai Ram*.

—**Louise Hawley**

Prasanthi Nilayam

Reprinted from *Sai Vahini* magazine
(Singapore), November, 2007

Louise and her husband Jack Hawley are long-standing devotees of Swami. Besides four books, Jack has produced an audio CD of the *Bhagavad Gita: A Walkthrough for Westerners*. Their website is: www.GitaWalkthrough.com.

How Saturated with Love Am I?

A Self-Inquiry Instrument Drawn from the Teachings of the Bhagavad Gita

Early in the Bhagavad Gita's timeless spiritual teachings, the breathtaking principle of divine love (beyond mere worldly love) is gradually introduced. As the Gita's 18 chapters roll out, these crucial teachings are interspersed throughout the text, restating the same truths in different contexts and imageries, like a mother repeating lessons to her child, so that the real truth of divine love gradually becomes clear.

Here we have taken those teachings a step further, shaping them into a modern self-inquiry instrument. It may, at first, register as a "test," which can cause some resistance, but it's not a test; there are no right or wrong answers here. Just take a deep breath, dive deep into the teachings, and find yourself comfortably participating in your spiritual evolution.

Proceed unhurriedly in a mood of high receptivity. Notice your awareness shift as you progress. Do not seek to learn the material, but to become it—to actually *be* the high consciousness that permeates the teachings.

Self-Inquiry on Spiritual Progress: An Immediate Self-Assessment

- Treat the teachings from the Gita (on page 9) as if God were expounding them to you.
- As you read each teaching (reverently), put a 1–9 self-rating in the blank next to each item, using the scale provided. Ask yourself, "To what extent do I understand and practice this in my daily life?"
- Give yourself an overall grade here: _____ (A+ through D- or F), in terms of how "loving" you think you are now.
- List two or three things to do during this year to raise your grade at least one level.
- Date this sheet and revisit it later to check your progress. (Expect to be pleasantly surprised.)

The Gita's Teachings

As you read each teaching from the Bhagavad Gita, ask yourself: “To what extent do I understand and practice this in my daily life?”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
never		seldom		sometimes		frequently		always

- Divine Love is both the way to and the ultimate goal of all human existence; it is the pinnacle of human spiritual achievement!
- It may seem impossible to you, but a human can come to really know God—not merely about God, but to literally be one with the Divine. This is the profound plan and purpose of creation, which is hidden from most people.
- The only way for you to achieve this is through unswerving devotion to me, God, who is the divine love that lives in your heart.
- Wise yogis ceaselessly love me (the Godhead, Brahman), and they know that the very love they are experiencing for me, is me, for I am love!
- Make divinity your fondest ideal and highest goal. Set your mind and heart on me, the Divine.
- One truly is where one's mind is, so fix your mind on me, be absorbed in me alone, focus your devotion on me, still yourself in me, and make all your acts an offering to me. Being saturated with devotion and faith leads you quickly and surely to me.
- When you live your whole life in me, each of your contacts with other beings becomes inwardly an adoration.
- In a constant state of deep love for God, the true devotee recognizes nothing but God in the world. Through this unswerving, single-minded love (*ananya bhakti*), you come to know the essence of my supreme glory, and you enter into my Being.
- When you love, you know me; you know my innermost nature, the truth of what I am. The act of loving is itself the real experience of knowing me. As a knower of God, you in fact become God.
- Give me your whole heart. Make me your very own. Then you will discover me and come to me. I promise you this because we are forever linked through love, the greatest of unifying forces.

—Jack and Louise Hawley

Adapted from *Roadmaps to Self-Realization* (2006, Jack Hawley), p. 74

Love Everyone Wholeheartedly

A “Surprise” Discourse to American Devotees

A group of devotees from the USA (Southern California) had been permitted to lead bhajans as a part of their program in front of Swami on the evening of December 15, 2007. Swami came out at about 5:05 p.m., went straight to the group, and asked for their program—a session of “chain bhajans”—to begin. The medley began with the Shuklambaradharam Ganapati mantra, then moved on to a sequence of bhajans without a break, a good blending of different beats and ragas. Swami sat tapping his hands and watching them intently as they sang. After completing the medley, the group continued to sing “normal” bhajans.

But the beauty of the evening came after the bhajan program. In fact, it came after the Arati (ritual offering of the sacred flame) was performed at about 6:00 p.m. Swami did not move, even after the Arati was completed. He then called Mr. Bob Bozzani, who was seated right in the front row of the American devotees, and asked him to speak. Mr. Bozzani gave a short and sweet talk on the topic of reaction, reflection, and resound. He observed that service projects in Bhagavan’s name—Bhagavan’s love in action—are bringing about unity of humankind by prompting cooperation, love, and harmony in the world.

Everyone was thrilled at this extra dose of darshan, but they were totally unprepared for what was to come next. Swami signaled for his microphone to be brought! Then, to everyone’s surprise and delight, he began to speak! The discourse appears below.

After his discourse, Swami very sweetly asked, “Is Arati over?” He then asked for the Arati to be done again! So it was a double bonus for the boys and devotees selected to give Arati to Swami. After filling everyone with his mellifluous words and the vision of his delicate yet powerful form, Swami retired at 6:50 p.m.

—Prasanthi Diary, January 2008, www.radiosai.org

Embodiments of love! People think this world is filled with many troubles, difficulties, and sorrows, and thereby they are filled with anxiety and worries. But in fact the truth is nothing like this: *everything is actually bliss*. The Lord, who is the creator, is full of bliss, and so is creation—be it insect, animal, or bird. Problems and difficulties

are but man’s imaginings. *Pleasure is an interval between two pains*: there cannot be happiness without difficulties. Difficulties are meant to give you happiness, not to make you miserable with more sorrows.

Whatever comes to us, we should consider it as God’s gift and be happy. We should not think that it has been given to us

to make us suffer. Never consider anything as painful. To remove severe pain in the abdomen, the doctor uses surgery, which itself is painful. Difficulties are ultimately responsible for the removal of pain.

The multitudes of beings are in fact the product of the same *Atma* (inner divinity). The same God dwells in all. The names may be different: Jesus, Allah, Rama, Krishna, and so on. The *Atma* is nothing but love; the actual name for the *Atma* is love. All of you have come from America only because of your love for Swami. This love will ensure that you can achieve anything. Love holds and unites

everyone. Unity leads to success, to purity, and finally to divinity. I and you are one. Swami is not separate from you. You have to strengthen the feeling that “I am God.” In that oneness, you will find bliss.

All are one, but the fickle mind is unsteady and wanders arbitrarily like a monkey. The one thing that is steady is love, love, love. *Love is God. Live in love.* Through steady love, the mind can be subdued. What we must learn today is that we must love all, because the same love is present in all. A mother loves her children due to this feeling of love. All are children of God; therefore, God loves all and hates none. God is not the cause of your pain and suffering, nor is God separate from you. God can never leave you and will be with you always, everywhere.

God is in you, with you, above you, and around you. You are, in fact, God; this being so, you do not have to search for God.

Wherever you look, see that God is present there. (Swami pointed to different things.) This is God. This is God. You are all embodiments of God. You have two eyes, with which you can see large numbers of things. Similarly, God is one, and he can see all. There is no place outside of God.

Because we limit our vision to the physical level, we see differences, but we should not rely on the physical body. Only with the physical body do you encounter difficulties.

Do not go by the form. The mind is a mad monkey, and the body is a water bubble. In one moment, the mind is here; the next moment, it flies away to another place. *Manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *chitta* (levels of awareness), *ahamkara* (ego)—all these are temporary, like passing clouds. Only one thing is permanent, and that is You. The “I” is the real you. The true answer to the question “Where is God?” is “I am God.”

Realize Love as the Undercurrent

Take love as the basis for everything. You may perform any number of spiritual practices, such as *bhajan* (devotional singing), *japa* (repetition of holy names), and *tapa* (penance), but love should form the undercurrent of all these practices. Without



The one thing that is steady is love, love, love. Love is God. Live in Love. Through steady love, the mind can be subdued. What we must learn today is that we must love all.

love, all spiritual activities are useless. In fact, if you have love, then there is no need for all these other spiritual practices. But to understand the importance of love, spiritual activities are needed.

