

Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA

Dedicated with Love and Devotion to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba



“The Hands That Serve ...”

Sai's Message: <i>Seva</i> : A Flower Placed Lovingly at His Feet	Sri Sathya Sai Baba	2
The <i>Sadhana</i> of Service: Act, Dedicate, and Adore.....	Sri Sathya Sai Baba	3
USA Region 8 Decorates Prasanthi for Christmas 2008.....	April Skrobiza	9

Sai Service: Love in Action

Region 10: Dallas Homeless Seva	Sai Center of Dallas, Texas	18
Region 9: Albuquerque Seva for Homeless Veterans	Sai Centers of Albuquerque, NM	20
Region 6: Quilting for a Healthy Start.....	Sai Center of Salem/Corvallis, OR	22
Region 4: Sai Medical Camp in St. Louis, Missouri	Dr. Chandra Varadachari	23
Region 3: Florida Sathya Sai Medical Camp for the Homeless..	Devotees of USA Region 3	25
Region 2: Eyeglass Cleaning Service Project.....	Sai Centers of Washington, DC, Metro Area	27
USA National Service Project: Bone Marrow Donor Registration Drive		28

Announcements:

“Love All, Serve All” – New e-Newsletter of Regional Reports.....		30
USA Retreat Dates, 2009	Regional Officers	31
The Spirit of Service	Sri Sathya Sai Baba	32
New Sri Sathya Sai University at Muddenahalli	Sri Sathya Sai Baba	36
Young Adults (YAs): Earnest Preparations for National Sai Youth Conference in May.....		38
Thank You, Swami.....	Young Adults of Chicago, IL	40
Sai Children: What Is the Best Service?	Adapted from Sri Sathya Sai Baba, <i>Chinna Katha</i> , Vol. 2	42
SSE Lesson Plan (Group 2): What Is the Best Service?		45
Sitting Downwind from Flowers	From <i>Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul</i>	46
Sathya Sai Book Center of America: Featured Books and Recent Arrivals	Book Center Volunteers	48

SAI'S MESSAGE

Seva: A Flower Placed Lovingly at His Feet

I have told you about the ideals and technique of seva (selfless service) often times before, and I am calling upon you once again to experience the joy thereof. I need not expound again on the special nature of the opportunity that is now offered to you. Render your hearts cool with delight; share the delight with others; adore God in this delectable form. When you look into the qualifications needed for seva, you will find that a pure heart—uncontaminated by conceit, greed, envy, hatred, or competition—is essential; also, faith in God as the spring of vitality, virtue, and justice.

Seva is the worship you offer to the God in the heart of everyone. Do not ask another where he came from, or which caste or creed he professes. See your favorite form of God in that other person. As a matter of fact, he is not an “other” at all; he is God’s image, as much as you are. You are not helping an “individual”; you are adoring me, in him. I am before you in that form, so what room is there for the ego in you to raise its hood?

Duty is God; work is worship. Even the tiniest work is a flower placed at the feet of God. Approach the [ones you serve] with a heart filled with the treasure of love.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Sathya Sai Speaks (SSS) 10:7, Mar. 4, 1970

The Hands That Serve . . .

Over the past decades, Sai “selfless service” efforts have steadily increased here and elsewhere. In this issue, besides Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s enlightening teachings on service, we present a sampling of service projects currently and recently taking place across the USA. We are most grateful for those who take the time to send in reports, articles, and photos related to their personal and Sai-organizational service activities. Through the sharing of such regional reports, we have the opportunity to inspire and be inspired, to encourage and to learn from each other. Through continuing our involvement in group activities, we experience divinity in our satsang. And we realize the truth of Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings, through putting them into practice, that service not only includes being helpful whenever possible but also simply doing our daily duties to the best of our ability, convinced we are serving the Lord himself thereby. —Eds.

The *Sadhana* of Service: Act, Dedicate, and Adore

The Sai organization service wing has a responsibility of a high order, for it must lead its members, and through them, all humankind, along the path of spiritual effort (*sadhana*), which takes the individual from the perspective of “me” to the perspective of “we.” This gives the service wing the importance it deserves.

