

Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA

Dedicated with Love and Devotion to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba



"Most Loving Divine Parent"

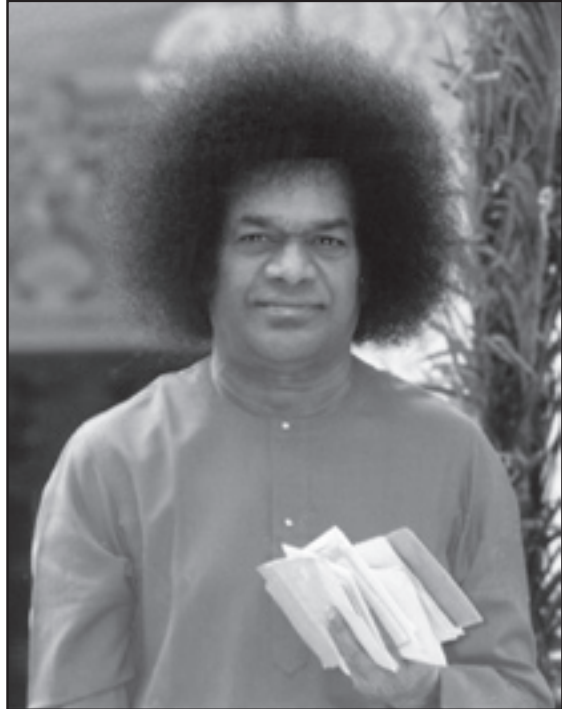
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Sai's Message

Our Four Debts

If you cannot show kindness and compassion, your birth will only ruin your mother's health. Since you have lived in your mother's womb for as long as you did and given her so much trouble, you must do things that will give her happiness. You must express your gratitude.

You have to repay four debts in this world—the debt to your mother, the debt to your father, the debt to your saint, and the debt to God. Since the mother has given you blood, her life and strength, and is responsible for your birth, you must show gratitude by respecting her. You must also show gratitude to your father, who gives you money, education, and protection. The wise [your spiritual teachers] give you human qualities, and so you must show gratitude to them. Ultimately, God is responsible for all these, so you must show your gratitude to God.



—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
Summer Showers 1973, Ch. 19

Baba, the Model Parent

Whether or not parents themselves have had adequate role models, we all have Baba as a model parent, with us as his children. He gives us unconditional love. He protects us by advising, warning, and guiding. We can turn to him at any time, whenever we need to, absolutely sure that he will help. He never fails to give emotional and mental peace. As a teacher, he sets high standards, toward which he expects us to make some personal effort. If we do not, then he lets us suffer pain; he says pain is healing and strengthening.

He wants us to be pure, patient, and persevering; he wants us to be disciplined, dedicated, and devoted. He wants us to regard life as a challenge we have to meet, a game we have to play, a dream we have to realize, and a love we have to share. He wants us to cultivate humility and reverence, so that

we can experience the wonder and majesty of God.

As a master, he is authoritative; he is concerned and caring. He gives us what we need, not what we want. He wants us to get out of our self-absorption, to go from “I” to “we.” He wants us to foster the best within ourselves and to live a life of conscience. He wants our discipline to come from within, so that we are good—not due to externally-imposed control, but because we desire our divine destiny. He excites us with our own possibilities. He brings joy, love, hope, peace, and magic into our lives.

He is the model of a dynamic parent. A dynamic parent gives and guides the child as much as Baba does his devotees.

—Pal and Tehseen Dhall

From *Education in Human Values for Parents*

From the Editors: Here for the New Year

Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) In our quest to be of service to our readers and represent all three main wings of the Sai organization (service, devotion, and education), we are pleased to try out a new feature with this issue of the *Sathya Sai Newsletter USA*. In support of teachers, parents, and students of Sai teachings, we are including a complete SSE lesson plan (see page 35), based on a story that appears in this issue’s children’s section (pages 32-34).

Coming Next: Special WYC Edition of *Sathya Sai Newsletter USA* The young adult contributions on pages 28-31 came out of these writers’ participation in the World Youth Conference of 2007. Since that momentous event, we have received a great many young adult submissions; our sincere thanks to all the YAs who sent them and those who helped collect them. The next issue of *SSN-USA* will be devoted entirely to the USA YAs, with their reflections on the World Youth Conference and on striving to be “Ideal Sai Youth: Messengers of Sai Love.”

Plant the Seeds of Love in Tender Hearts

Bhagavan on the Duty of Parents and Teachers

The magnificent mansion created by the ancient sages for the peaceful and prosperous existence of succeeding generations—the mansion of perennial wisdom known as *Sanathana Dharma*—has crumbled through the wanton neglect of the sons and daughters of the land. Now, peace and joy are to be found only among the little children, for their elders have lost the art, the discipline, of regaining and retaining these values.

Children are fresh, charming saplings, who can be made to blossom, through care and love, into ideal citizens of the land, able to understand and practice the great disciplines laid down by the sages for their liberation, through self-realization.

The mother and the father must bear a major share of the responsibility for the proper upbringing of children. The earliest years of life are the most crucial. The skills, the attitudes, the emotions, the impulses that make or mar the future are built into the foundation of life in those years.

The parents can help or hinder the building of that foundation as strong and straight. But parents now lack equipment for this basic role. They have no faith [in the ancient principles]; they themselves have no mental peace, no spiritual discipline that the children can imbibe from them.

Children must grow up in homes where their parents honor their parents in turn, and are happy only when they serve their elders. Then only will children revere their parents. This must be taught to them by example rather than precept! Schooling is a waste, if children do not learn lasting virtues or strength of character as a result of the process. They must learn reverence for parents, teachers, and elders. Now, they learn a number of copybook maxims, but they do not put even a single one into practice in daily life.

Teach Practice by Example

Children must learn the glory of God, who is their inner reality; they must understand that they are not the body, but they are the one Indweller, who is the Indweller in all. Through singing devotional songs and through listening to tales of God's glory, these elevating truths can be handed over to children [only] by teachers and parents who are themselves aware of and practicing these truths in their daily life.

You must learn your own news before getting excited about the news of others. Learn the A, B, C, and D of your own alphabet, and then you will be better able to guide others in their learning and life.

Do not ridicule the children when they go to a temple or a sage and show interest in devotional singing, worship, or meditation. Many elders believe that there is time enough for such pastimes after one has lived for sixty years. People who spread this nefarious doctrine are ruining the lives of their dear ones, for they do not condemn the wrong and encourage the right. Others, by their behavior and habits at home, in full view of children, inculcate the habits of lying, gambling, drinking, and so on.

Plant the seeds of love, sympathy, truth, justice, charity, compassion, repentance, and self-control in children's tender hearts; this is the prime duty of all who deal with children.

When the father asks the child to tell someone at the door that he is not at home, or when he asks his brother to reply to a phone call that he has gone out, the vice of dishonesty gets implanted in the child.

Do not burden children's tender brains with all kinds of lumber—information that can never be put to use, facts that warp and twist truth, and so on. Teach them only as much as they can use beneficially and as much as can be of direct help to them in their lives. Train character more than brains.

Parents first and foremost; teachers next; then comrades, playmates, and companions; and finally the various levels of society—these all shape the character of the children and the destiny of the country.

Parents must revere the teacher, so that the child may revere him too; the teacher also must become worthy of reverence and aware of his high role. The schools bearing the name of Sathya Sai have the utmost responsibility in this regard.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
(SSS 9:2, Jan. 19, 1969, "Charming Saplings")

You owe a supreme duty to your parents, who are responsible for all that you are. You will be less than human if you do not show your gratitude to them for all that they have done for you. Parental love is for the children what the sun's rays are for the blossoming of a flower. Wherever you may go, whatever you may achieve, whatever position you may occupy, you must always remember your mother with love and reverence. . . . Devotion and love for the mother are the marks of a true human being.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
(SSS 18:10, May 6, 1985, "Revere Love and Truth")

Family Life with Sai

This article appeared in the May 2007 edition of *Mother Sathya Sai*, a publication of the Easwaramma Women's Welfare Trust in India. In her delightful style, Sharon Sandweiss shares some of Baba's personal teachings on the family.

My husband and I sat silently, enveloped in love. We were alone in the interview room with our beloved Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and most of our worldly concerns floated away lightly into the fragrant air.

Yet one concern remained fixed in my mind. My husband and I were worried about the education of our four young daughters in our permissive Western society. How could we protect them from the agitation and unrest in the world—the excessive selfishness, materialism, and negativity?

“Baba, the public schools have problems, and human values are disintegrating. Should we send our daughters to a private school?” Sai Baba replied gently, *No, the schools are all alike. You must talk to your children; see what is on their minds. You don't always know what they are thinking.* He was emphasizing the importance of good communication—of listening with open hearts, without criticism or prejudice.

Many years have passed since that treasured moment with Sai Baba. Many times I have cried with gratitude, for surely without him and his guidance we would be lost. Baba has come in answer to the deepest yearnings of our hearts. He has come with sacred teachings to bring peace and balance to a world that is teetering, and he has

come to give direction and support to our families. He has helped to define my role as a woman, wife, mother, and spiritual aspirant, and helped to bring sanctity and joy to our family life.