Fill your mind with love. (Swami sang:)

*Prema mudita manase
kaho Rama Rama Ram*
... (Recite the name of Rama with your heart full of love. ...) Hence, give highest importance to love. This is the chief spiritual practice that we have to undertake.

All physical, worldly relationships are temporary—impermanent, like passing clouds that come and go. They are your mental reaction, reflection, and resound. Have total control over the mind; then you are moving toward realizing God.

(Swami displays his handkerchief.) What is this? This is a cloth. It is not merely cloth; it is a combination of threads, which are made of cotton. Everything has emerged from God, like threads. You weave the threads per your liking, but it is not your liking that is important; what God likes is what is important.

There can be changes in the body and mind, but love is changeless and permanent, having no birth or death. It is immortal and one only. It comes from truth; truth is one. Truth is God. God manifests and moves

about, present everywhere, in the form of love.

Your breath itself is God and reveals your divine identity. If you observe it, it says, *Soooo... Hammm...*, meaning, “I am That.” That refers to God, who is present in you in the form of love. The same love pervades all. Therefore, you should treasure love in your heart safely. Other thoughts come and go like passing clouds, but only love is permanent and eternal. So do everything with love, even when facing your enemy.

If you come across an enemy, love and greet him by saying, “Hello, hello.” Then he will also respond in kind, saying, “Hello, hello,” back to you. This is the reaction,

reflection, and resound of your feelings. Whatever good or bad you experience is the result of your own actions. Everything comes from within you; hence, you should always remain immersed in love.

Nothing is impossible for love; if you have love, you can achieve anything and perform any task. Love is responsible for all of creation and its functioning in this world. It is love that creates, sustains, and destroys. There is no greater God than love; love is God. It is pure and unsullied. Whatever you do without love is a futile exercise. Therefore, treasure love in your heart. Everyone will



be attracted toward this love; it bestows everything upon you.

When you look at the world with your physical eyes, you see diversity, but in fact, everything is love, which does not change. Be filled with such love. If you follow this principle of love, it will give you the fruit of all the various spiritual practices.

People call God by various names—Rama, Krishna, Jesus, Allah—but all names refer to the same God. Similarly, God responds to whatever name is called. All these names have been given to God by man; God does not originally have these names. The original

name of God is *love* and *love* only. Love is only one and not two. Do not entertain differences based on the names and forms, as love is one.

It is like this: You have rice. You can grind it and prepare various dishes—*idlis* (pancakes), *dosas*, and so on. With sugar, rice can be made into pudding. But all these different names and forms arise from the same rice. God or love is the same—made into different names and forms by man. But like the one ingredient, rice, God is present in all creation as love. Therefore, perform each and every task with love.

We call others “brothers and sisters.” You may consider someone as your husband, someone as your son, and someone as your daughter. These are all physical and worldly

relations, established only by you and subject to change. Physically, they appear separate, but never observe diversity: brothers, sisters, and all other relationships are one. Be it an old man or a child, both are essentially divine. God is beyond all ages and forms; only love is God’s true form, and the same love is present in all forms you see. Therefore, every one of you should develop love. Love

everyone wholeheartedly; only then can you experience bliss. As long as you have love, you will not lack bliss.

Recognize Only Unity

People observe individual differences.

There are three aspects of an individual: 1) the one you think you are; 2) the one others think you are; and 3) the one you really are. At the physical level, you may identify with your name, form, and village, but in reality, you are only one, and this is what you should realize. Recognize the unity of all creation.

Your worldly relations will also gain value when you recognize this unity: if you have a one (1), you can put many zeroes after it, and each zero gains value. But remove the one (1), and all the zeroes lose value, even if they are a thousand in number. Without God, the only one, there is no value; with God, everything’s value gets enhanced. This is the truth, howsoever anybody may say it.

In the same way, you may chant any name, realizing the oneness of God. The



*God is beyond all ages and forms;
only love is God’s true form, and
the same love is present in all
forms you see. Therefore, every
one of you should develop love.
Love everyone wholeheartedly.*

Vedas declare this same truth: *Truth is one, but the wise refer to it by many names (Ekam sat, viprah bahuda vadanti)*. With love in your heart, you may go to any country, chant any name, and perform any spiritual practice.

Do not hate anyone. *Help ever, hurt never* is the quality of a true devotee. Being a devotee, it is not right to observe differences, such as *mine* and *thine*. Do not think, “You are not mine; he is mine.” This amounts to hating God, for the same God is present in all. Swami’s wish is that all should develop this feeling of oneness, be happy always, and attain the highest bliss.

You have come from different countries, and you have different names and forms, but having come here, you are all one. From today onward, may you always remain in bliss—forever and ever. Some say, “Today is my birthday.” *Birthday* relates only to the body. Today it is born; tomorrow it may die. But you are all eternal and immortal. You have no birth, no death. Be happy always. Do not allow differences of *mine* and *thine* to come near you.

All of you have sung the glories of the Lord in one voice. This unity is divinity.

Where there is lack of unity, there is diversity. Where there is unity, there is purity, and purity attracts God. Hence, develop unity. The white clothing you have put on symbolizes purity. Differences are seen when you put on clothing of different colors. Give no room for differences. Not only in dress, observe unity and purity in your mind, feelings, and thoughts. All are one. Upon returning to your respective homes, lead your lives with unity, love, and bliss.

Swami is very happy with your bhajans today. They were full of harmony and thus were in perfect unity. (Swami sang the bhajan:) *Hari bhajana bina sukha shanti nahi ...* (Without singing to the Lord, there’s no peace or happiness ...). Consider *bhajan* as *bhojan* (food) for satisfying your spiritual hunger, and imbibe the food of bhajan every moment, day in and day out. From morning till night, constantly do bhajan in all your waking hours; this is Swami’s teaching to you. Perform all your tasks while contemplating constantly the name of God within you. God is within you, beyond you, below you, and behind you. *Very happy.*

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
December 15, 2007

The power of Love alone confers true strength. All other powers are of no avail. Hence the only strength we should seek from God is the strength of love. With that strength all the powers can be acquired. It is not siri (wealth) that we should desire; we should yearn for Hari (God)... It is not rolling in wealth that constitutes enjoyment. To be immersed in God’s love and thoughts of God is the greatest enjoyment as well as true yoga... God is present everywhere in the cosmos. He is timeless, without beginning or end. You must try to develop the awareness of this Omnipresent Divine in your heart.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (July 17, 1988, “Wealth or Grace?”)

Matching Volunteers with Those in Need

*Sai Center "Service in Action" Program Finds a Fit
with Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services*

In Fall 2005, young adults of the Sathya Sai Baba Center of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, met with the local town manager, to present a program entitled Service in Action. This program proposed to have a system in place whereby residents of the town who need volunteer help and support could access the volunteer services of the Sai Baba center membership.

Eager to move forward with this proposal, the town manager referred the Sai Baba center to the Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services (SYFS) agency. This organization serves the needs of local community youth and families, providing services from as simple as rides, to moving services, to professional counseling, including confidential psychotherapy.

For the past few years, SYFS and the Sathya Sai Baba center have worked together to identify and support the town residents. Since then, Sai center members have been blessed with many opportunities that fit the devotees' objective of getting involved with the local community at a personal, grassroots level.

Once, a group of five volunteers helped a widowed mother and her four children make a fresh start in life. On another occasion, four volunteers helped a senior citizen relocate

from one apartment to another. On yet another occasion, a group of three volunteers transported a surprise donation—a fish tank—from SYFS to a troubled family.

On September 29, 2007, a group of over twenty volunteers provided a facelift to the interior (painting of doors and offices) and exterior (power-washing mold-affected areas) of the SYFS office facilities. The SYFS staff acknowledged that this much-needed facelift could not have been possible without a group such as the Sai center coming forward to provide the required work and supplies.

About a month later, on October 26, 2007, the SYFS board of directors presented a recognition award to the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center of Shrewsbury. During the award ceremony, the SYFS executive director announced to the gathering of approximately forty prominent community members, "The Sai Baba Center's group of volunteers has been ready and able to help those in need, on repeated occasions, all while performing professional work and without wanting any spotlight or acknowledgment for their wonderful efforts."

—Sai Center of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts

Friendship a Natural Outcome of Alzheimer's Service

Weekly Social Visits Have Continued for Over Nine Years

"Hi, honey, it's good to see you," says Sally, a tiny woman with beautiful white hair, from her wheelchair. Sally and other residents of the Country Meadows Assisted Living Center have Alzheimer's disease, which is memory loss. The Alzheimer's residents accomplished much in their younger days and now are living apart from their families.