One can realize this importance only by delving deeply into the significance of *seva* (selfless service). You must sublimate all work as worship and try to fill every moment of your lives with that outlook. Only then can you justify your membership in this organization.

Through activity, man attains purity of consciousness. In fact, man must welcome activity with this end in view. Why strive for a pure consciousness? Imagine a well

with water so polluted and muddy that the bottom of the well cannot be seen. Similarly, within man’s heart, deep down in his consciousness, we have the *Atman* (Divine Spirit), but this can be recognized only when the consciousness is clarified. Your imaginings, your inferences, your judgments and prejudices, your passions, emotions, and egoistic desires, muddy your consciousness and make it opaque. How, then, can you become aware of the Atman that is at its very basis? Through service, rendered without any desire to placate one’s ego and with only the well-being of others in view, it is possible to cleanse the consciousness and have the Atman revealed.

By doing *seva*, you serve your own best interest. So, for whose sake are you performing *seva*? You are doing *seva* for your

own sake. You are engaged in seva in order to become aware of the Atman in you, in order to discard the allurements of the ego, in order to know yourself and get the answer to the question that torments you: namely, “Who am I?” You do not serve others, you serve yourself; you do not serve the world, you serve your own best interest.

How is it possible to transcend the ego through seva? By saturating work with love, work can be transformed into worship. When the work is offered to God, it gets sanctified into *puja* (sacramental worship). This makes it free from ego, from earthly desire for success, and from earthly fear of failure. You feel that when you have done the work as best as you can, your *puja* is accomplished. It is then for Him who has accepted the *puja* to confer on you what He considers best. This attitude will make your work *nishkama* (with mind unattached to its results).

Regular practice of this discipline will render the consciousness clear and pure. It will promote *chitthashuddhi* (purity of heart or consciousness). Without this primary qualification, how can man ever hope to scale the spiritual heights? Almost all the great sages of the past spent the early years of their lives in sadhana that would ensure a pure consciousness. However bright your

prospective career might be, however much you might accumulate the wherewithal of a comfortable life, to whatever heights of authority you might have climbed through the exercise of your intelligence, your gains shall be nil unless your every activity is suffused with the divine purity inherent in the consciousness.



*By saturating work with love,
work can be transformed into
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offered to God, it gets sanctified
into puja (sacramental
worship).*

You get blessed or punished due to your own acts

To illustrate this, take an ordinary postal envelope. Upon it, in golden ink, write someone’s address in very fancy calligraphy. Insert a beautifully worded letter full of amazing sentiments, and then take it to the post office. What happens to it? It will not move even a yard away from the post office. Now take a mere postcard, a cheap unimpressive thing, and address it with no special care. Scribble the news you want to convey. Affix a stamp and drop it at the same post office. Watch what happens! The artistically ornamental envelope remains inert, while the inartistic, cheap document travels a thousand miles toward the addressee. Therefore, whatever may be the uniqueness or importance, the faddish zeal or attractiveness, the seva that you do can yield no fruit if it is done without a pure *chittha* (heart).

Your yearning to do seva and your enthusiasm while doing seva are rescuing you from harm. God is the witness. God has no desire to bless, nor anger to induce punishment. You get blessed and punished as a result of your own feelings and acts. As you feel, so it becomes. (*Yad bhavam tad bhavati.*)

Bad deeds never yield good; good deeds never breed bad. Neem seeds never yield mangoes; mango seeds never breed neems.
(APHORISM)

A person might be an expert in many fields or a master of skills and accomplishments, but without inner cleanliness, his heart is a desert or a massive stone with no trace of love, mercy, or expansive virtue.

Rituals seldom purify man's consciousness

Of the nine steps in spiritual sadhana, as laid down in the Bhakti Sutras (aphorisms on devotion), which lead to the realization of the Self, the step of *dasyam*, the attitude of a selfless servant, is quite near the final goal; it is the eighth step. The study of texts, the renouncing of wealth in charity, the repetition of divine names or the chanting of psalms and hymns, may be good exercises to sanctify the mind and to avoid falling into evil ways and ruinous pastimes, but they seldom purify the consciousness of man. Instead they serve mostly to bloat the ego,

instill pride, and promote a competitive craving for superiority.