First, Self-Confidence

First, Sai Baba comes with the supreme message: God permeates all creation, and human life is sacred. He tells us that we must have self-confidence, that is, confidence in Him and in our own Self, which is capable of rising above grief and suffering.

When our daughters left for school in the mornings, I often reminded them, “You are *Atmaswarupa* (the embodiment of God)!” We would smile at each other as I spoke, because although we barely understood the concept, Sai Baba had melted our hearts with his love, and he had informed us that this love is divinity within us.

Next: Understanding and Self-Control

Baba emphasizes that we must listen to one another, try to understand, and then adjust. This sounds easy, yet it is so difficult to practice amid the stress and turmoil of daily life. Family life offers a golden opportunity to practice patience, compromise, and sacrifice, and to shift our center of concern from “I” to

“we.” Like unpolished gems tossed together, through the course of family life, our rough edges of anger, impatience, and selfishness become smoothed over time, and refined until we shine like brilliant jewels, reflecting God’s light.

Once Sai Baba said gently to me, *Fighting with husband*. I was surprised and quietly protested, “But Baba, perhaps only a little!” He smiled, saying, *One small seed grows into a big tree*. He gestured with his arms outstretched to show how quickly a small anger can escalate into something very large.

Here was a further lesson on the importance of good communication and control of emotions. I began to understand that even a slight negative thought can have a powerful effect on others.

Sai Baba cautions that instead of criticizing others, we should try to correct our own faults. Like a master therapist, he helps us by reflecting back our hidden negative feelings and undesirable character traits. Gently and lovingly, he encourages us to change.

When Baba first came into our lives, I was quick to pass judgment on other people. How could they claim to be devotees when their conduct was far from godly? Gradually I realized that the others were only reflections of me! I stopped criticizing the shortcomings of others and concentrated instead on my own transformation. As Baba has said, *To become divine, man must become refined. Love is the result of refinement.*

Our Children Are Watching Us

Our daughters watched our actions closely. Children naturally respond to noble ideals, and they are also quick to notice hypocrisy. Can we expect them to be kind and respectful if we are not setting the example? Is our speech sweet and loving, or are we harsh with one another? Are we unified in thought, word, and deed? Is our home a cheerful and peaceful place, filled with laughter and joy? Are we practicing the five D’s: Duty, Discipline, Devotion, Determination, and Dedication? How do we create a haven where children can live without fear, developing the courage to be good, despite disturbing peer pressure?

When our daughters were young, we often walked with them to a nearby athletic field, settled on the cool grass, and gazed at the vast blue sky. As we listened to the whispering wind and the sweet twittering of the birds, we talked about daily problems, about life’s mysteries, and about God’s immense love expressed in the beauty of nature and in our love for one another. We echoed Sai Baba’s words, *God is always within, around, above, and below you, guiding and protecting you, as close to you as your shadow*. These family talks infused us with confidence and faith.

Answers to Teens’ Burning Questions

Sai Baba’s love draws people to him. When our daughters were teenagers, they had a compelling desire to see him once again. They were questioning, “Who am I? What is the meaning of my life? Can I ever live up

to Swami's ideals?" They were struggling as I had many years earlier, and wondering if Baba would be disappointed with them when we went to India to see him.

To our relief, Baba called us in. What exquisite joy to sit as a family with Sai Baba. Feeling safe and protected, we pressed closely around him and strained to catch every soft and loving word. Often we burst into laughter because of his playfulness and humor, and we were soothed and brightened by his melodious voice. The moment was intimate and sweet, and bliss-drops flooded our eyes.

During this particular trip, Sai Baba showed that he knew and loved each one of our daughters. Modeling subtle lessons on parenting, he accentuated the positive, saying, *Good girls; good parents*. When our daughters asked for advice, he elicited their opinions instead of voicing his own, saying, *I am the source, not the force. I don't tell what to do. I only help*.

Each time a daughter mentioned her concerns, he supported, rather than chided. One daughter asked about her temper. Baba replied, *Not temper, just action-reaction. I will help*.

Another daughter confided, "Baba, I have bad thoughts." Again, lovingly, he responded, *Bad thoughts but good girl. Don't worry, I will help*. Then he spoke about how to control the mind by filling it with sacred thoughts, and becoming a mastermind.

One of the girls commented that a friend was causing her some problems. *Life is filled with problems*, came Swami's quick reply. *Problems are your teacher. Say, 'This*

is good for me,' and soon what appears to be bad will become good. He stressed the importance of facing our problems with equanimity, courage, and following the voice of conscience.

"Baba, how can we feel close to you when we are so far away?" asked one of our daughters. Baba replied tenderly, *Talk to me all the time; give me your pain*.

Another daughter asked, "Baba, what more can we do?" The reply was swift and simple: *Love, love, love!*

Ladies' Day

Sai Baba's immense love was again apparent when he inaugurated Ladies' Day, on November 19, 1995. Our daughters' spirits soared as they heard Sai Baba extol women for their courage, compassion, wisdom, devotion, and sacrifice. *It is obvious that feminine birth is estimable, adorable, and sublime*, he stated. A few years later, on November 19, 2001, Baba further said that he had established Ladies' Day in order to *propagate and realize the sanctity of motherhood and the principle of selfless love. ... This day will be celebrated by posterity for eons*.

Integrating Spiritual Life and Family Life

Raising a Sai family in the USA is both wonderful and daunting. When our children were young, we wondered how we could integrate our devotion to Sai Baba with our active Western family life. I often felt that we were leading dual lives: on one hand, we had our spiritual life with weekly Sai Center meetings in our home, service projects, and trips to India; and on the other, we had our

suburban life of soccer games, music, art, and dance lessons, parent-teacher association meetings, and family gatherings.

Most of our friends and extended family members did not understand our devotion to Sai Baba, and were mystified, disinterested, or disapproving. Many felt uncomfortable with our vegetarian diet and with the large pictures of Sai Baba in our home. How should we deal with all the seemingly disparate elements in our lives?

We determined that viewing worldly life as separate from spiritual life was faulty. They are actually one and the same, and not seeing their oneness was due only to our shortsightedness. We learned that we should develop broad, inclusive vision instead of separateness. As Sai Baba says, *The blemishes of the heart have to be washed by moral life and the doing of one's duty*. When all of our actions and relationships, including family, are infused with love, then everything becomes sacred: family time, work time, play time, and prayer time—soccer games, as well as Sabbath days.

When God is present, love overflows. The family is the first school of life, and if parents express love, children also become loving. When this happens, the family sings a happy song. As Baba has said, *Love binds all hearts in a soft, silken symphony*.

Our lives changed profoundly after meeting Sai Baba. We are supremely grateful for our four now-grown-up daughters, all beautiful expressions of Baba's love. They are thoughtful, brave, broadminded, and loving women, facing the troubles of the world with courage and faith.

Recently, I thanked Baba for giving my life meaning. He responded softly, *Don't worry about meaning. Be happy*. I said, "Baba, we love you so much." In his compassionate and loving way, he responded, *And I love you more*.

In words from a Jewish prayer book, "How can we find the words to thank you for your goodness, and how can words alone be fitting thanks? And so we make this pledge: We will thank you with our lives; we will offer to you the work of our hands. Fill then our hearts, our lives, our work, with a constant love for you, God of the universe, Creator of all life, Lord of all beings. Then shall our souls rejoice and sing, 'You have turned my grief into dancing, released me from my anguish, and surrounded me with gladness. O Lord, my God, I shall give thanks to you forever!'" (*Gates of Repentance*, a Jewish prayer book)

—Sharon Sandweiss
San Diego, California

A family is the most important functional unit in the world. If the family runs on sound lines, the world will also run smoothly. If the unity among the family members suffers even to a small extent, the world will face the repercussions. Unity gives strength to the lives of the family members. Therefore, every family should strive for achieving unity and harmonious relationships among its members.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (March, 2003)

The Mother in All Mothers

In writing about Sai Baba of Shirdi, Hemadpanth states, “Sai Baba had the extraordinary love of the Mother; his joy knew no bounds. He knew the wants of his children long beforehand, and he took great pleasure in fulfilling them.”

Everyone who has come to Bhagavan, the present manifestation of that same Mother, will describe him too in the same way. Every devotee, however old, becomes as a little child in the presence of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and just as a child takes refuge in the mother’s lap and sobs out to her all its fears and worries, the devotee too pours out his troubles and gets consoled.

In the Markandeya Purana, the Divine Mother is described thus: “If remembered in times of trouble, she destroys the fear of all living things.” We all know that Bhagavan need only be remembered, and he flies thousands of miles in an instant, to give relief. The scripture continues, “If remembered by others who are free from immediate fear, she grants the most auspicious understanding.”

Devotees of Bhagavan will endorse that Baba, as soon as they pray to him, vouchsafes and advises them directly, or if they are far away, indirectly but clearly on all problems, not only spiritual, mental, or physical, but even social and domestic. The scripture further illustrates the Divine Mother by outlining her many attributes, and Bhagavan, being the Mother of all mothers and the

embodiment of all God forms, is indeed the same. His compassion is the right of all beings, and he never tires of telling the good news to all. He has said often in his discourses that no one need look upon him with fear, or even extol him, in order to earn his grace, because no one fears his mother or has to praise her in order to win her to his side. The mother’s love is spontaneous and independent of any expectations.