So, in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, it is not serving food that is the need, but companionship, as there is much loneliness among the elderly. For one hour each week, the Mechanicsburg Sai Center has been blessed by Bhagavan with a "bingo" service activity at this assisted living facility.

Members of the Mechanicsburg Sai Center visit weekly with Sally and other residents on two different floors of the facility. Among the first floor residents, the disease is not as acute as in those who live on the second floor. And, while most residents do not recall the names of the Sai volunteers from week to week, they seem to recognize their faces. The Sai volunteers greet them and slowly escort them to the activity room to play the familiar game, "bingo"—which simply involves placing large tokens on a card bearing numbers from between 1 and 75, which are called out

randomly. Winning of the game occurs when five tokens placed on called-out numbers line up, either straight or diagonally.

On the first floor, the bingo game is serious business, with residents focusing intently on its play. These participants show little patience for their friends who are hard of hearing, and the Sai volunteers must repeat the numbers several times. The friendly impatience brings about much hilarity among the volunteers and each other. On the second floor, the Sai volunteers play bingo with residents who have more severe Alzheimer's. This game is slower, and when winning takes place, the Sai volunteers give them all a prize.

What do they win? Not money or useless trinkets, but instead the joy of group singing—of cheerful, familiar songs from the 1920s–1940s, which were the residents' favorites as they were growing up. These are tunes such as, "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else but Me," "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," and patriotic songs such as "God Bless America," "Yankee Doodle," and "America the Beautiful," which remind residents of good times. While singing, the Sai volunteers engage the group by passing around a small soft ball, which can bring out the playful child in even the oldest,

most serious residents. This creates much laughter in the activity room, making the atmosphere feel light.

The Mechanicsburg Sai Center has been playing bingo with the residents at Country Meadows every week for almost nine years. Thus the center has had the opportunity to interact with many wonderful people over the years. The fact that it is a weekly project affords the volunteers the continuity to grow fond of the residents, and the Sai volunteers call them friends. Sometimes, the Sai volunteers learn of residents who have passed away, which saddens them. Other times, Sai volunteers have the opportunity to spend time with those who are dying, by holding their hands or sharing a smile and lightening their pain for a bit. Visitors to the service project always express that they feel touched by the love they feel during the visits to the facility.

As the Sai volunteers announce the last game, the residents ask for “one more game,” and the Sai volunteers oblige them. Then, when it is time to go, the Sai volunteers hug each person, and the residents kiss them back and ask that the Sai volunteers come back to see them. The atmosphere that the Sai volunteers feel is one of love and respect. As the Sai volunteers say their goodbyes until the next week, the loving angelic staff at Country Meadows also say “thank you”—but it is the Sai volunteers who feel even more thankful for this loving service opportunity.

—Sai Center of Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

“In Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, it is not serving food that is the need, but companionship, as there is much loneliness among the elderly.”



Seizing an Opportunity to Foster Joy and Unity

Seattle Eastside Center Joins with Downtown Center/Shelter in a Holiday Celebration

The Family & Adult Service Center (FASC) in downtown Seattle has the aim of helping homeless individuals and families achieve self-sufficiency. The center provides shelter and a comprehensive set of services, including training in life skills and financial literacy. Its goal is to enable individuals and families to permanently transcend homelessness and find a firm footing. The shelter is a drop-in center where the homeless have a place to shower, eat, use the laundry and telephone, receive mail, get clothing, and share fellowship.

For several years now, attendees of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center of Seattle Eastside have been filling lunch bags once a month to distribute at the shelter. Lunches include burritos made of rice, beans—and that most important ingredient, *love*—and the burritos appear to be very much enjoyed by visitors at the shelter.

Recently we had an occasion to discuss additional service opportunities with the FASC director. With the holiday season close at hand, one such opportunity was to join other FASC volunteers in hosting a Christmas celebration serving homeless adults and children.

Immediately, many at the Sai Center of Seattle Eastside launched into action, and

brainstormed ways to bring joy as well as combine the center's various wings—YAs, SSE, Service, and Devotion—as a unit, to demonstrate love (and unity) in action. The plan that emerged was to combine a hygiene kit service activity (assembling and distributing toiletries and other necessities) with a devotional program of carol singing combined with multi-faith songs. Yet another opportunity involved hosting a bingo game.

Initially, some of our center members felt trepidation, since they had never participated in an event like this before, particularly one with public singing, and we had fewer than four weeks to prepare. However, with Swami's inspiration, hesitations quickly dissipated, and it ended up being a wonderful opportunity, in which many could participate. With the YAs and SSE children actively involved, it was hard to miss the enthusiasm!

Bursts of activity emerged all around, with preparations evolving at full speed, including emails and conference calls. Meetings took place with the FASC director to make sure the program would go smoothly and to communicate the motivation of universal, selfless love. Meanwhile, the songs were practiced. One of the coordinators made CD

copies for the group singers, to help them get familiar with the words, keys, and tunes.

Materials for the hygiene kits appeared magically, and the kits were assembled. Volunteers provided wish-lists of gifts (listing what the children wished for) to be distributed.

On December 22, the celebration day arrived. Many felt Swami's presence during several blissful moments throughout the event. It was wonderful to see many families at the shelter enjoying the food and beverages that we served. The happy faces of children holding tightly to their Christmas gifts brightened up the room, even on a cloudy Seattle day. Folks began dancing and humming to the tunes of the carols and multi-faith songs. Even though some of the songs were unfamiliar, the audience began to join in enthusiastically. A little girl started dancing spontaneously, and even the older kids could be observed tapping their feet.

An excited crowd took part in the bingo game. Some of the children also got to experience the joy of playing "bingo master." Others got to announce their names proudly, as winners. It was one, big joyous event without any boundaries, filled with touching and heartwarming moments. The FASC director reflected that it had been one of their best celebrations ever, and promptly invited the Sai volunteers to return next year.

—Sai Center of Seattle Eastside,
Washington

*"It was one, big joyous event
without any boundaries,
filled with touching and
heartwarming moments."*



Divine Love at the Beach

For the last five summers, young adults and other devotees from Sai Centers around the greater Los Angeles area have spent a day at the beach with children from “Ability First.” This school, established in 1926, was originally known as the “Crippled Children’s Society.” It served the needs of children with physical and mental handicaps, and many years later, the school was appropriately renamed “Ability First,” recognizing that all children are gifts of love from God.

On a picture-perfect day in September, 2007, about 70 Sai volunteers gathered at the beach to welcome the children from Ability First for a day filled with fun and excitement. Three canopies were erected on the sand to protect the children from the sun. These pavilions were then beautifully decorated with flowers, balloons, and quotes from Swami. A huge balloon arch was also set up at the entrance to the beach. Since the balloons were orange in color, it seemed like Bhagavan himself awaited these children, with outstretched hands.

At 9.30 a.m., about 60 children arrived at the beach with some of their teachers, and the devotees gathered around to garland each child who emerged from the bus. The children were then each assigned a “friend” with whom they would spend their day. After a quick breakfast, the children were divided into groups for games, such as baseball, water relays, tug of war, and a seashell collection contest. Without



a doubt, one of the kids' favorite activities was swimming in the ocean.

To the delight of all at the beach, the devotees had prepared a delicious lunch, including salad, pasta, rice, vegetables, fruit, juice, and ice cream. After the meal, the children played more games. Then came the favorite part of everyone's day—the musical session. Popular and upbeat English, Spanish, and Sanskrit bhajans were sung by the devotees, and everyone followed with enthusiastic hand-clapping—and some children even started to dance with the bhajans!

Is it possible to capture the innocent smiles of the Ability First children with mere words? How can we truly convey the joy derived on our part from this service project? It is difficult, indeed. However, the young adults and others felt in their hearts the true essence of Bhagavan's message of "service to fellow men." Inspired by Swami's example, the time was sanctified by engaging socially in good action, and that is what transformed an ordinary day at the beach into an extraordinary experience of divine love.

—Aparna Murali
and Max Lowenthal
Region 8 (Pacific-South) YA
Representatives



Our Eternal Companion

The divine alone can be the guide, companion, and counselor on this lone journey of man.

—Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

This article first appeared in the 2007 pre-World Youth Conference publication, *Ideal Sai Youth: Messengers of Sai Love*.

Swami brought me into the Sai family at the age of nine, when I started attending a Sai Center with my family. I also went to *Bal Vikas* (Sai Spiritual Education) every Sunday, where I was introduced to Swami's teachings. The transformation that Swami's teachings brought about in my parents left a deep impression on my young mind. They seemed happier, even though they were no longer going to parties every weekend. They were more loving and devoted and spent more time with the family. Swami made them strive to be better. He became the focus of their lives as well as mine. At this time my grandparents decided to move to Prasanthi Nilayam. This was a blessing for my sister and me, as it allowed us to spend our grade school and college summers at the ashram. We anxiously awaited these trips, often leaving for India on the same day our classes ended. The immense peace and love I felt in Swami's presence drew me back each year.

One day near the end of our first summer trip, I wrote a letter stating that if Swami took my letter, he would call us for an interview the next day. To my utter surprise, he took the

letter. I was ecstatic. I had been longing and praying for an interview, and now my wish would be fulfilled. I relayed the good news to my family and told them to get prepared. I had already come up with a long list of questions that I was going to ask the Lord of the Universe and figured they should do the same. My grandparents advised me not to get my hopes up and were a little skeptical. I was confident, however, that Swami was going to call us for an interview, and I had my list prepared.

The next morning, Swami did call us. He guided my sister and me like a father and showered us with so much love like a mother. This incident helped build my faith and love for Swami. I felt that if you longed for his grace with faith and all your heart, he would answer your prayers. This incident also helped me realize that I had a direct relationship with God. From this day on I would relay to him my teenage fears and concerns in numerous letters. I used to write him letters almost every day, and he would actually take them. As I've grown older, Swami has continued to be my confidante,

helping me to get through difficult times. I realize now that wherever I am, I can communicate with him through prayer.

Throughout my life, Swami would remind me that he was always with me, guiding and protecting me. One incident where he protected me happened after I returned from a trip to India. I had developed high fevers and severe vomiting and diarrhea. The doctors placed me on intravenous fluids to keep me hydrated. Various specialists saw me, and they sent blood samples to the lab for analysis. One morning the doctor called to tell us that something was growing in one of the blood samples and that it looked like typhoid bacteria.

At that time I did not know the full implications of this, but from the look on my mother's face, I knew that it was not good. What I did not know was that if I were diagnosed with typhoid fever, I would be placed in quarantine and would have to miss months of school. Right after the call, my sister and I went into our family prayer room and prayed to Swami to cure my illness. Soon after we came out of the prayer room, my mother received another call from the lab. They had looked at the sample again and could not find any growth! We knew that this was Swami's blessing. I fully recovered a few days later. During our next trip I thanked Swami for curing me. He acknowledged that he had helped me and reminded me that he had come to me in my dream during that time as well.

Swami has shown me that if we follow his command, things will always work out for the best. During the third year of

medical school in the USA, we do two-month rotations in various specialties, including pediatrics, internal medicine, surgery, and obstetrics/gynecology. I enjoyed all of my rotations except obstetrics/gynecology. In this I showed very little interest and put minimal effort into the rotation.

Meanwhile, my father was preparing to go to India. I would need to pick a specialty within the next few months in order to apply for postgraduate training. I requested my father, if he had the opportunity, to ask Swami what I should specialize in. My father inquired if I was sure I wanted him to ask, because I should follow whatever Swami says. I had faith that Swami would choose the specialty that was best for me and insisted that my father ask him.

When my father did ask Swami, he advised me to do obstetrics/gynecology! I was surprised, but deep down I trusted that this would be the best field for me since he had recommended it. Swami says, "You must have full faith that everything God does is only for your good and welfare." Swami, however, never forces us to do anything. He has told me, "It should come from Source, not force."

A few weeks later, I received my obstetrics/gynecology exam results, and I had obtained the top marks in the class. I also received the obstetrics/gynecology student of the year award. I was astonished. I knew these achievements were all a result of Swami's grace. Since then, I have completed a residency in obstetrics/gynecology and have worked in private practice. Not surprisingly, I now enjoy this field and find it fulfilling to

care for both mother and child, and to care for women throughout their lives into old age. Swami knows what is best for us, even when we may not realize it ourselves.

Knowing that he is always with me has given me the courage and confidence to face the challenges I encounter. As an obstetrician/gynecologist I am often placed in situations where the life of the mother or baby are at grave risk. I try to pray to Swami as much as I can, especially during these difficult moments. I often find that things go smoothly after that. I am able to address the situation in a calm manner, confident that he will help me.

Swami has also helped me in my dealings with patients. Swami has said, *How should you do your work? Do it to please God. Tell yourself, "I am doing this job as an offering to him."* I try to go the extra step to allay their

fears and address their needs, remembering Swami's advice to treat our patients like family. When I start to feel stressed or annoyed, I try to remember that I am doing his work and therefore should ensure that I do it with love and dedication, leaving the results to him.

I feel fortunate to have Swami in my life and am grateful for all that he does for me daily. One day, my husband and I asked Swami if there was anything we could do for him. Swami lovingly replied, *Yes, you can. Be happy; that is what I want.* What is true happiness? Swami says, *Happiness is union with God.* I now try to follow his teachings, knowing that by doing so I will be truly happy.

—Harini Setty
Arcadia, California



God is in you, with you, above you, below you, around you, and he will always take care of you. Do you know why? Because he is your best friend! Your so-called worldly friends are always selfish and have their own axes to grind, but God is not like that. He is totally free from desires and expects nothing. He only helps, supports, and protects. And in return he only wants your love. He has absolutely no desires. His heart is filled with love and compassion for his devotees. Is this treasure of selfless love available anywhere else?

—Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

SS 2000:7, May 20, 2000, "God Is the Only True Friend"

A Danger of “Little Knowledge”

A Lesson on Humility from the Life of Buddha

Once, Buddha was traveling from village to village giving spiritual discourses. One day, he felt tired and asked one of his disciples to address the gathering. He went inside to rest. Meanwhile, during the course of his speech, the disciple said, “In this world, there has never been a spiritual master greater than our master, Buddha, and there will not be another like him in future.” The audience responded with a thunderous applause.

Upon hearing this, Buddha came out. One of the disciples explained the reason for the joyous applause. Buddha smiled and called the disciple who delivered the lecture. “What is your age?” he asked. The disciple responded that he was 35 years old. “How many kingdoms have you visited so far?” Buddha asked. The disciple admitted that he had visited only two kingdoms.

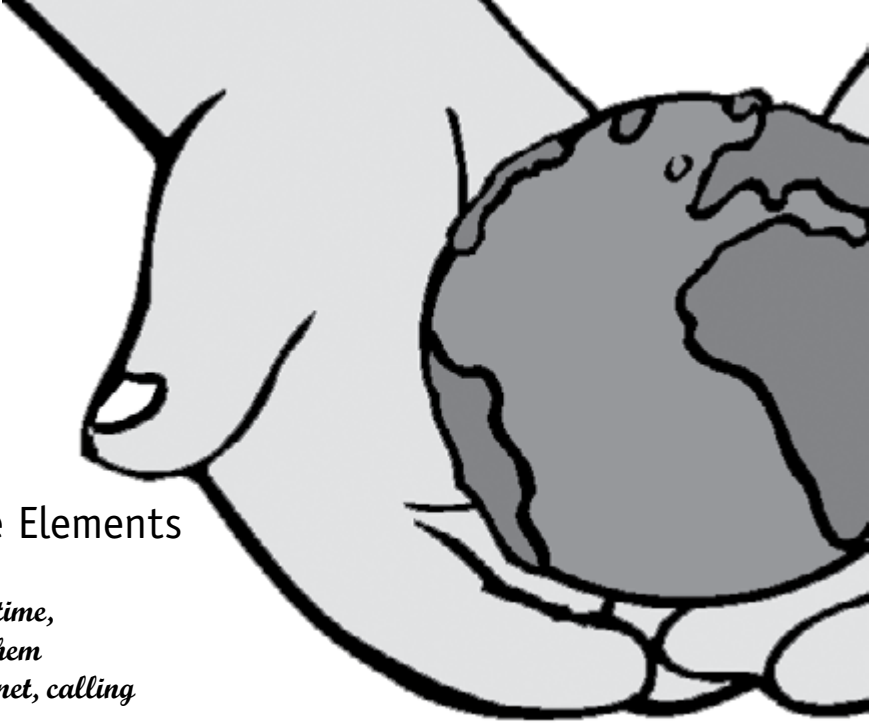
Buddha replied, “You are 35 years old and have seen only two kingdoms. You have not understood the present completely. Then how can you say anything about the past and the future? It is meaningless to say that a master like Buddha was never born before and will never be born again. Many avatars and sages have taken birth in this sacred land of Bharat (India). Many more avatars and noble souls will be born here in future also. There are many noble souls in this world; I offer my respects to them all.” In this way, Buddha reproached his disciple.