You may be sitting in the bhajan hall and loudly singing in chorus, but your mind may stray into anxiety over a pair of sandals left outside the hall. Always at the back of the mind is fear of losing the sandals; this takes all the inner strength out of the bhajan and makes it a barren show.

The sadhana of seva is quite distinct [from the other eight steps]. In seva you devote all your energy and attention to the

task at hand, for it is a dedicated task. You forget the body and ignore its demands. You set aside your individuality and its prestige and perquisites ("perks"). You pluck your ego by its roots and cast it away. You give up your status, your conceit, your name and form, and keep your *chittha* (heart, consciousness) completely pure.

Whatever the task you are performing, renounce your personal individuality and share its travails and troubles, its fruits and benefits, with God. You need not bring in God from somewhere outside you; he is in you, all the while. This truth must be your own discovery, your own treasure, your own strength. This is the grand purpose of the service wing. That is why the service wing is assigned a high place in the Sathya Sai organization.



Whatever the task you are performing, renounce your personal individuality and share its travails and troubles, its fruits and benefits, with God.

Seva done for a suffering being reaches the Lord

A pious person was once traveling from Kashi to Rameshwaram, at the other end of this vast country. He was carrying with him some holy Ganges (Ganga) water, to be mixed with the sea at Rameshwaram. That act was to be the consummation of a long and arduous pilgrimage, through many a holy place and many a sacred river.

Halfway through this journey, the pilgrim saw by the side of the road a donkey in the last throes of life, too weak even to move to some source of water to quench its thirst. Its dry tongue and rolling eyes indicated its agony, of extreme thirst. The pilgrim was so moved by this tragic sight that he poured the precious Ganges water that he was carrying, down the throat of the distraught animal. Moments later, the donkey recovered enough strength to pull itself out of the grip of death.

Seeing this, the pilgrim's companion exclaimed, "Master! The sacred water you brought from Kashi was supposed to be offered to the ocean at Rameshwaram. Why have you committed this sacrilege, pouring it down the mouth of this despicable animal?" The pilgrim replied, "But don't you see that I have poured the holy water into the ocean itself?"

Any seva (service) done to a suffering *jiva* (individual) reaches the Lord himself and can never be a sacrilege, for seva to the *jiva* is seva to the *deva* (divinity). Always be firm in that belief.

The play enacted by Shiva and Parvati

Millions come to Kashi (Varanasi, on the Ganges, a place associated with Lord Shiva) as pilgrims. It is said that those who see Kashi will not be born again. One day at Kailasha (Shiva's heavenly abode), Parvati asked Shiva, "Lord, I have heard it said that all those who visit Kashi, where there is a celebrated shrine for your worship, will attain Kailasha and stay on there in your presence. Millions are coming to Kashi, but is this place (Kailasha) big enough to accommodate them all?"

Shiva replied, "All the millions cannot come to Kailasha! I shall design a play and make it clear to you who among the millions can come here. You, too, have a role to act. Do as I direct you."

Parvati became an old hag of 80 years, and Shiva, a rickety old man of 90. The old woman held the old man in her lap, right at the main entrance of the famous Shiva shrine of Vishweshwara, and she implored, in piteous tones, of the pilgrims who passed by on their way to the temple, "My husband is terribly thirsty. He is about to die of thirst. I cannot leave him and go to the river Ganga to bring him water. Will any of you pour a little water down his throat and save his life?"

There is no prayer more fruitful than seva

The pilgrims were coming up from the ghats after bathing ceremonially in the holy river, their clothes still wet and clinging to their bodies. Some of them lamented about how their peace was disturbed by the sight of this pathetic couple. "We have come to

take *darshan* (audience) of the Lord, and look what meets our eye!” Others flatly ignored her cries and lifted their noses in the air. Others said, “Wait. After we finish our worship inside the temple, then we shall bring Ganga water for you.” No one offered to bring the necessary immediate help to the aged patient.