One must listen to the advice Bhagavan gives to children about their choice of lifemates or to daughters when they proceed to take up residence with their mothers-in-law or have newborn babies to feed and foster. . . . One common argument that Baba uses to persuade people to postpone their departure from Puttaparthi comes to mind. He asks the lady of the party, “Why don’t you remain a few days longer in your Mother’s home?” That settles it! One will realize then that Sai is the Mother of all mothers, the Mother who is the mother in all beings. The tenderness, sympathy, and love with which Bhagavan attends to the needs of the cows, the rabbits, the pet dogs, peacocks, or deer, the care he takes to avoid any harm to living things, is a lesson to everyone in the art of efficient mothering. He is verily maternal love, incarnate.

—Sanathana Sarathi
 (“Sai Spiritual Showers,” Vol. 1, No. 4)

Sai Gita

A Mystifying Tale of Unmatched Love, Part 2

We continue here an adaptation of the Sai Gita story that initially appeared in *Heart2Heart* e-journal in January 2007.

It was not as if life was always rosy and cozy for Sai Gita. She had her share of ailments and afflictions, and difficulties because of her advanced age, but these bothered her not in the least. “Somehow she does not feel the pain,” said Pedda Reddy, her latest caretaker. Her mind was always fixed on the Lord, and in turn, it was with the same intensity that Bhagavan looked after her welfare. When Sai Gita suffered from a stomach disorder, resulting in her tummy bulging inordinately, Swami immediately arranged for expert vets from Kerala and Bangalore to attend to her; when the leather on the soles of her feet started peeling due to foot-and-mouth disease, Swami encouraged the doctors to start treatment without any hesitation and assured them



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that she would be cured soon, and that’s exactly what happened.

“On one occasion it was reported to Swami that she was sick,” says Sri Chiranjeevi Rao, who was caretaker of the Prasanthi Nilayam ashram for many years. “Swami created *vibhuti* (holy ash) and asked me to deliver it to her personally. Whenever I went to the *gokulam* (dairy)—which was frequently in those days—Swami invariably asked me to visit Sai Gita on the way and check if she were comfortable and well cared for.

“Is she getting sugarcane leaves to eat?” Swami would inquire. Sai Gita relished the sweet sugarcane leaves very much, and Swami knew this only too well. He was also aware that these leaves were not easy to come by in Puttaparthi, so he would

say, “You must take pains to bring her the things she likes. Being an animal, she cannot express herself so specifically, but when we know what she wants, we should make all attempts to provide for her wishes and keep her happy. That is real service.”

Role Model for Students

Incidentally, Sri Chiranjeevi Rao was instrumental in building a spacious shed for Sai Gita in the early 1980s, which had a high wall and lots of greenery around it. Sai Gita’s move to this new location from the gokulam in 1979 or 1980 marked the beginning of a new chapter in her life. Besides having a comfortable place to stay, her home now stood right opposite the senior students’ hostel, which brought along with it many precious advantages.

“I remember this touching incident very vividly,” a former student told *Heart2Heart*. “It was a bright festive morning—the exciting day of Christmas. After the captivating carol-singing and beautiful *darshan* (seeing of Swami) in the *mandir* (temple or darshan area), some of us got up and prayed, ‘Swami, please come to the hostel.’ We expected answers like, ‘Why do you want me in the hostel, when I am with you here all the time?’ or ‘Wait ...,’ or ‘Today I am very busy—see, so many people have come from different countries,’ or simply a mischievous smile.

“But no, that day, Swami immediately asked, ‘Are you ready?’ We loudly shouted, ‘Yes!’ but within we were nervous to the core. We had not made any arrangements; the dining hall was not decorated; the garden was not pruned; the entrance had no *rangoli*

(sacred designs drawn on the pavement) or mango leaves, and what about decorating Swami’s *jhoola* (swing)? What could we offer to Swami? What programs could we stage? Our minds were zapped.

“Even as we were lost in this avalanche of thoughts, Swami called for the car and announced, ‘I am going now!’ We had no time even to think, and we ran like boys possessed. By the time we reached the hostel, Swami was already there. A few boys—who undoubtedly broke national records in thousand-meter running that day—reached the hostel well before Swami’s car and were fortunate enough to be there to welcome him. And what a day it was! Everything was so informal. Swami stayed with us for half an hour, and how he blessed each one of us—walking on the lawns, collecting letters, cracking jokes, blessing whatever we offered, and obliging us in whatever we asked.

Sai Gita Answers the Call

“But this was not the highlight of this memorable visit. The best part was yet to come, and I remember those few moments so well. Swami stood at the entrance of the hostel, all smiles, looking so radiant with the rays of the morning sun adding to his divine luster, and called out with a voice so sweet, *Gita ... , Gita ...*, as if singing a divine melodious tune. Swami’s voice was so soft that only myself and a few others near Swami could have heard it, but Sai Gita—standing a hundred meters away—felt it, and immediately her ten-thousand-pound body galloped like a race horse! Excited and overwhelmed with joy, Sai Gita presented

herself before Swami in the next instant, and for the next ten minutes it was only Swami and Sai Gita.

“How this purest devotee of an elephant

went on caressing Swami—and how Swami, in turn, was so gentle and loving toward her—is a sight that remains etched in gold in my memory forever. Sai Gita was not in the least interested in the fruit that Swami offered; she wanted only for Swami to touch her, look into her eyes, speak to her, and be next to her. Even an inch of separation was intolerable. For me, it was the greatest demonstration of pure love.”

While Sai Gita got her precious opportunities whenever Swami visited the students’ hostel, every day the boys had a living example and inspiration of true divine love. This is how Sai Gita’s abode, being right opposite the students’ dwelling, became such a wonderful win-win situation. Both Sai Gita and the students loved each other, but each loved Swami more than each other.

A Krishnastami Visit

Every time Swami visited the hostel was a red-letter-day for Sai Gita. Sri Y. Arvind recalls a similar incident:

“Years ago in Prasanthi Nilayam, on the beautiful eve of Krishna’s birthday, Swami was standing on the portico, inquiring about the arrangements for the imminent festival. The elders who had been given responsibilities informed him about the arrangements—how the cow procession

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would come, where they would be positioned, and the order of the procession, down to the last details of what *prasadam* (blessed food) was to be distributed and what quantities were available. Swami was in a jolly mood, and most of us felt it was the ideal time to pray for him to visit the hostel.

So, gently, with the words, ‘Please, Swami,’ generously sprinkled in our supplications, we pleaded, prayed, cajoled, and did all we could to get him to bless the hostel with his physical presence. Swami played hard to get but finally said the magic words, ‘I will come!’

“The hostel’s look changed overnight. Teams of boys worked on various areas of the hostel, and decorations sprang up everywhere, placing banners, festoons, and plantain stalks at key positions. The little shrine for Lord Ganesha outside the hostel was elegantly decorated, all the corridors swept and mopped extra clean, and the dormitories tidied up. By the early hours of the next morning, the entire hostel was spick and span.

“In retrospect and with good humor, I feel that the response to Swami’s visit to the hostel galvanized us all the way a drill sergeant’s inspection parade would his troops! Of course, Swami is our loving mother and father, but the discipline he demands of his chosen ones—well, you have

to hand it to him! Even the laziest of us would be on his toes.

“Coming back to the story, the opportunity taken to invite him was due to some students who, having a green thumb, under the inspired leadership of their seniors, created a beautiful garden in the hostel quadrangle. The garden was a combination of a Grecian rock garden, a Japanese water garden, and a regular floral layout. It had smooth, tiled paths that wended around deeply-embedded boulders, and a water feature, including a cascade leading to a fish pond. A bamboo bridge, which was painted a pleasing light green to match the surrounding lawn, arched over the pond. Creepers covered bamboo arches at strategic corners on the paths. Flowering shrubs lined the paths and filled every crevice offered by the rocks. A flat rock served as a pedestal, and a firmly-anchored and well-cushioned chair was placed upon it for Swami. Steps led up to the chair so that Swami could walk with ease. A lot of effort had gone into building and maintaining the garden, and the crowning glory would be for Swami to bless it. All this was going on in our minds.

“Morning darshan in the mandir proceeded without a hitch. Swami wore a yellow robe, the color of Lord Krishna’s and apt for the occasion of Krishna’s birthday. The procession went like clockwork, with Sai Gita in the vanguard in all her majesty, all dressed up for the Lord—richly caparisoned in gold and silver, with five-foot-long silver ear hangings, gold-brocaded saddle cloths over her back, and beaten gold ornaments on her forehead. She looked royal. Swami

walked down to her with a haste that belied his ‘impatience,’ and his interaction with her was the cynosure of all attention; I would not be exaggerating if I said the cows were feeling jealous of her! Their Gopala (a name for Lord Krishna, meaning, literally, ‘caretaker of cows’) was with Sai Gita!