It is foolish for a man with little knowledge to behave like a learned man.



—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

SSS 32-1:15, May 30, 1999



Poems on the Five Elements

*Since the beginning of time,
A hundred billion of them
Have walked this planet, calling
It home.*

*Since the beginning of time,
A hundred billion of them
Have been born, creating
The light.*

*A star for everyone
Can be possible,
But is not necessary.*

*However, isn't our planet
More important for survival?
Do we not need
The elements, five,
To live?*

*First, earth, with its attraction,
That gives our cars traction.*

*Next, water, with its flow,
Needed for making cake dough.*

*At its zenith, fire is red,
At the bottom, fire is blue,
It is present in stars,
And in us too.*

*How good it is to breathe,
To inhale the sweet odors
Of fresh air.*

*Ether, the anonymous one,
Its support for us weighs a ton.*

*Take care of these elements,
Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle
These three plus Educare
Form a duet that causes
Two to be added to three,
Forming a complete five.*



The equation: $av + bw + cx + dy + ez = \text{Survival}$

Can be solved by:

- (a * (Turn off electrical appliances))
- + (b * (Take a shorter shower))
- + (c * (Wear a sweater instead of turning up the heat))
- + (d * (Drive less, emitting fewer air pollutants))
- + (e * (Pray more, cleansing the air))
- = Our continued survival

So, where: $a > 0, b > 0, c > 0, d > 0, e > 0$

No algebra is needed for this.

Solve the equation and prosper;

Fail—and what happens to us and the earth?

So, as you can see,

It comes down to:

“To help or not to help?”

That is the question.

The answer is,

And should be,

The more pleasant form of

The final solution.

—Sai Gourisankar

Age 14, Fort Worth SSE Group 3

The Five Elements

*There are elements all around me,
That I can taste, feel, hear, smell, and see.
Earth, Water, Ether, Fire, and Air,
They are present everywhere.*

*But they will not last us forever,
Their fate is balanced on a lever.
On one side is man's pollution,
On the other is the solution.*

*Right now, the pollution is much bigger,
For the solution, few stop and figure.
It's really quite simple:
with just a little thought,
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle anything bought.*



*Don't waste water in the shower;
Your bill will make you run and cower.
Turn off lights and save electricity;
Help Mother Earth and take some pity.*

*Don't drive your cars everywhere;
Ride your bike and clean the air.
All these ways are tips to stay green;
Follow them and keep our Earth clean.*

—Amritha Gourisankar
Age 13, Fort Worth SSE Group 3

The Five Elements

- *Let Fire burn all evil.*
- *Let namasmarana spread knowledge throughout the Air.*
- *Fill the Earth with peace.*
- *Let the Ether reverberate with OM through all the generations.*
- *Let your mind flow like a mellifluous River*
- *toward God and his teachings.*



—Bijesh Subedi
Age 14, Fort Worth SSE Group 3

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Sai Spiritual Education Lesson Plan (Group 3)

EDUCARE: THE FIVE ELEMENTS (Air)

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE: Educare - The Five Elements • **FOCUS:** Air • **AIM:** Create awareness of air, breath, the life principle, and inner divinity; purify the air/reduce air pollution.

QUOTE: *Air has no form, but if present in a balloon or football, it acquires those forms. God has no form, but based on the ‘container’ in which God is said to be held, God assumes that name and form. (SSS 28:13, May 13, 1995) The formless divine can be experienced in the breathing process, which proclaims the oneness of the individual and God in the sound, So-Ham [21,600 times a day]. With the inbreath saying the sound So (“That” or “God”) and the outbreath, the sound Ham (“I am”), the life-breath declares, “I am God; I am God.” —Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 28:36, Nov. 23, 1995)*

SILENT SITTING: Share the quotes and discuss the meaning of *So-ham*: “I am That” (*That* = God). When God created humanity in His own image, He blew his own breath in him, but today man has forgotten his own divinity. He does not realize that when he breathes in and out, with every breath, *Sooooo . . . hammmm . . .* (“I am God”) goes on continuously. Meditate for 1-3 minutes, focusing on *So-ham* breathing.

AFFIRMATION/PRAYER: Invite students to write their own affirmations (e.g. *I am God*).

SONGS: “I Am God, I Am God, I Am Not Different from God . . .”
 “Divine Mother, *So-Ham*, You and I Are One . . .”

STORY/INVESTIGATION: *Materials:* uninflated balloons, markers. *Procedure:* Provide students with balloons and lead them through the following demonstration. Have students draw a face on a flattened balloon, and write the words, “I am God” on it.

- Ask students to inflate the balloon by blowing into it, visualizing divine energy as breath and the element of pure air going into the balloon.
- Ask: “If air is divine, what is inside the balloon?” (*God/divinity*) “What is outside the balloon?” (*God/air*) “What is both inside and outside of everyone’s balloon?” (*God/air*)
- Discuss how the balloon skin is like ego (*ahamkara*) – it seems to keep us separate, and we go searching for God.
- Have students release their balloons; let them fly around. Ask: “What happened to the air inside the balloon?” (*It went back and merged with its source, i.e., God. . . . We can realize that we are not separate from divinity at all. Only because of body consciousness—like a flimsy balloon—did we think we were separate from God.*)

EXTENDING ACTIVITY/GAME: Purifying the Air (a version of musical chairs) *Materials:* construction paper for making cloud cutouts, scissors, colored markers, pens or pencils, recorded music and player

- Read and discuss this quote: *When trash is burned, the polluted smoke percolates all the way (from clouds to rain to crops) to food. And when such food is consumed, diseases result. Contaminated food is thus responsible for most of the bad thoughts and actions one sees today. ... Bad thoughts pollute the air and also infect others; this is the way bad vibrations spread. ... [But] if you constantly chant the name of God, the polluted atmosphere will automatically get purified. ... In addition, when you breathe purified air, it also helps to keep out bad thoughts.* —Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SS 2000:2, May 15, 2000)(See entire discourse.)
- Have students make a dozen or more cutouts of clouds. On each cloud, have students draw a picture or slogan describing things that either pollute the air or purify it. (Examples: *Polluting activities*—broadcast radio waves, arguing/bad words, bad thoughts, smoke from cigarettes, burning materials/factories, exhaust from vehicles. *Purifying activities*—kind/sweet words, good thoughts, loving thoughts, silence/meditation, planting trees, using bikes/public transit instead of cars, reducing use of electricity, bhajan singing, namasmarana.)
- Place the clouds face down in a big circle. Play music and have students walk/run outside the circle until the music stops. Each student stops in front of a cloud and turns it over. If it shows a polluting activity, the student must leave the circle. Continue the game until one person remains. **Variation:** Students who are “out” can take a blank cloud cutout and cover it completely with *So-Ham* or God’s name. When their “air-purifying cloud” is complete, they can re-enter the game. This time, if they stop at a pollution cloud, they can cover it with their air-purifying cloud and remain in the game.

LIFE APPLICATION: (1) Practice the *So-ham* meditation 3-5 minutes daily. Go inward to realize your inherent divinity. (2) Practice *namasmarana*. If students do not have a chosen name of God, have them choose one to use during the week. Have them use each ringing of the bell at school to remind them to repeat the name and picture the form, and visualize God in everyone around them at that time. Have students list other prompts they might use to remind them to repeat God’s name several times a day. Invite students to choose one additional prompt besides the school bell, as a reminder to practice frequently.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: Schweickert, Tina, *Nature and the Environment: The Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba* (Salem, Oregon: Oak Savannah Publishing, 2005). Jenkins, Peggy, *Nurturing Spirituality in Children* (Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond Words Publishing, 1995)—a collection of concrete activities demonstrating spiritual principles.