Just then a robber was hurrying into the temple to pick a few pockets and heard the plaintive voice of the old woman. He stopped near them and asked, “Mother, what is the matter?”

She replied, “Son, we came to this place to have the darshan of Lord Vishweshwara of Kashi, but my husband has fainted from sheer exhaustion. He might survive if some one would bring a little Ganga water and pour it down his throat.

I cannot leave him here and go for water. Please help me, and earn some merit.”

The robber was moved to compassion. He had a little Ganga water in the hollow gourd he had with him. He knelt down near the dying person on the lap of the old woman,

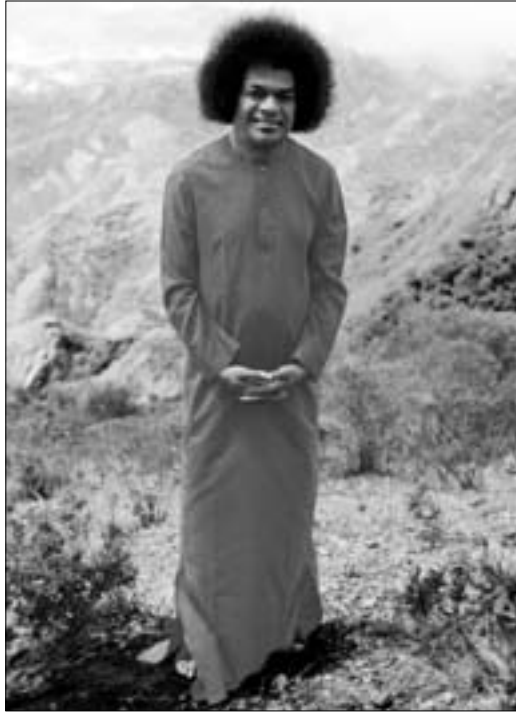
but the woman stopped him, saying, “The moment the Ganga water wets his throat, my husband may die; he is in the final stage of life. Therefore speak a word of truth and pour the water.”

The robber did not understand what she meant, so she explained, “Speak, within his hearing, about some good deed that you have done in your life, and then pour the water in his mouth.”

This created a problem for the robber. He was at his wit’s end, as he could not quite comply. He said, “Mother, I have, in truth, not done any good deed so far. This present act, the offering of water to this thirsty man, is the very first good deed I am responsible for.” And saying this, he placed the gourd at the lips of the old man

and gave him a mouthful.

At that very moment, the old couple disappeared, and in their place stood Shiva and Parvati, blessing the robber. Shiva said, “Son, life is to be dedicated for the service



— ❁ —
*An act dedicated as an offering to
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of others and not devoted to the exclusive interests of oneself.

“However many wicked deeds you might have done so far, for your selfless offering of Ganga water with truth on your tongue, we bless you with our darshan. Remember there is no morality higher than truth, no prayer more fruitful than selfless loving service.”

Three stages of spiritual inquiry

On the royal road to spiritual realization, three stages are mentioned in the scriptures: *karma-jijnasa* (inquiry into one’s actions), *dharma-jijnasa* (inquiry into righteousness), and *Brahma-jijnasa* (inquiry into the nature of God). *Jijnasa* means deep inquiry. A person becomes fit to inquire into Brahman and succeed in that inquiry only when his consciousness has been trained and shaped by inquiry into the modes of activity and mores of conduct—the *karma* (actions) and the *dharma* (righteousness)—that clarify and purify. One who discriminates well before engaging in any activity will naturally be righteous in conduct and behavior.

Good karma will automatically lead to good dharma. Take the example of homemade coconut chutney. Only after you

grind and prepare it do you taste it to see if enough salt has been added. Then if you discover that the salt is not enough or that it has been left out, you can add the amount necessary to make it tasty. But you will not add salt before tasting a small amount.

Hence, the three stages are: (1) grinding and getting the chutney ready, (2) tasting it, and (3) adding the needed salt. The preparation is the karma (action), the tasting is the dharma (dedication), and the adding of salt to make

it tasty and sustaining, is the adoration of Brahman. Act, dedicate, and adore—that is the way to acquire a pure consciousness.