“But they too had their chance, when Swami came to feed them with bananas. Everything led smoothly to the point when Swami signaled for *bhajans* (devotional singing) to start. The procession was on its way back to the gokulam, the prasadam had been distributed, and now expectant faces looked at Swami’s every gesture, waiting for his signal. He knew this, and he tantalized us all—till the last moment, and then his smile bloomed. ‘Go . . . I will come!’ he said. Immediately, our energy levels tripled, and in a trice, we traversed the thousand meters to the hostel, like jets.

“Swami proceeded to the hostel and graciously blessed all of us standing along the path leading to it. Alighting from the car, he walked slowly, taking in all our efforts to beautify the place. The smile on his face was the greatest of blessings. He went toward the stage and sat on the decorated swing set up for him, and for a while he listened to the group songs sung by ebullient voices. He blessed the prasadam offered, then indicated he was ready to move along.

“When Swami reached the path that lay across the quadrangle, the boys brought his attention to the new garden. His eyes lit up at the new sight, and he gently wound his way toward the picturesque setting. Swami picked up the scissors offered on a velvet platter and

cut the saffron silk ribbon that lay across the primary arch leading into the garden.

“Simultaneously, one of us turned on the water cascade, and the murmur of gently flowing water augmented the sacred atmosphere. Swami walked along the paths laid out and touched the chair set for him on the rock, blessing it. Then he stepped onto the bridge spanning the pond. One of the boys offered him a silver bowl of fish food, with a spoon, and pointed to the water.

“‘What is this?’ asked Swami.

“‘Swami, there are fish in the pond.’

“Swami sweetly picked up the spoon and sprinkled a couple of spoonfuls. Then, suddenly, he picked up the whole bowl and dumped it in at one go. He seemed to be in a hurry! It was obvious; his gait quickened as he walked back to the main lobby. All of us were perplexed at this sudden change; then we understood, as we saw Swami make a beeline to Sai Gita, who was waiting outside the hostel. He was speeding toward her.

“All of us stepped aside and watched the show! Her heavy ornaments and other embellishments had been removed, and she remained oblivious to everything except her Swami.

Baskets of fruit were offered, and Swami kept feeding her. His eyes were twinkling, and his face beamed with a different joy as he patted her cheek, rubbed her trunk, and murmured endearments.

“She responded in kind, speaking to her



“At times, she seemed more than just an animal. Her love for Swami was far greater than ours because of its simplicity. She existed only to love and adore him. That is the highest form of devotion: to exist only for the love of God.”

Master in her language. No doubt they understood each other well! Three hundred and fifty boys and teachers, a large bunch of them around Swami and Gita, plus two long lines extending on either side of the path leading out of the hostel, and lots of devotees outside—all of us were enjoying Swami’s interaction with Gita. If only we had an aerial photograph of the sight, but words will have to do. He spent more than ten minutes with her and then almost regretfully patted her goodbye.

“We offered Him *Arathi* (sacred flame and hymn of praise), and hundreds of voices welled up in unison. Sai Gita raised her trunk in salutation as Swami left the hostel, and many of us took the opportunity to touch her, the one so beloved by the Lord. After enduring our petting, she retired to her

enclosure. But even as she crossed the road, she paused and turned toward the direction that Swami’s car had driven. She watched

for a few seconds, then silently entered her enclosure.

“At times, she seemed more than just an animal. Her love for Swami was far greater than ours because of its simplicity. She existed only to love and adore him. That is the highest form of devotion: to exist only for the love of God.”

Yes, this was the lesson that she drove into everyone’s mind—be it student or devotee—that the whole purpose of life is to exist for the Lord, and there is nothing holier or more purposeful. Swami often exalted her devotion and asked students to learn from her. In a discourse to the boys in the Prasanthi Mandir on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi in 1992, Swami said,

Those of you who are staying in the hostel notice cars going up and down the road. On the other side of the hostel is Sai Gita. She takes no notice of the innumerable cars going on the road. But without any notice, she smells, as it were, the passing of Swami’s car, and immediately comes out with a roar to greet Swami. That is her devotion to her Lord. ... It is steadfast love.

Ever Alert for Her Beloved

Come what may, Sai Gita’s focus was always compass-like, pointing constantly in one direction. “The moment she would hear the siren of the police jeep (an indication that Swami is on his way),” says Sri Pedda Reddy, “she would come out immediately from wherever she was, be it in the shed or in the tank, and run to the road. Standing beside the tarmac she would scan every car that passed by; the moment she spotted

Swami’s car, she would trumpet in glee and sometimes make peculiar sounds of joy.

“When his car drew near, she would search to see where Swami would be seated—in the front or the rear—and if the car window were closed, she would embrace the front windshield with her trunk and wait for the window to roll down. If it happened, she would be ecstatic; she would slowly slide her snout inside and start nuzzling Swami’s hair and face.

“She loved Swami’s crown (of hair); the *vibhuti* smell enlivened her. She was in bliss. But if for some reason Swami’s car did not stop, she would be crestfallen, devastated. She would start crying and grumbling, the ‘Hmm ... hmmm ...’ going on endlessly.

“Some days, if she were very disturbed, she would start shouting and trumpeting as if calling out to him with all the wind power at her disposal.

Only after half an hour of pacifying phrases, such as, ‘He will come,’ ‘Maybe he is busy today,’ ‘He saw you, didn’t he? Do not worry. Tomorrow he will come especially for you,’ and so on, would she reconcile herself. And it would take another hour to persuade her to accept any food. That was the intensity of her love for Swami, and that fervent yearning rewarded her with so many beautiful blessings from Swami.”

The Royal Elephant of God’s Kingdom

Yes, when one yearns only for God, one gets God and everything else too. As Jesus said, “Seek the kingdom of God, and everything else shall be added unto you.” One of the lovely blessings bestowed on Sai

Gita, for example, was how she had become an indelible part of all major celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam, be it Swami's birthday, Dasara,

Krishnastami, or the students' sports meet on January 11 every year. How did she feel, being decorated like a royal and leading the procession majestically on such special days? Did she get excited about it?

"Oh yes, very much," declared Pedda Reddy, her caretaker for almost two decades. "On any normal day, when I took her out for a walk, she would go about the whole process very casually, and the few meters' stroll would drag on for nearly two hours. But when going to the mandir on festival days, it was as if she had become twenty years younger! She wanted to run. She knew she was going to see Swami, and her eagerness would get the best of her."

"In fact, her first hint would be in the early morning, when I applied turmeric on her feet, the first thing I did whenever she had to be dressed up for any occasion. After being decorated she would wait for my command and for the gates to open before gliding quickly into the mandir. So she would stand as still as a statue as I adorned her with more than twenty-seven types of ornaments."

"She patiently endured the 'make up' session, which apart from smearing vibhuti on her body, included bedecking her with exquisitely carved golden head-gear, a richly embroidered body blanket, shining silver anklets, a tiny resounding golden

"On any normal day ... the few meters' stroll would drag on for nearly two hours. But when going to the mandir on festival days, it was as if she had become twenty years younger! She wanted to run. She knew she was going to see Swami, and her eagerness would get the best of her."

bell, many dazzling necklaces, dangling earrings, gorgeous garlands, and so on. In the procession, she played her role to perfection, walking gracefully with a regal air, as befitted the grandeur of the occasion."

The most beautiful part was Swami's concern about her, just like a mother who is very particular about how her child should be dressed for an important occasion. Swami would check with Pedda Reddy as to whether her silver anklets were polished, whether her drapes were in perfect order and all her ornaments intact, and so on.

"Just a year before the eightieth birthday celebrations," Pedda Reddy recalls, "Swami wanted to see all her ornaments. So I went to his residence and discreetly displayed all her jewels. After a few seconds of inspection, Swami asked, 'Where are all her ankle belts?' I was taken aback; I thought I had preserved all her belongings securely. Only when he asked again did I recall that I had, in fact, sent two of her ankle belts to Bangalore because they needed repair. Immediately calls were made, and the next day she was ready for the *rathotsavam* (chariot) festival, immaculately decked out. When Swami passed by Sai Gita that morning, his eyes first went to her feet. Only when I explained that the anklets had arrived the prior evening and fit her perfectly now, did he look satisfied."

“Incidents like this were numerous. Once when I put a gaudy synthetic garland on her neck, Swami said, ‘Why do you put the plastic garland there? It covers all of her gold and silver necklaces.’ On another occasion, he thoughtfully remarked, ‘Three elaborate silver bracelets on her neck looks so cramped. Maybe you could try changing the position of some of them.’ So then I placed two of her big shining bracelets on either side of the velvet drape.”

For Swami, every detail about her was important, and for Sai Gita, if there was anything significant, it was only Swami.

Love, Fun, and Joy

What was dear to Swami was dear to Sai Gita, so even though she preferred solitude, she always reserved a soft spot for Swami’s students. She would allow the boys to touch her, be around her, speak to her, and when in a good mood, even play with her. Going down memory lane and selecting one such anecdote, Y. Arvind, recalls:

“One evening I was in the Hill View stadium when she came along for her routine walk. I had finished a couple of games of volleyball and was sitting on the stone steps that run along the road leading uphill. Seeing her at a distance, I climbed down and walked toward her. From afar I could hear her high-pitched greeting. I felt a glowing smile when I saw her patient eyes and sedate walk.