NOTE: SSE lessons may be adapted for use in SSEHV settings.

focus on devotion

REGION 3: ALABAMA ■ FLORIDA ■ GEORGIA ■ MISSISSIPPI
NORTH CAROLINA ■ SOUTH CAROLINA

Ladies' Day 2007



Swami has dedicated one day each year to remind his devotees of the virtues inherent in all women and to encourage women to look within and improve these virtues, so that they may have a positive impact on their families, communities, and nation. In this spirit, the Atlanta Sai Center hosted a half-day mini-retreat on November 17, 2007, to celebrate Ladies' Day, followed by a musical offering by the ladies. About 70 women attended the mini-retreat to learn more about women and spirituality, as well as forgiveness and silence.

The first session, led by Betsy Shutz, focused on the topic of "Forgive and Forget." Betsy reviewed the many interpretations of this concept and offered guidance on realizing why we need to forgive. She also focused on transforming the concept into reality, or as she put it, "from knowing to *being*," or transforming from knowing that we need to forgive, to actually practicing it.

The second session was led by Ramani Sambhara, who emphasized the importance of women and spirituality. She used several illustrative methods to convey the impor-

tance of persevering on our path to realize our true Self. The interactive session was well received by all the ladies. She ended with a fun game to make each of us realize the importance of enjoying spirituality and sharing this joy with our sisters.

Betsy Shutz led the third session, on the subject of silence, offering several techniques for practicing silence daily. She walked the ladies through some of the exercises and gave practical notes on how to achieve inner silence. Betsy emphasized the importance of developing silence in order to hear the inner voice.

In addition to these three sessions, the congregation of ladies was also blessed with short talks by two female alumni from Swami's schools—Aparna Sikha and Sunanda Kandula. Each of these gems shared experiences from their years at the Anantapur campus of Swami's university, giving each of us a loving glimpse of Swami as mother, father, teacher, and friend.

At the end of the retreat, each lady made a personal commitment to Swami to practice at least one item from the day's ideas, in the form of a promise card sent to Swami. The promises were based on the following handout:

PROMISE YOURSELF:

- *To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.*
- *To talk health, happiness, and prosperity to everyone you meet.*
- *To make everyone you know feel that there is something good in them.*
- *To look at the sunny side of things and make your optimism come true.*
- *To think only of the best, work only for the best, and expect only the best.*
- *To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.*
- *To forget mistakes of the past and press on to greater achievements in the future.*
- *To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile.*
- *To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.*
- *To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble in your mind.*

Following the retreat, the ladies offered a musical program of songs and bhajans in several languages, followed by a bhajan medley. The atmosphere was filled with unifying love for Swami. All ladies who attended the retreat and music program are in gratitude to Swami for giving us the opportunity to gather, learn, and share our love for him.

—Sai Center of Atlanta, Georgia

Earning the Name, *Devotee*

What Are Our Duties and Responsibilities?

We are indeed blessed to be living at a time when the avatar of this Kali Age is walking the earth, guiding and instructing mankind to its natural destiny of Self/God realization. Unfortunately only a handful of humanity has realized the divinity of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. How many of us really deserve to claim that we are devotees of Bhagavan Baba? Baba says that it is not enough if you call yourself a devotee; he should acknowledge you as a devotee, not otherwise! (Summer Showers 1996:12) Let us analyze some of the qualifications and standards expected of a true devotee of Bhagavan Baba.

There is no arguing that it is a hard-earned privilege to be born as a human being among the millions of species on this planet. Only humans are endowed with the power of discrimination as to what is good and everlasting versus what is transitory. We have to uphold and practice the basic human values of *sathya* (truth), *dharma* (right conduct), *shanti* (peace), *prema* (love), and *ahimsa* (nonviolence). And one of the foremost qualifications of a devotee is *trikarana shuddhi* (triple purity), or the harmony between thought, word, and actions: as one thinks, one should speak; as one speaks, one should act. He alone is a noble being whose thoughts, words, and actions are in total harmony. Our beloved Baba is a good testimony of this principle, which confirms his oft-repeated statement,

My life is my message. He is a teacher par excellence, not only through his teachings but also in living the great truths expounded by seers and sages of the past.

So the responsibility has fallen on us, his devotees, to practice those teachings so that our lives in turn become “his message.” Swami very often says, *You may be a hero on the stage, but what is the use if you are a zero in your practical life.* (SSS 35:24, Dec. 25, 2002) Baba’s emphasis has always been on quality and not quantity, in every facet of our *sadhana*, or spiritual discipline, including the devotees who profess to follow him.

One important point to bear in mind is that Baba does not need any one of us to advertise or propagate him or his mission. He often says that his mere *sankalpa* or will is sufficient to accomplish any work that he wishes to accomplish; it is out of his love and compassion that he provides us many opportunities in his various service missions. These provide excellent opportunities for us to refine our character, conduct, and outlook through closely identifying with others. In this regard we can compare ourselves with the small squirrel in the Ramayana story who tried to “help” build the famous Ram Sethu Bridge between India and Sri Lanka for Rama and his army to cross the gulf. That small squirrel carried out a tiny task sincerely from the bottom of its heart and was rewarded by the Lord, thereby confirming that the motive behind any action is more important than

the action itself, or its success or failure. In other words, we should be asking ourselves about our motive for doing any service: is it a sincere act of love or for other personal reasons, such as publicity?

It is a great responsibility to be a “Sai devotee,” since it carries with it various duties, not only to oneself but also to God and to society at large. For good or bad, the public tends to judge Baba and his message based on what they see in the behavior and actions of his devotees. Ultimately, any blame or praise for our behavior will go back to the source, to Baba himself. Our responsibility is to practice *nishkama karma*, action without attachment or concern for the results.

Another foremost quality of a devotee is love, since “God is love and love is God.” The *dharma* or duty of a Sai devotee is to love, and his thoughts, words, and actions should be suffused with love. *Love lives by giving and forgiving, and self lives by getting and forgetting. Love is selflessness and self is lovelessness.* (SS 1978:11) Also Baba, in His inimitable fashion, says, *Duty without love is deplorable; duty with love is desirable; love without duty is divine.* (SSS 12:7, March 17, 1973)

Another quality expected of a devotee is *saranagathi* or total surrender at the feet of the Lord, with the constant prayer, “Oh Lord, you are the doer and enjoyer for every action of mine, whether carried out via my thought, word, or deed. I am only an instrument in your hands. Please make me a worthy instrument, just like the hollow flute in the hands of Lord Krishna, so that you may play divine melodies through me. I pray only for liberation from this endless cycle of birth and

death, and to let me merge into your lotus feet and enjoy the eternal peace and bliss that defies description.”

A true devotee is steadfast in his faith, devotion, and confidence, whatever the ups and downs in his worldly fortunes. He is always striving with *ekagratha*, one-pointed attention, for the peace and bliss that cannot be found in this transient illusory world, but which exists in each one of us as our own *Atma* or soul, where God is immanent. The truth, *Aham Brahmasmi* (“I am God”) should not be forgotten.

We should strive for Self/God realization through constant spiritual practice, cleansing our mind of all the impurities we have accumulated over lifetimes. For this to succeed, we must develop love, good character, moderation in food, sleep, exercise, and so on. Also, abstinence from imbibing meat, alcohol, or tobacco is a must. The devotee should be constantly engaged in activities for spiritual, social, and universal upliftment. We must become the change agent that we want to see in society. Each devotee has to love all and serve all selflessly, without any distinction, recognizing that the same God is resident in all.

A devotee must also develop *thyaga*, or sacrifice and renunciation. The Lord as Krishna declared in the Bhagavad Gita that immortality can be attained only through sacrifice and renunciation, and not through ritual, wealth, or progeny. Sacrifice and renunciation always make us sweeter, and therefore, Swami advises us to sacrifice all bad qualities like hatred, malice, jealousy, anger, greed, and attachment at God’s altar,

and resolve to cultivate good qualities. (SSS 16:28, Oct. 16, 1983)

One need not give up family, wealth, and other possessions and go to the forest to lead a spiritual life. He advises us rather to keep our hands in society and head in the forest. (SSS 30:15, July 17, 1997) Sorrows will haunt us as long as the mind is not at peace with itself. We must meditate, sing the glory of the Lord, and surrender and offer all our activities and the fruits thereof at the lotus feet of the Lord. We must cleanse and make our heart a holy and worthy seat for the Lord to install himself within.