An act dedicated as an offering to the God resident in all becomes sacred; this is the highest seva. Devote yourselves to this seva. *Avatars* (divine incarnations) are engaged in seva; it is why avatars incarnate. Hence, when you offer seva to mankind, the avatar will naturally be pleased, and you can win grace. As members of the Sathya Sai service wing, you have a great opportunity. I hope you will make the best use of this chance. I bless you that you may.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
SSS 10:29, May 6, 1977



*An act dedicated as an offering
to the God resident in all
becomes sacred; this is the
highest seva. Devote yourselves
to this seva.*

The hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba



Our journey
of Christmas
2008 began at
Christmas 2007—
and heralded a service
opportunity beyond our
wildest dreams.



Christmas Gift of Love

*USA Region 8 Decorates
Prasanthi for Christmas
2008*

Australia and Italy had done a magnificent job of decorating Prasanthi at Christmastime for at least the previous ten years. But to give the Australians and Italians a much-deserved break, the Prasanthi Christmas committee approached USA Region 8 to take over a portion of the 2008 Christmas decorating duties at the ashram: the Sai Kulwant Hall and verandah areas, the Poornachandra balconies (areas facing Swami's street), and Swami's residences (Yajur Mandir, stupa, and guest house). Awed by the enormity of the project and proceeding largely on faith, our USA Region 8 coordinators accepted the job, knowing that following in the amazing footsteps of Australia and Italy would be no small task!

It was to be a year of proving the power of group diligence and cooperation. Our first planning meetings began in February 2008. We chose a theme: "Christmas Gift of Love." Right away, lighting became a significant feature of the designs. This had not been done before, because it required so much electricity. But due to new LED (light emitting diode) technology that cuts the amount of electricity needed to almost nothing, we could make use of lighting in a big way!





Then our team of designers and artists, headed by Phyllis Wohlberg, began their tasks in detail. Sai Kulwant Hall and Swami's residence were divided into smaller design areas and assigned to one or more artists/designers. Ideas were presented at team meetings, where comments and suggestions were discussed. The design process itself took four to six months.

The middle of Sai Kulwant Hall was to depict the heavenly realms of God's creation, via angels and stars. The mandir was to be adorned with beautiful pictures of Jesus and Mother Mary, along with biblical scenes about the birth of Jesus.

To further convey a sense of the heavenly realms, several huge, beautiful, custom-made "ribbon lights" were planned to hang from the central glass ceiling of the hall. One family in our group, the Bakshis, were experts at making commercial-size lighting displays, and they offered to hand-make these exquisite ribbon lights, plus a unique Moravian-style lighted star, to be hung at the center of the mandir balcony.

The designers also planned wash lights for the outdoor surfaces of Swami's residence and guest house, to softly illuminate the domes and walls with an ever-changing array of beautiful colors, each color fading slowly into another, controlled by computer software. The final plan was approved and permission given to install these special lights. All were thrilled with the enchanting effect these lights added to the overall design.

Smaller details were also full of symbolism, from LED-flicker candles on the mandir window sills to the three tall candles to be lit by Bhagavan when opening the 2008 Christmas celebration, which were hand-made by a candle factory in Carlsbad, California, and placed on three tall, antique-gold holders. Another symbolic detail was the use of real beach sand hand-carried from Southern California. The sand was used around the base of the "Surfing Santa" display (with a pair playful dolphins standing in for Santa's reindeer), simulating a real beach.

Snow is also associated with Christmas in many parts of the world, so our designers had the idea of installing two artificial (nontoxic) snow machines in the middle of Sai Kulwant Hall. These snow machines added an element of surprise (and delight) to the design and provided a realistic snowing effect during several segments of the Christmas program.

A number of dedicated young adults joined our corps of volunteers, adding their enthusiasm and energy. They worked hard to design and sew over 30 beautiful velvet banners, in red and green, with gold and silver trim. These banners added a loving



touch of elegance to the mandir columns and gate posts.

Presentation of Designs

At first, meetings were attended only by project leaders and designers. Standing by was a large contingent of devotee volunteers who would help in India with the assembly and installation. By June 21, it was time to start involving these added team members and show them the slide presentation of the designs in detail.