“She had all the time in the world. Even as she ambled up, her long trunk reached out, sniffing at me. I patted her affectionately, grateful for the attention from a being so beloved of the Lord. Her trunk roamed over

my hands and my pockets, and with an indignant squeak, she turned away. The boy accompanying her laughed and said, ‘You used to give her something to eat every time you met her; today you disappointed her.’

“I am sorry, Gitamma,’ I said, moving to an angle where I could catch her eye. But she turned away again playfully. Once again I moved around. Again she turned away. And together we completed a full circle. We must have been a pretty comical sight, because the laughter of bemused boys rent the air. I felt immensely happy, a feeling of total abandon.

People do not trust what they don’t know, and what they don’t know, they fear—an instinctual response, regardless of intellect or discrimination. Animals too have the same instincts—only more so. But one thing I realized was the trust Sai Gita placed in the people Swami loved. She too loved us. It really strikes me dumb just to contemplate the power of love.

“Then some boys playing soccer kicked the ball toward her. Immediately she responded. Her huge ears flapped in excitement, and she lumbered toward the ball and gave it a careful kick. It was so lovely to watch her raise her foreleg, swing it back, and kick the ball.

“That was it! For the next twenty minutes, about thirty enthusiastic boys and one very jolly elephant played ball. Of course, no referee had the heart to tell her that using her trunk was against the rules, but even so, the match was friendly and ended with a bell instead of a whistle. The hostel bell rang, calling us in for bhajans. With regret, she

let us go, and I saw many a head turn back and gaze at her fondly as we returned to the hostel.

She looked so massive against the deepening sky of the summer evening—so huge, strong, and powerful. I felt a vague stirring inside, and somehow a lump formed in my throat. She was missing her Swami, her Master. Her yearning was so intense that I could feel it too. I sat down on one of the rocks that still dot the rear of Easwaramma High School and watched her.

“She moved away and, as if sensing that someone was watching, turned and threw back one long look. I felt the lump dissolve, and I was myself again. The grass seemed greener and the sky more vibrant with the colors of the setting sun. I smiled to myself as I carried the sight with me to the hostel.”

Perfect Love Exemplified

How many lives have been inspired by her exalted example! Even though she was a five-toed pachyderm,

whenever people looked at her, it was always with awe and reverence. Many of us

can relate to the act of showering affection on an animal and getting love and loyalty in return. We know of dogs who have given their lives for their owners, of pets who give more unconditional love to their keepers than their best friends do, and of cats who act as stress-busters and provide instant happiness to their masters.

But how many pets in the world have turned peoples' attention godward? What Sai Gita has taught humanity without speaking a word is what saints and noble persons take years to learn and decades to impart. Just by her presence and example, she has goaded thousands of students and devotees into practicing higher thinking and aspiring for the highest and nothing else. To demonstrate the nobility of her life and how much esteem Swami placed in her faith and



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I Am There

Do you need Me?

I am there.

You cannot see Me, yet I am the light you see by.

You cannot hear Me, yet I speak through your voice.

You cannot feel Me, yet I am the power at work in your hands.

I am at work, though you do not understand My ways.

I am at work, though you do not recognize My works.

I am not strange visions. I am not mysteries.

*Only in absolute stillness, beyond self, can you know Me as I am,
And then but as a feeling and a faith.*

Yet I am there. Yet I hear. Yet I answer.

When you need Me, I am there.

Even if you deny Me, I am there.

Even when you feel most alone, I am there.

Even in your fears, I am there.

Even in your pain, I am there.

A copy of this poem, "I Am There," written in 1942 by James Dillet Freeman, is also on the moon, placed there by Apollo XV astronaut James B. Irwin in 1971.

I am there when you pray and when you do not pray.

I am in you, and you are in Me.

Only in your mind can you feel separate from Me,

For only in your mind are the mists of "yours" and "mine,"

Yet only with your mind can you know Me and experience Me.

Empty your heart of empty fears.

When you get yourself out of the way, I am there.

You can of yourself do nothing, but I can do all.

And I am in all.

Though you may not see the good, good is there, for I am there.

I am there because I have to be, because I am.

Only in Me does the world have meaning; only out of Me does the world take form; only because of Me does the world go forward.

I am the law on which the movement of the stars and the growth of living cells are founded.

I am the love that is the law's fulfilling. I am assurance. I am peace.

I am oneness. I am the law that you can live by.

I am the love that you can cling to. I am your assurance.

I am your peace. I am one with you.

I am.

Though you fail to find Me, I do not fail you.

Though your faith in Me is unsure, My faith in you never wavers,

Because I know you, because I love you.

Beloved, I am there.

—James Dillet Freeman, 1912-2003

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devotion, Sri Sanjay Sahani, principal of the Brindavan campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, shares a revealing incident:

“It was one of those occasions when Sai Gita ‘sensed’ Swami’s arrival and stood in full alertness beside the road long before we, the boys in the hostel, heard the police siren and rushed toward the gate. If she were on the road, more often than not Swami would stop the car, and that’s what happened this particular day. Swami alighted from the car and approached her. We, not wanting to miss even a millisecond of the divine drama, rushed near Swami too.

“Suddenly there was a splash! This used to happen frequently. Excited with happiness, Sai Gita would start urinating. But that day, since she was on the tarmac, it splashed all over, and many boys stepped back immediately. Most of us waited and watched from a distance. But Swami was with her, standing right beside her, and his robe, evidently, was fully wet. After a minute or so, Swami looked at all of us and said something that sent shivers down our spine. ‘If you were to drink a cup of her urine, maybe you would get a fraction of her devotion,’ he said solemnly. We knew then the level of our devotion compared to hers, this sacred, saintly soul, encased in an elephant’s body.

“Years later, when I quoted this incident in a small talk in Trayee Brindavan, in Swami’s presence, and repeated exactly what he had said on that occasion, Swami, sitting on the swing and listening intently to the

story, immediately said, ‘*Aaunuu, Aaunuu*,’ in Telugu, meaning, ‘Yes, that’s true, that’s true.’”

This silent yet salient four-legged being had a certificate surpassing any other achievement in this material world, a testimony of the purest of love for the Lord. As Sri Chiranjeev Rao said, “What she had for Swami was perfect love.”

For this reason, she was likewise always in Swami’s mind. Even when hundreds of thousands gathered in Prasanthi for the eightieth birthday celebrations and a million arrangements had to be made for the devotees, Swami never forgot her; he showed his concern about her missing ankle belt.

A Palace of a Home for His Loved One

In 2006, when Swami gifted the students of the (then) Institute with a world class indoor stadium, christened the “Sri Sathya Sai International Centre for Sports,” he also built a palace of a home for Sai Gita, with exquisite carvings by the same sculptor who had fashioned the beautiful domes that adorn the Prasanthi Mandir. But this was the culmination of another beautiful drama that had begun a few weeks earlier.

When the land was being cleared to start work for the indoor stadium, unfortunately Sai Gita’s shed could not be spared, because of the vast area the new multi-game sporting complex mandated. When this was brought to Swami’s attention, he seemed upset.

He issued strict instructions that in no case should Sai Gita be moved unless she had a proper and peaceful accommodation built for her. But nobody had a clear idea

where exactly to build her new home. When someone suggested that a shed could be built for her beyond the indoor stadium, Swami immediately

rejected the proposal, saying, “No, it is too far; she will be afraid. She should be near.”

And that is how plans were drawn up to accommodate her [on the side of the new stadium nearest the mandir], inside the planetarium complex. Swami liked this idea but still made many changes to it. He did not want a shed for her; he wanted a palatial home. Also, he wanted it to be located closer to the road, so that it would be easy for her to have darshan whenever Swami passed by. But building this new structure would take at least a few weeks, so where would she stay in the interim period? This was Swami’s concern. So a brand new temporary shed came up in just two or three days behind the planetarium, complete with a bathtub, relaxing area, and so on.

Swami visited this site almost daily, and only when he was satisfied with the temporary shed was Sai Gita moved. Even after that, he would visit many times to see if Sai Gita were comfortable and ask Pedda Reddy if she were okay and if all her needs were taken care of. Then he would inspect the construction of her new “grand home” and seem pleased.

Looking at the grandeur of the new enclosure, many people would ask, “Is this the place where Swami will sit and watch the boys play in the indoor stadium?” That

This silent yet salient four-legged being had a certificate surpassing any other achievement in this material world, a testimony to the purest love for the Lord. As Sri Chiranjeev Rao sai, “What she had for Swami was perfect love.”

is how captivating the new residence of the Lord’s dearest devotee was shaping up to be. And that is what pure love can do. If anything matters to Swami when it comes to his devotees, it is devotion and devotion alone.

No one suspected then that this elegant abode would within the space of a year, become Sai Gita’s *samadhi* (memorial shrine), as well as the fitting home for a new arrival, the elephant calf, Sathya Gita.