We are all in a constant struggle to liberate ourselves from these prison cells called “bodies,” and to merge into that blissful ocean of *sat-chit-ananda* (reality/being-consciousness-bliss), or Brahman (God), who is also referred to as the ultimate cosmic truth, or cosmic consciousness, or intelligence. Also, let us carry the Vedic prayer always in our heart, *Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu* (May everyone in all the worlds be happy).

—Swaminathan Kollengode
La Mirada, California

2008 Retreat Dates - USA

Region 1 (Northeast): May 23–25, 2008, at Russell Sage College Campus, Troy, NY. Contact: Cheruvu S. Murthy, saicheruvu@hotmail.com, or 845-227-8567.

Region 4 (Mid-Central): *Only Love for God Is True Love*. May 16–18, 2008 at Camp Wyman, near St. Louis, MO. Contact: Jack Feely, jfeely@ta-stl.com, or 314-862-1254.

Region 5 (North Central): Devotional Music as a Pathway to God. Aug. 29–Sept. 1, 2008 (Labor Day weekend), at Camp Henry Horner, 26710 W. Nippersink Road, Ingleside, IL 60041. Speakers: Linda Gallagher, Paul Erhard. Contact: Vijay Sai Reddy, Regional Communications Coordinator, 847-452-2777, or info@sathyasaicenters.org.

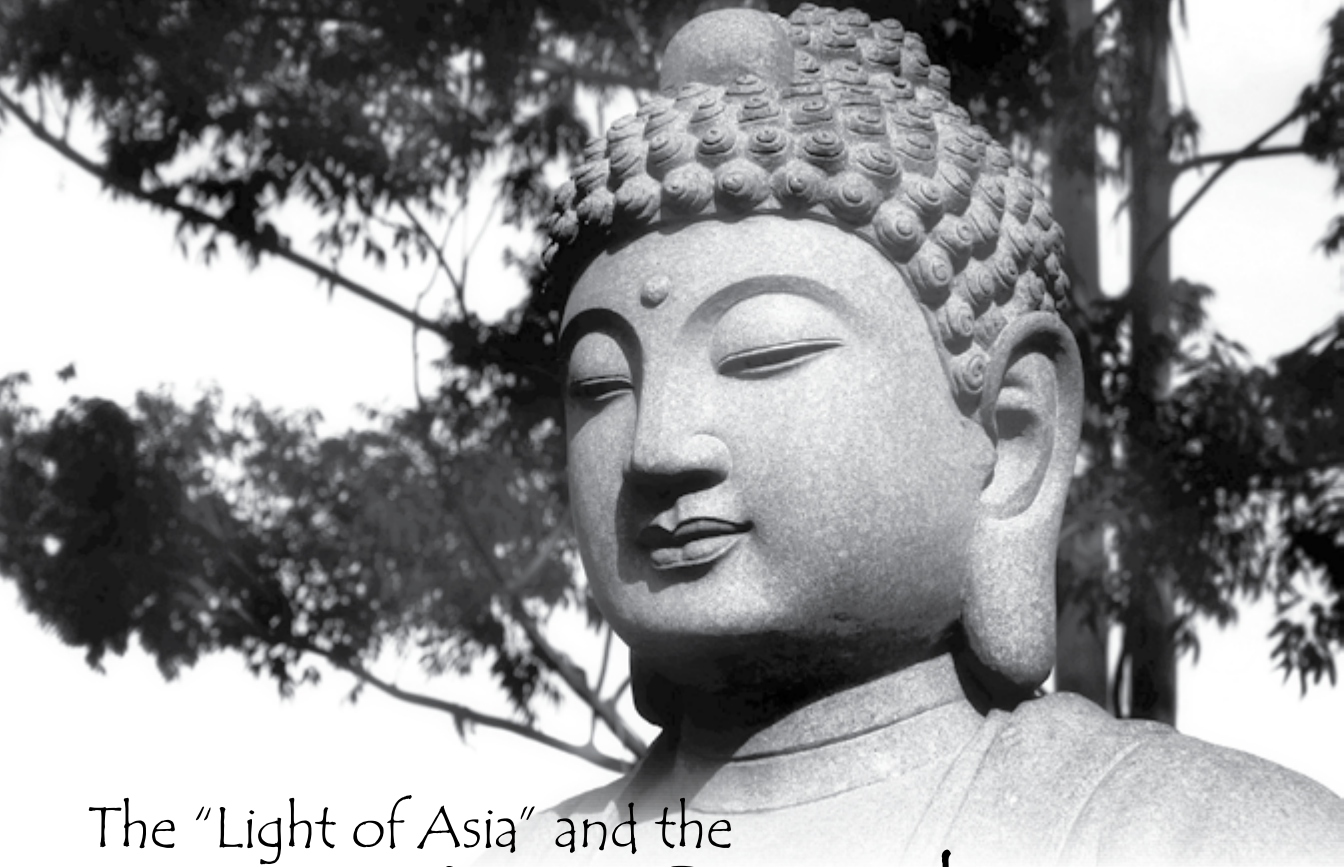
Region 6 (Pacific North): Aug. 30–Sept. 1, 2008, at the conference center at Silver Falls State Park, Oregon (www.silverfallsconference.com). Contact: Ram Pochincherla, 503-531-0490 (h), 503-261-3452 (m), or rampochincherla@yahoo.com.

Region 8 (Pacific South): May 30–June 1, 2008, at Buckhorn Camp near Idyllwild, CA (www.buckhorncamp.com). Speakers: Dr. Sundar Iyer and others. Contacts: Mike Congleton, 760-602-1604 or mwcongleton@roadrunner.net and Alan Parigian, 805-646-3250 or akparigian@adelphia.net.

Region 9 (Southwest), Arizona: *Life Is a Game, Play It*. Sri Sathya Sai Baba Amrith Retreat, May 23–25, 2008, at Camp Chapel Rock, 1131 Country Club Drive, Prescott, AZ 86303. Speaker: Gene Massey. Contact: Ramya Kumar, 978-985-7835, or ramyak@hotmail.com.

Region 9 (Southwest), New Mexico: Land of Enchantment Retreat, Aug. 29–Sept. 1, 2008, at the Bodhi Mandala Zen Center, Jemez Springs, NM. Speakers: Leonardo Gutter, Wendy and Jeremy Hoffer. Contact: Elaine Hausman, 505-660-0283, or ehausman@rockridge.biz.

For retreat updates online, go to: <http://www.sathyasai.org/organize/z1reg01/contents.html>



The “Light of Asia” and the Love Principle

Glimpses of Buddha’s Life and Teachings

Buddha Purnima is celebrated on the full moon day in the lunar month of Vaisakha (around May), as a thrice-blessed day, on which the prophet Buddha reputedly took birth, became enlightened, and attained *nirvana* (shed his mortal coil). His physical mother was Queen Maya Devi, wife of King Siddhodhana, ruler of Kapilvasthu, in the sub-Himalayan region near Nepal. Her young son, the prince, was named Siddhartha, which means “one who accomplishes his purpose.” The family priest,

Asita, declared that the baby was destined to become either a great emperor or a great saint! The king, however, took drastic steps to prevent his only son from becoming a monk, by sheltering him within the confines of the royal palaces, secluded from any exposure to death, illness, and the outside world. The prince married his cousin, Yasodhara, at age 16, and became a father at age 28, to his son, Rahul, which means “bond” or “attachment.”

The Call of Awakening

Despite all his royal luxuries, the prince had great inner strength, intellect, sobriety, and compassion. He ventured to seek beyond the boundaries of the palace gates, to witness the world. The moment of destiny came: his eyes were opened upon seeing three very common worldly sights—a grey-haired old man tottering along with a cane, a miserable cripple groaning in pain by the side of the road, and a dead body being carried away for cremation. The prince was shocked and troubled, and asked his escort about these sights of sorrow, suffering, and mortality. The escort replied, “Every person born is destined to die of old age and disease!”

The prince, while reflecting on this news, noticed a hermit sitting peacefully in meditation under a tree and learned that the saint had given up all his worldly life of pleasures and pains, to experience peace in seeking a higher truth—reality! The prince immediately plunged into inner inquiry, and became determined to seek a higher purpose to life. That night, he took off all his princely garments and jewels, and, renouncing his previous life, walked away in search of solutions to the riddle of suffering and impermanence.