Then these slides were shown to Dr. Narendra Reddy, of the Prasanthi Council, who was very pleased. He suggested that the presentation be shown to Mr. Chakravarthy, the ashram manager at Prasanthi Nilayam, at Gurupurnima time.

Meanwhile, the design and purchasing teams needed exact dimensions of the areas to be decorated, in order to finalize the designs and purchase the correct quantities of materials. So, our Region 8 Service Coordinator, Rohan Balasuriya, took the presentation to Prasanthi in July, to show to Mr. Chakravarthy and to gather the critical measurements. But, in typical

“Swami style,” what with all the Gurupurnima and World Education Conference events going on

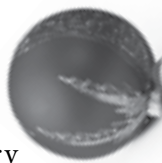
at the ashram, the ashram manager wasn’t free to meet with Mr. Balasuriya until just before his scheduled return to the U.S.

As Mr. Chakravarthy reviewed each slide, he asked detailed questions, made many positive comments, and agreed to all the designs! This good news made our decoration team very, very happy! Mr. Balasuriya then received permission to quickly make measurements inside the Sai Kulwant Hall.

So, in early August, with measurements in hand, the purchasing team began their work of calculating, locating, and ordering all the items needed to create the ashram-approved designs. This was an enormous task. A comprehensive spreadsheet listing all the design areas with the exact items needed, including quantities, sizes, and suggested sources, was compiled. This information enabled the purchasing team, headed by Vimala Srinivas and Roopa Sharma, to start obtaining all the needed items—fabrics, trims, ribbons, bells, ornaments, lights, greenery, supplies, tools—the list went on for 18 pages.

Even so, they still had to locate sources to provide the best quality products at the most reasonable cost. They needed to buy thousands of ornaments and thousands of meters of garland, hundreds of wreaths, and other specialty items such as LED





twinkle and rope lights, statues, banners, and snow machines. Only with Swami's infinite grace were cost effective sources found in such diverse locations as China, India, and the USA.

Adding to the challenge, items obtained in the USA had to be organized into 25- to 35-pound packages, so they could be packed as baggage to be taken to India by each volunteer. This was done to avoid problems with Indian customs, a notorious obstacle in the past.

With the help of devotees in Bangalore, some of the green, pine-style garlands were pre-made into various sized wreaths, and 10,000 prasad packets were filled with nuts, raisins, and mango candy. Bangalore devotees also helped with the two giant containers full of items arriving from China, which they received, checked, organized, and stored until time to transport them via truck to the ashram in early December.

Final Planning and Swami's Approval

In October we received wonderful news—Swami had personally reviewed our proposed Christmas decoration designs and had given his approval. He had carefully

looked at each and every picture, making comments as he looked!

The focus for October and November then turned to the construction department, which would be in charge of all the assembly and installation

in India. We discussed any known assembly and installation issues at our meetings, as well as possible solutions.

Our final pre-trip meeting took place on November 16. There, over 150 volunteers were assigned as teams under the direction of the construction task force leader, Dushyant Mehta. Each team was assigned to a certain area of Sai Kulwant Hall, Swami's residences, or the Poornachandra balconies. The teams got acquainted, discussed their plans, and contemplated unanswered issues of assembling and installing their particular decorations. Also at this meeting, volunteers picked up their bundles of materials to be packed and transported within their personal luggage—the equivalent of about one suitcase each, full of decorations.

Eleven Days of Assembly

Over 200 devotees from USA Region 8 journeyed halfway around the world to participate in the decorating of the most holy of places. Among our group were also our regional choir and a children's Christmas drama group. Our first USA Region 8 group meeting in India took place on December 11 at 7:00 p.m., in Shed 32. Many of us were exhausted from traveling and suffered jet-lag,



but all were happy and excited to participate in this unique service opportunity.

Since this was our first Christmas decoration experience, we decided to err on the side of caution, keeping Shed 32 open from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., to ensure that all the assembly work could be completed by December 22, when we would have to install everything over a scant two-day period.