The Celestial Song of Love....

When we asked Sri Pedda Reddy what was the most precious lesson he learned in his twenty-year association with Sai Gita, without pausing a second he answered, “Devotion to Swami. ... I have never seen anybody crave for Swami like she did. That is the greatest thing I learned from her.” He continued, “In fact, I often prayed to her and offered my gratitude, saying, ‘Gita, it is only because of you that I get a chance to be near Swami, that He speaks to me, and that I have this wonderful chance to serve. I am fulfilled by this sacred opportunity.’”

It seems that Sri Pedda Reddy is no less an ideal for us—or maybe years of relating with Sai Gita has metamorphosed his life into a shining example of loving service and devotion. This is what happens through

close contact with illumined souls. And all one needs to be illumined, as Swami often says, is not scriptures, spiritual practices, or sermons, but just unsullied love. Perhaps it was to prove this to the muddled mind of man that Sai made “Sai Gita” ... the celestial song of pure love.

Five thousand years ago, Swami, in the form of Lord Krishna, sang the song of the Bhagavad Gita, to impart to mankind the wisdom for leading a life of perpetual harmony. Now we have the Lord who has demonstrated this precious knowledge through Sai Gita.

Her life story is a tale of immaculate purity and soul-entrancing sublimity. She compelled and inspired millions to transform their lives into beacons of beatific light, serene love, and never-ending happiness. Perhaps it is not exaggerating to paraphrase Albert Einstein’s quote about Gandhi-ji to apply to Sai Gita: “Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such an animal as this, ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

—Adapted from **Heart2Heart e-Journal**,
January 2007. Courtesy www.radiosai.org.



REGION 5: ILLINOIS (EXCEPT BELLEVUE) ■ INDIANA ■ IOWA ■ MICHIGAN
MINNESOTA ■ NEBRASKA ■ OHIO ■ WISCONSIN

Second Annual Health Screening at Regional Sai Retreat

Swami blessed us all with a wonderful and transforming experience at our regional retreat at Camp Henry Horner, Ingleside, Illinois, September 1-3, 2007. Our theme this year was “Feeling the Presence of God: Living in Loving Service,” and we were blessed with wonderful participation from many Sai brothers and sisters in our region and across the globe.

As part of the retreat, we conducted a health screening and health education camp, Saturday-Monday, 6:30-8:00 a.m., and Saturday-Sunday, 12:00-2:00 p.m. and 6:00-7:30 p.m. The coordinators, Dr. Hari Conjeevaram and Dr. Meera Krishnan, received wonderful help from physician and nonphysician volunteers from the entire region.

Services offered included blood pressure checks, blood glucose and lipid panel testing (total cholesterol and HDL cholesterol), one-on-one consultation with physicians to discuss test results, and preventive health education on nutrition, exercise, cancer screening, and general cardiovascular health, including hypertension, heart disease, and stroke. Age-specific health screening information was also provided to each participant.

Eighty-nine Sai brothers and sisters ages eighteen to eighty-one registered, with nearly equal numbers of men and women. Several

came for follow-ups on tests performed at last year’s retreat.

About half (forty-six percent) of the Sai brothers and sisters screened had abnormal findings with regard to blood pressure, blood glucose, lipid testing, or a combination thereof, several for the first time.

The camp also provided continuity of care for those screened last year, some of whom had made lifestyle changes and/or initiated treatment through their physicians after receiving abnormal test results.

All participants were educated on healthy living (diet, exercise) and were also instructed to follow up with their physician on any abnormal findings.

The services provided at the health camp were appreciated by everyone, and Swami’s divine love and grace were with us throughout the camp. We humbly pray to Swami to continue to provide us with opportunities to serve him in all our brothers and sisters.

In Swami’s Service with love,

—**Dr. Hari Conjeevaram**

Vice President and Regional Medical Director,
Region 5 (North Central)

Tutoring Project in Houston, Texas

Swami not only reiterates that we are born to serve others, but also he gives each of us an opportunity to accomplish the same. Our ever-compassionate Lord blessed the Houston devotees with an opportunity to work with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) and educate economically disadvantaged children who need tutoring, guidance, moral support, motivation, and drive for academic success.

The students of Hartman Middle School are predominantly Spanish-speaking, from families who have migrated from Latin America. Since these parents face severe financial and economic crises, they tend to neglect their children's education. This situation drives the Houston Sai group's focus on the academics of this group of children, bringing home the importance of education in molding their careers and ultimately their lives. Devotees also offer classes to the parents, to motivate the families to understand the importance of education and the economic benefit they derive through their children's education, training, and better employment.

The tutoring program takes place every Saturday during the school year from 9:00 a.m. to noon, serving about 120 students. Those who attend the program are selected based on their performance in the

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exam, which is taken by Texas public school students in the spring each year. Every student must pass this state assessment in order to be promoted at certain grade levels and to graduate from high school. The volunteers, along with school officials, tutor these children in math, science, and English. The needy children are provided with lunch as well.

We have put Swami's teaching of "love all, serve all" into action, with volunteers loving the children and serving their need for education. Swami's divine work has insured that these efforts show good results, which has been reflected in a significant improvement in the TAKS results.

Last year the group organized a "prep rally," for motivating not only the students who attended the tutoring program but also the entire school of approximately 1,600 students. The group organized a gift of shirts bearing Swami's slogan, "Help Ever, Hurt Never," for the entire student body. The devotee group provides additional supportive motivation for the students in the form of celebrations for Christmas and other holidays or local festivals. This is indeed one of Swami's many miracles, working through his devotees to make a difference in society.

—**Prafull & Madhu Kumar**
Sugarland, Texas



“Day on the Beach” for the Disabled

Santa Cruz, California

Since 1994, the Sathya Sai Baba organization of Region 7 has participated in an annual event called “Day on the Beach,” held in July at Cowell’s Beach in Santa Cruz. This extraordinary event provides individuals who have physical and mental disabilities the opportunity to participate in watersports such as kayaking, outrigger canoeing, surfing, and SCUBA diving. In 2007 we had approximately 185 participants.

Numerous volunteers assisted in the planning and execution of the day’s events. From the Sai community we had over thirty-six devotees at the event, representing eight centers, and overall, ten centers in the region got involved with this service program. The participating centers included Central San Jose, Fremont, Newark, Oakland, Peninsula, Pleasanton, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Stockton, and Walnut Creek.

Our Sai organization provided snacks and drinks to all participants, volunteers, and visitors to the event, including veggie or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, samosas, potato

chips, bagels and cream cheese, cookies, fruit salad, strawberries, watermelon, apple juice, and water. The atmosphere was very festive, with music provided by volunteer live bands.

Over 900 meals were served through the many helpers Swami arranged. Our service teams started coming in by about 9:30 a.m.; and we were ready to serve by 11:00 and continued until around 4:00 p.m.

The spirit of love was positively felt by all, and Swami’s presence was felt by our attending guests, as indicated by the e-mail received from Foster Anderson, the founder and president of the organizing entity, Shared Adventure, who wrote, “I can’t thank you enough for coordinating the food for ‘Day on the Beach’ this year. Can you send me an address to write a thank you to all the Sai Babas who helped out?” Swami, we thank you!

We hope you can feel the energy of the experience through the captured images.

—Srinivas T. Rao

Service Coordinator, Region 7



Swami's "Injection" of Love

The Sedative That Soothes Our Suffering

With every passing instance in life, I have increasingly understood and felt that His Will prevails. Swami appeared in my life at an age when I accepted all things without question, just as a child picks up anything that appears sweet and lovable. I was ten years old when a picture of Swami entered our altar. He caught all our attention and gave no room for any second thoughts by his sprinkling of nectar and vibhuti.

Life went on smoothly, and my parents were engrossed with the love that Swami poured out, which one could easily pick up just by having his darshan. That same love was passed down, and I didn't have much difficulty at that time in moving forward in my *sadhana* (spiritual practice). If I am now asked what inspired me to follow his teachings, I would simply and spontaneously state that it is the effervescent and radiant love that he showers on us.

On several occasions, I was thirsty for that love, for I felt that I might have gone off track under various pressures such as school and office work, and there have been times when I have pleaded to Swami to bring me back, as in the line of the song that goes, "When I stray far away, bring me back again!" At those times, Swami would give me a shot, a "morphine injection" of

love, through the most unexpected means. That powerful love sustains us to climb the ladder of sadhana and travel the journey of self-transformation.

The Road The road is seldom smooth. Things may appear unfair, as those who appear to us as evil may win, while those who appear to be good seem to drown in misfortune. But we must bear in mind that the evil will eventually suffer the consequences of their actions, and the good may even now be working out their last few bits of karma before reaching the Lord's lotus feet.

When the good are given such pains, it is always under the Lord's watchful eye, and therefore it is like the pain after a surgery. It cannot be taken away completely, but Swami's grace and blessings act like a sedative, helping us complete what we have to, to wipe out our residual karma.

Therefore the best thing to do is not focus on the difficulties during the journey but pray to Swami to give us the strength, energy, courage, and fortitude to deal with them. In this regard, we need to have no doubt that Swami is always protecting us.