Buddha's Search

After having experienced both the life of luxurious self-indulgence and extreme self-denial as a wandering monk, the one who was to become Buddha eventually settled on a “middle path” of balance as the way to spiritual success, of avoiding the extremes

of self-indulgence or self-deprivation. At age 35, after 49 days of meditation under a bodhi tree (in Buddha Jaya in Northern India), he realized the truth and emerged as Buddha, the “Awakened One/Enlightened One,” and announced his first sermon: “The mind, approaching the eternal, has attained the extinction of all desires.”

The “Light of Asia,” as Buddha is also called, set in motion a gigantic wave of spiritual transformation that continues to this day.

The Love Principle

Bhagavan Baba has observed:

Since Buddha did not interest himself in the study of Vedas or in the performance of yagas and yajnas (rituals and ceremonies), he was dubbed an atheist. This is utterly wrong! He was a pure-hearted person, with a determined pursuit to understand the cause of sorrow and suffering, and to search for solutions to the misery in people's minds and lives. (SSS 30:13, May 15, 1997, “Purity: The Path to Liberation”)

Swami says:

Buddha's teachings were based on the love principle. The same is true of Sai also. Love is the basis for all divine incarnations. . . . You have to develop selfless love. If you do, the whole world will be under your control. This love is blissful and nectarine. The sweetness of nectar may have limits, but the sweetness of divine love has none. It is beyond all measure. It is beyond description, too; it can only be experienced. Buddha discovered this love,

experienced it, and became one with it. God and love are not different. (SS 2000:8, May 21, 2000, “Buddha’s Message”)

Bhagavan calls upon us to light this “Lamp of Love” in our hearts with resolve. The first step is to understand these three Buddhist declarations:

- I seek refuge in the Buddha/*buddhi*.
(*Buddham Sharanam Gacchami*)
- I seek refuge in society.
(*Sangham Sharanam Gacchami*)
- I seek refuge in righteousness.
(*Dharmam Sharanam Gacchami*)

These maxims imply that, firstly, one must sharpen the intellect (buddhi) and the capacity for spiritual discrimination. Next, intelligence has to be used in the service of society (sangha). Thirdly, service must be based on dharma or righteousness. If these three steps are followed, they will lead to bliss. Never harm any living creature in any way whatsoever. Help ever, hurt never – this is the essence of Buddha’s teaching. (Ibid.)

Swami assures us that we must awaken the buddhi, this faculty of discrimination and inquiry, and make it the charioteer of our life:

According to the Upanishads, the human body is comparable to a chariot, the sense organs to horses, and the mind, to the reins. The body, the mind, and the senses are by themselves of little use. However beautiful a chariot may be, however fine the horses, and however efficient the reins—without a charioteer, all of them are of no use. . . .

Another name for the buddhi is Antaryami (the Indweller). Man is guided by the voice of this Indweller in the conduct of life. When problems arise, man waits for the directives of the Inner Voice. If this Inner Voice does not give him satisfactory answers, he will be in a quandary. When he gets satisfactory guidance from the Inner Voice, he will be able to come to terms with the external world.

Sometimes, one is found to remark, “My conscience does not approve of this.” The Inner Voice is the voice of conscience. When one is asked to “follow the master,” the “master” is one’s conscience. When you follow the dictates of your conscience, you will be able to reach the proper destination. (SSS 23:16, May 26, 1990, “The Buddhi and the Atma”)

Swami goes on to tell us that the ego, because it promotes identification with the body, prevents the buddhi from shining in its full glory. Thus, Swami tells us:

Efforts must be made to throw off the cover imposed by the ego on the intelligence (buddhi). The buddhi is very close to the Atma, and is therefore well situated to receive illumination from the Atma—in fact, receiving 90 percent of its energy from the Atma. The mind, in turn, derives its power from the buddhi and activates the senses. The power of the senses is spread over the body.

[Sunlight reflected into a dark room by a mirror is not as bright as direct sunlight.] In the same manner, the illumination emanating from the Atma when it passes through the buddhi to the mind, and from

the mind to the senses, and from the senses to the body, gets considerably dimmed by the time it reaches the body. However, if the buddhi is kept totally pure and untainted, it can transmit to the body the full power of the Atma. Hence, man must strive to keep the buddhi pure and holy.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad, the buddhi is compared to a bird. Unwavering faith (sraddha) is the head of the bird. The right wing of the bird is the cosmic order (rita). The left wing is truth (sathya). The main body of the bird is the great principle of the Divine Self (Mahatattwa). The tail is yoga (symbolizing maintaining balance in life between the spiritual and mundane spheres). The buddhi is thus composed of these five constituents. Hence, the buddhi is an extraordinary power. It is only when all these five constituents are actively present that the buddhi (intelligence) acquires its fullness. (Ibid.)

Buddhist Codes of Conduct

Buddha expounded on “Four Noble Truths” that identify the cause of suffering, and an eight-fold path for its removal. This

Buddhist “eight-fold path” is symbolized by the eight spokes of the *dharma chakra* or “wheel of righteous living,” a well-known Buddhist symbol. The eight-fold path has to do with developing wisdom in the form of right perspective and intent; ethical conduct in the form of right speech, action, and livelihood; and mental discipline in the form of right effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Buddha also taught nonviolence as the highest dharma.

Millions of Buddhists from around the world, from Asian as well as Western countries, are reliving the light and love of the “Eternal Buddha” at the divine lotus feet of the universal teacher, Lord Sai. The Buddhist *dharma chakra* forms a part of Swami’s *sarva dharma* symbol, which symbolizes the essential unity of all faiths, and thousands visit Prasanthi Nilayam and Brindavan each year to practice Buddhist precepts, celebrate Buddha Purnima, and carry on the torch of Buddha within the global Sai family.

—**Dr. Sarvalakshmi Duriseti**
Laguna Hills, California

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The more man pours out his love on others, the more is his inner bliss. Hence, man should expand his love for his fellow men if he wants to increase his own inner bliss. This is the royal road to divinity. The best way to love God is to love all and serve all. This is the secret revealed by Buddha.

—**Sri Sathya Sai Baba** (SS 2000:8, May 21, 2000, “Buddha’s Message”)

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Selected Books from Our List

Baba: God Is Love, Live in Love, compiled by Grace J. McMartin, contains passages from Swami's discourses on children, motherhood, and teachers. BW-012.....\$ 4.00

The Bhagavad Gita: A Walkthrough for Westerners (hardcover) by Jack Hawley, presents the teachings of Sri Krishna and the essence of the Bhagavad Gita in a simple and lucid style, with the Western reader in mind. BW-018.... \$14.00

Roadmaps to Self-Realization, by Jack Hawley, has its basis in the author's previous release, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Walkthrough for Westerners*, and is a manual for finding higher consciousness through the world's mystical and spiritual teachings. BW-190 ... \$11.00

Essential Wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita, by Jack Hawley, presents the essence of the Gita's teachings in a user-friendly format. It is organized into chapters that address five important questions spiritual seekers have been asking from the beginning of time: *Who am I? Why am I here? Who, or what, is the Divinity many call "God"? What is my relationship to that Divinity? Is it possible to live a spiritual life, and if so, how?* These and many other insights are revealed in the pages of this book. BW-052.... \$11.00

Love All, Serve All, a pictorial message on Bhagavan, is an offering solely for spreading Sai's incomparable divine love. The inspiring text and photographs depict Swami's service projects in glorious color and black-and-white. Hardcover, oversized. BW-096 ... \$55.00

Tread Softly: Sai Baba's Teachings on Nature and the Environment, by Tina S. Schweickert, is a compilation of quotes Baba has made regarding nature and the environment, with commentary by the author, who also shares stories from her own life as a naturalist and her concern for the Earth. BW-211 \$7.00

Invitation to Love: A Spiritual Journey, by Valerie Allen, describes the author's spiritual journey to Sathya Sai Baba. She hopes that it will help other seekers find the love that is so essential to world peace and unity. BW-068 ... \$23.00

Sathya Sai Speaks on Education offers a compilation of Sathya Sai Baba's unique message and mission on integrated, values-based education. Soft cover, 365 pages. BW-131 \$7.00