The Invaluable International Team

While USA Region 8 was assigned a central area of the ashram, we worked side by side with many international volunteers. The international team focused their efforts on decorating the other parts of the ashram, including the Western canteen, North Indian canteen, shopping center, bakery, bookstore, and hospitals. Both groups (USA Region 8 and International) were guided by Tom Lahey, the International Christmas Decorations Director.

Mr. Lahey, plus several of his wonderful and talented international volunteers, also assisted us with our installation. Mr. Lahey has directed the Christmas decoration efforts for many years, and he provided us with invaluable advice, as well as creative solutions to

many of our most perplexing installation issues. In addition, he and his experienced international volunteers helped us hang decorations in the most difficult locations. Our installation work could not have been completed nearly as well without their expertise.

Shed 32 and Beyond

Between December 12 and 21, Shed 32 became “action central!” It was amazing and inspiring to see so many devotees working with such dedication and perseverance. Many of the group skipped both meals and sleep, keeping at their work and thinking only of pleasing Swami.

Our first task was to place ornaments on over 2,000 meters of artificial pine garlands and wreaths. The plain greenery was transformed into gorgeous works of art under the direction of Roopa Sharma and Phyllis Wohlberg, using over 24,000 ornaments that had been purchased just for this purpose. By Swami’s grace, many international volunteers joined our ranks





and contributed their time and talents generously during the assembly work.

Meanwhile, another smaller group of volunteer seamstresses worked with the Easwaramma Women's Welfare Trust, sewing all the pillar and pigeon guard covers. This was another huge task, which also took long hours, detailed planning, and many days to complete.

While chanting prayers, still other volunteers filled 10,000 vibhuti packets and placed gift items into 10,000 red, green and gold organza bags, which were to be offered as prasad. Besides the nuts, raisins, and mango candies assembled by Bangalore devotees, our Region 8 volunteers added a photo of Swami, a small zip bag of vibhuti, and two traditional Christmas candies.

Next, it was time for the LED lighting to be incorporated into the decorations. This job had its obstacles, too. The twinkle

lights, purchased from China, had a built-in program that ran through a series of lighting modes, including staying on, twinkling, dimming, and blinking. But only steady lights were allowed in Sai Kulwant Hall—no blinking or twinkling lights. This challenge was daunting; we had no idea how to convert the wiring to static mode.

But the lighting team did not let this stop them. They spoke with Mr. Ramalingam, head of the Maintenance Department at Prasanthi Nilayam, who found a way—using a candle flame and hand-stripping the plastic from the wires and rewiring each strand of lights so it would stay only in the “on” mode.

Mr. Ramalingam stayed up late into the night stripping and rewiring many strands of twinkle lights, until our electrical team, led by Daniel Gomez, could assist him. Hundreds of strands of lights had to be rewired before they could be used. This was just one of many obstacles that the Region 8 team overcame, with evidence of Swami's loving help.

Despite many obstacles, grace abounded: snags and snarls melted away, and the work proceeded. In Shed 32, some volunteers noticed vibhuti manifesting on their identi-





fication badges. And one morning we were blessed to have Swami pass by the shed in His car, giving us all a closeup “car darshan.”

Installation Begins

After ten long days of assembly work, we received word to begin the massive job of installing the decorations. After morning darshan on December 22, a procession of devotees headed for Sai Kulwant Hall, carrying the first batches of decorations, with a handmade red-and-gold Ganesh “crown” at the head of the file. After a brief ceremony installing the Ganesh crown, the volunteers dispersed to their assigned areas to begin installing decorations. We had to finish our morning installation by 1:30 p.m., when the seva dals start cleaning the hall for afternoon darshan. Good progress was made; we were on schedule.

The evening of December 22, after bhajans, we began our second installation around 6:30. Teams were scheduled to finish the fences, pillars, and verandah, which had been started in the morning. Other teams started on the mandir balcony, the storage areas, the gates, Swami’s residences, the Rama Temple, and the Poornachandra fences. We worked until 1:30 a.m. before



heading off to our rooms to grab a few hours of sleep.

On December 23, we hung decorations from 9:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., to finish up what had been started the night before. In the midst of those tasks, word came that Swami wanted us to decorate his residence area right away!