Swami's Discourses and Teachings Upon listening to Swami's discourses or reading Sai literature, I was always fascinated by Swami's

simplistic teachings. Take for example, Love all, serve all. As easy as this may be to read or hear, it is challenging to practice. Loving all is not easy, especially in the world of competition and frustration. However, with determination, faith, and love for Swami, any good mission can be successful.

Loving all and seeing Swami in all has been my biggest challenge. Recently, I have begun to understand that when you scrutinize yourself and others, you will eventually and gradually get glimpses of Swami. Swami can be seen in the work people do, their outlook in life, and even in their smile, radiance, and twinkling eyes. I am working on this! It is challenging, but with Swami's name on our lips constantly, nothing remains difficult!

Love It takes us all a while during our transformation to learn how not to be afraid to give and receive love from others. All it takes is one failed relationship where someone scorns our love, and we tend to retreat for a long time. In this world, failed and unreciprocated love is one of the most painful things to bear. But then Swami invariably steps in and holds our hand, literally and gently walking us along the path of divine love that is selfless, pure, and has no expectation of anything in return. This love we give out to others because it is our nature, substance, foundation, mansion, and wealth—our only true wealth.

Swami has reinforced this in me through various means recently, impressing upon me that divine love is the medicine that heals, attracts, and soothes. It is the main ingredient in all Swami's teachings. We

should have no fear in giving our divine love to anyone and everyone we come across. Our bounties will never cease or decrease.

Yes, during frustrating moments, love is sometimes the last thing to cross my mental horizon.

There have been moments when I feel I have been distanced from love, but that same love, when felt again, will eventually conquer absolutely anything.

My best friend told me recently that even if we feel we may have suddenly and accidentally distanced ourselves from love, this too has a purpose. But the truth is, Swami will carry us through life, keeping us safely and securely in the palm of his divine right hand, the one we should strive to grasp and never let go. Swami says that is why it is called the "right." Likewise, we should slowly leave behind the attachments to this material world that we are holding on to by our left hand, which is why it is called the "left."

Surrender In order for us to get completely accustomed to divine love, our next move is total surrender to Swami's lotus feet. Once we surrender to Swami, coincidences stop

...when you scrutinize yourself and others, you will eventually and gradually get glimpses of Swami. Swami can be seen in the work people do, their outlook in life, and even in their smile, radiance, and twinkling eyes.

happening in our lives, because everything happens by his will. Swami is Sai Krishna. He will play with us, out of the love he has for us. But every game has a little lesson for us to pick up. When that lesson is absorbed, it will then be time for the next lesson. If we do not learn that lesson well, he will make us repeat that step over again until we master it.

The world refers to this as “difficulties.” When they come in droves, we lament and start wailing to Swami. Sometimes we find ourselves losing money, time, and effort, or we allow our internal cart to fill with frustration, discontent, disillusionment, and depression. But I know of no other institution in the universe that lets us take the same exam over and over again until we pass and graduate.

Let us rest assured, be confident, and believe that Swami will never let go of us. He is the guru of gurus, the teacher who literally spoon-feeds his children with nectar. Swami has said that we must ask him and tell him about our doubts and fears. He will provide the answers in ways that will make us realize the depth of his munificence, and our eyes will fill with tears of bliss, repentance, or joy, as the case may be.

So when we feel caught in the cobwebs of this materialistic society, we must not fall back. He sees through our eyes and hears through our ears. If we shed a single tear, he will wipe a hundred from our eyes. Such is the way of his selfless love, without expectation of anything in return. Now if Swami does that for us, why can’t we extend the same to our fellow brothers and sisters, who are Swami themselves?

The Ideal Youth As a young adult and one of Swami’s children, I feel we are blessed to help bring about his mission. I constantly experiment with different projects where I can serve as a proud Sai young adult. I have increasingly begun to understand that through unity and love, mighty tasks can be accomplished. I always admired the various water projects that Swami has conducted and the amount of work that his students put in with utmost devotion and motivation to bring about success with his grace.

Swami has said that “only youth can transform youth.” Who are the chosen ones, we may wonder. The answer is that we all are. Again, nothing can happen without his will. The slightest idea that we come up with, be it any kind of service project—teaching bhajans at the local Sai center, spending quality time with older people, or taking part in food service—is but a blessing in disguise.

Swami shows us these opportunities to engage in and transform ourselves. Why does he call us “embodiments of love”? We are his loving children and his *bangarus* (golden ones), filled with bliss, which we fail to understand exists in us.

Uncle Indulal Shah mentioned in one of his books that the “journey has begun.” There need not be a time, date, or year for this journey to begin. The moment we surrender to Swami and decide that our life now has meaning and will be dedicated to Sai service, then we are on track. If there is something noble that we want to do, to pass on our love and care to society, we must never give up.

We, as Swami’s youth, are bestowed with innumerable talents and gifts. He will show

us the way, if we just become receptive to him. Once we are receptive, our hands need to be placed on one another's shoulders, so we can carry out Swami's beautiful principles of unity and love.

The world may be called our oyster, but by the same token it is also our open stage, and we the actors and actresses must go out there and enthrall the audience that has been

eagerly waiting—for divine love! It is time for us to quench the thirst of dry throats, satiate the hungry, and lead and deliver our fellow brothers and sisters unto the promised land of Truth, Right Action, Love, Peace, and Nonviolence.

—Sridevi Raman
Flushing, New York

A Poem

Today, I open my eyes to fresh rays of hope, and this ounce of vision brings my inner and outer pursuits into unison. The sruti of mother earth becomes the sruti of my soul.

As I dedicate precious time towards the tuning of the instrument and the understanding of an art, I must allow the drone of the tambura to resonate from within. Every pitch I play becomes a reflection, a subsequent harmony, of every pitch of my heart.

As I hear the beats of the kriti and make them my own, I must allow the rhythm of my heart, lungs, and mind to dance together. The pulse of my blood becomes the pulse of the earth/universe, and I can finally carry on life with purpose.

When this happens, I thankfully inhale the breeze from mother earth herself and lead my life as her servant.

—Preetha Narayanan
Memphis, Tennessee

Sruti, divine sounds; *tambura*, a long-necked stringed instrument or lute; *kriti*, a type of musical composition

Respect for Parents

This is a story about a boy named Bobby. One summer Bobby's family went on a camping trip and pitched their tent in the middle of a beautiful forest. Bobby's favorite pastime was exploring the woods surrounding the camp. He loved to gather unusual rocks, bits of wood, and sometimes even a discarded bird's nest.

One day, Bobby forgot his mother's warning not to venture too far from the camp. He went farther and farther into the deep woods. He was interested in a lively chipmunk for a while, and then a colorful bird that chirped an unusual song. Suddenly, Bobby noticed that the shadows were getting deeper and darker. He began to look for landmarks to help him find his way back to the camp. He went a few feet in one direction. That didn't look familiar, so he turned and walked another way. After an hour or so of this kind of fruitless searching, Bobby realized that he must be lost. He called out his father's name, but there was only the echo of his own voice coming back through the corridor of tall trees.

Bobby was tired by this time and very hungry. He thought wistfully about his mother cooking dinner over the campfire and about how good even a piece of bread would taste. Finally, he gave in to his fatigue, pulled some dry leaves over him, and snuggled down in the roots of a big tree. He remembered to pray to God to protect him; then he fell asleep.

Back at the campsite, his mother was very worried. She called and called his name. Then she alerted his father and the other men in the camp that Bobby was missing. The men started out at once using their flashlights. They walked in all directions, calling his name over and over. Then Bobby's father said, "There aren't any wild animals in this forest, and Bobby is a smart boy. I'm sure he will be all right until morning. Let's get an early start, as soon as it is light." So the men gave up the search for the night, and in the morning they began searching before the sun came up.

Bobby's father was the one to find him. Bobby was still asleep under the leaves. His father was so happy to see him, he gathered the little boy up in his arms and hugged him hard.

"I'm so happy you are all right," said his father, with tears in his eyes, "Mother and I have been worried sick about you. Weren't you afraid, Bobby?"

"No, I wasn't afraid because I knew God was here, and he was protecting me from harm."

"I'm so happy you had that faith, son, but remember next time to listen to your mother and father! Remember that God has given us the task to take care of you and watch over you while you are still young. Our parents did the same for us, and you will do the same for your children one day."

Bobby learned an important lesson that week at the campground. He learned how important it is to listen to his parents and to have respect for his parents.

—Adapted from a story in *Patterns for Living*, by Margaret M. Stevens
Courtesy, Margaret M. Stevens

SAI SPIRITUAL EDUCATION LESSON PLAN (GROUP 1)

RESPECT FOR PARENTS

VALUE: Right Action

SUBVALUE: Respect for Parents

QUOTE: *Respect for the parents—[the ones] who started you in life and brought you into this world to gather the vast and varied treasure of experience—is the first lesson that dharma (right action) teaches. Gratitude is the spring that feeds that respect.*

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 3:33, Feb. 3, 1964)

AFFIRMATION(S): I respect my parents with my thoughts, words, and deeds. I see God in my parents, and I obey them. I am thankful for all that my parents do for me.

SONG: **You Are My Mother; You Are My Father**

You are my mother, you are my father, you are my nearest, dearest friend;

You are the beginning, you are the middle, and you are beyond the end;

I love you so; you help me see,

See you in everyone; see you in me.

For I'm in you, and you're in me. For I'm in you, and you're in me.

STORY: “Respect for Parents” (see pages 32-34)

DISCUSSION: Discuss how we can respect our parents. Answer questions such as:

- “Do I talk back to my parents?”
- “Do I listen to my parents?”
- “In what ways do I serve my parents?”

ACTIVITY: Write a letter of gratitude to your parents for all that they do for you.

LIFE APPLICATION: This week, work on the affirmation by thinking good thoughts about your parents, by speaking sweetly and softly to your parents, and by doing extra chores for your parents without being asked. See God in your parents, and when your parents speak to you, listen carefully, knowing that God is speaking through them. Then let this spill over to all your teachers and elders. This will make you happy, and God will be most happy with you.

PRAYER: *Each morning, I am born again. Make me speak soft, sweet words today. Make me helpful to my parents. Let me do deeds that shower happiness on them.*

—Berniece Mead

Sai Spiritual Education Coordinator, USA

☞ Parents' Prayer ☞

O Heavenly Father and Mother, make me a better parent. Teach me to understand my children, to listen patiently to what they have to say, and to answer all their questions. Keep me from interrupting them or contradicting them. Make me as courteous to them as I would have them be to me. Forbid that I should ever laugh at their mistakes or resort to shame or ridicule when they displease me. May I never punish them for my own selfish satisfaction or to show my power. Let me not tempt my child to lie or steal, and guide me hour by hour that I may demonstrate by all I say or do that honesty produces happiness. Reduce, I pray, the meanness in me, and when I am out of sorts, help me, O Lord, to hold my tongue. May I ever be mindful that my children are children, and not to expect them to have the judgment of adults. Let me not rob them of the opportunity to wait on themselves and make decisions. Bless me with the capacity to grant them all of their reasonable requests and the courage to deny them privileges I know will do them harm. Make me fair, just, kind, and fit, O Lord, to be loved, respected, and imitated by my children.



FOCUS ON DEVOTION

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

Journey to Sai through SAI

Region 3 Pilgrimage, Summer 2007

When we first heard of the Region 3 pilgrimage, we thought it would be a great opportunity to intensify our *sadhana* (spiritual practice) and be closer to Swami. We got a lot of inspiration and felt very encouraged to join the group and participate in the “Journey to Sai through SAI” (Service, Adoration, Illumination).

The *satsang* (group gatherings) helped us to focus more intently on our individual *sadhana* and to persevere in our daily practice. Participating in the bhajan practices and service activities reinforced our common desire to get close to Sai and helped us feel more group unity.

In Prasanthi, we had daily bhajan practice sessions, which provided more opportunities to come together with other Sai brothers and sisters and put into practice Swami’s teachings of unity, love, patience, perseverance, equanimity, and more. Singing as one voice and clapping in unison helped us to be united for the one purpose of being in front of our beloved Sai.

The gents’ group recited the Gayatri Mantra while standing in line before going for darshan and while walking to Sai Kulwant Hall. This helped me focus on Swami and feel connected to him. I became more aware of how my mind wandered, but then I was able to focus better and feel closeness with Swami.

The day of the musical presentation, Swami showered us with so much love that I was not able to contain my tears of joy. I was blessed to help record this event and saw how all of the people present shared in this joyful feeling. It was the most rewarding experience to see our beloved Sai smiling and filling our hearts with his immense love for all present, and I know that even others not physically present also joined us in that joy.

Swami’s generosity was boundless; he blessed us with his presence, talked to the devotees, and moved around them in his chair, letting some take *padnamaskar* and also giving saris to the ladies and white cloth for safari suits to the men.

He allowed the group to continue with additional bhajans and stayed with us through the Arathi. My heart filled in abundance, feeling Sai had given so much love to all.

Then he surprised most of us by calling us for a group interview in the mandir, on the afternoon of July 5, 2007, the final day of our scheduled “Journey to Sai through SAI.” In this interview, he showered us with more love, spoke to our group, shared vibhuti and sweets, granted *padnamaskar* (opportunity to touch his feet), and blessed everyone present. He told us that he is with every one of us.

Then came an experience beyond

all our expectations: Swami materialized a golden necklace with a medallion of Mother Lakshmi, which he showed briefly to the group, before presenting it to my wife, Gabriela. We were informed that it was a *mangala sutra*, or wedding necklace. My wife and I did not realize that Swami was performing a marriage ceremony for us at that time, in the presence of our fellow Southeast Region pilgrims. This blessing was beyond our comprehension.

This was our journey to Sai, which continues until we realize him inside our hearts.

—David Yoder

Sathya Sai Center of Orlando, Florida

Sweetness is divinity itself. . . . When the Lord is described as the “master of sweetness,” what is this sweetness? The heart is sweet, the feeling is sweetness. The love (one feels) is sweet. One’s action is sweet. The bliss one feels is sweet. The Atma is sweet. This blissfilled sweetness pervades man from head to foot. . . .

There is nothing in the world sweeter than the love of a mother for her child. For the well-being of the child, the mother is ready to sacrifice her all, including her life. Such nectarine sweetness is manifest only in the mother, who is the embodiment of the Divine. . . .

The mother is the visible manifestation of God. If one seeks to worship what is invisible while ignoring the divinity of the mother who is visible and adorable, it must be regarded as a sign of ignorance. God is of subtle form, invisible, infinite, and immeasurable. The mother is a visible and tangible proof of divinity. When a child is born, the first person it beholds is the mother. The mother bears patiently many travails for the sake of the child. It is sweet to love such a mother. You may have love for God, but if you have no love for the mother who is physically present before you, how can you love the invisible Divine?

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

SSS 27:18, July 3, 1994

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BOOKS

Purifying the Heart by John Goldthwait, Ph.D., describes the spiritual practice that Sai Baba taught to Dr. Goldthwait. This practice releases worldly attachments that close our hearts, so they may open to our true Self, which is pure love and compassion.

Paperback, 135 pages.

BI-030 \$4.00

A Practice for Purifying the Heart by John Goldthwait, Ph.D., contains 100 quotes from Bhagavan's discourses to help readers practice the concept of purifying the heart and releasing attachments that cause obsessions and vagaries of the mind.

Paperback, 35 pages.

BI-158..... \$3.00

Dasara Discourses 2005, is a compilation of discourses Swami gave during 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. Paperback, 67 pages.

BA-123 \$3.00

Expanding the Boundaries of Self by Oliver H. Jobson. This book is a log of the spiritual gems the author has learned in his life journey, and how a spiritual aspirant begins to discover the inner journey.

BW-055.... \$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*. This book is a manual for finding higher consciousness through the world's most mystical and spiritual teachings.

BW-190.... \$11.00

Sri Sathya Sai Baba and the Buddha, by Suresh Bhatnagar, is a monumental work comparing the remarkable similarity in thinking between the two great spiritual teachers, Sri Sathya Sai Baba and Buddha. Throughout the book, the reader will find references and quotations on the commonalities in the teachings on truth, peace, love, righteousness, nonviolence, compassion, and other tenets connecting Buddhism and Sri Sathya Sai's teachings.

Paperback, 425 pages.

BI-169..... \$10.00

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

The Auspicious Goat, by Carolyn Freund-Nelson, is about a family pet goat that brought the Nelson family close to Baba. Filled with humorous and inspiring anecdotes, this coffee-table-quality book also contains hundreds of Swami quotes woven into the story, artistic color photography, and is narrated by Baba-the-goat, herself. Hardcover, 240 pages. BW-004 ... \$25.00

Vidyagiri Divine Vision commemorates the 25th anniversary of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (now Sri Sathya Sai University). It includes photos and stories from many of the professors and alumni of the Institute. BI-151 \$7.00

Sathya Sai Speaks on Education offers a compilation of Sathya Sai Baba's unique message and mission on integrated, values-based education. Paperback, 374 pages. BW-131 \$7.00

Sri Sathya Sai Veda Vani was compiled by the late Sri Ghandikota Subrahmanya Sastry, a renowned Vedic scholar. On various occasions, Swami gave discourses on the Vedas and on Vedic Dharma, which were published in Telugu under the title, *Sri Sathya Sai Vedavani*. This same book has now been translated into English in the hopes of helping devotees in their spiritual practices. BI-133..... \$6.00

Prema Dhaara, Part 1 and **Prema Dhara, Part 2** were compiled by J. Venkatraman, from letters written by Sathya Sai Baba to the college students of the Sri Sathya Sai University and others. Some of the letters are touching, some profound, and others very inspiring.

Part 1 BI-086..... \$3.00

Part 2 BI-132..... \$4.00

CDs

One Spirit, One Love Recent recording of English devotional songs performed by the Norwalk Sai Youth Chorus. T-SCE-094 \$7.00

Love Eternally English devotional songs performed by the Norwalk Sai Youth Chorus. T-SCE-092 \$9.00

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