We had scheduled this to be done that evening, so we didn’t have those decorations in hand. Quickly, calls were made, and the decorations were rushed over from Shed 32 by all available hands. Thus, a larger-than-planned group of devotees were graced with the “task” of decorating Swami’s residence and guest house, as well as installing the “Surfing Santa” display and Swami’s Christmas tree! Swami knew, of course, that we needed to finish decorating his residence that morning, because we still had so much left to do that evening.





It was down to the wire, with a lot left to accomplish. We began our fourth installation session after evening bhajans. All the most important lighting still needed to be installed, including hanging the “ribbon” lights over the central driveway, and installing the lighting for the mandir and Poornachandra balconies.

We still weren’t sure how to hang these complicated pieces in those high areas. Experienced volunteers climbed special extension ladders to install the beautiful fabric and lighting. Christmas decorations had never been put along the top area over the mandir balcony or around the tops of the Poornachandra balconies. Again, we were charting new ground, and again, pure grace came to our aid; with skilled, beautiful teamwork the job was done, but not before the wee hours of the morning.

Finally, on December 24, we had one last chance to place our finishing touches: the three hand-made candles for the verandah centerpiece, flanked by two angel statues on decorated platforms; fresh flowers on the dais; touch-ups to garlands, banners, and bows; and testing of all the lights. Now everything was in place for the 2008 Christmas celebrations to begin!

Christmas Celebrations Begin—and End

The Prasanthi Christmas celebrations began on the evening of December 24 and continued through December 26. Word came that Swami was “very happy” with the decorations, and that he had called the lighting “beautiful.” Swami also made us all happy by looking intently at the decorations as he passed by. Sri Anil Kumar (Swami’s interpreter), with typical flair, heaped





superlative praises, pronouncing the lighting a reflection of both the double-helix of DNA and the starry cosmos.

For December 25, our Region 8 choir was invited to lead Christmas caroling at 6:30 a.m. in Sai Kulwant Hall, and on December 26, the Region 8 children's play group joined with the international children's choir in presenting a combined program of songs and a drama on the life of Jesus, accompanied by an international group of musicians. Swami also showered his grace on our group by accepting a lovingly-made footstool from us.

The Christmas decorations remained in place through December 27. Then, like a Tibetan sand mandala that gets completely erased after painstaking construction and artistry, all the decorations were taken down, completely disassembled, carefully sorted, and placed in storage for future holidays.

Much helpful hardware brought in by the Region 8 team was intended to remain at the ashram: a bevy of much-needed ladders of various lengths, the snow machines, the large rear-projection screens and projectors, and the LED wash lighting on Swami's residences, which has now been made permanent. We were and remain so very thankful for the amazing opportunity to be of service in this way and to participate in the 2008 Christmas celebrations—the blessing of a lifetime.

—April Skrobiza, USA Region 8
Christmas 2008 Decorations Coordinator

More online: See the Archivals page at sssbt.org for additional photos and descriptions of the Christmas 2008 programs at Prasanthi Nilayam.



Serving the Homeless in Dallas

The Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center of Dallas, Texas, started serving the city's homeless about 20 years ago. The seva began after Swami came in a dream to one of the Sai Center members. He showed her a place called the "Austin Street Shelter" and told her to go there and start helping them. To her amazement, when she went there, it looked exactly as Swami had shown her in the dream.

Since then, every second Friday of the month, a group of about 20 devotees serves dinner to about 350 homeless people. The food is prepared at home and consists of salad, vegetarian spaghetti and sauce, bread, cookies, and juice. Guests at this night shelter have said that this is the only time in the whole month when they get enough to eat (Swami's way of feeding the poor).

Also, for ten to fifteen years, the Young Adults of the Dallas Sai Center conducted what they called "The Bagel Project." This consisted of serving breakfast to the homeless every Sunday morning. They served bagels

with cream cheese, pastries, fruit, and juice and catered to several hundred homeless people. This seva was conducted for many years on the

streets. Later it moved to the "Day Resource Center," run by the city.

About five years ago, the Dallas Sai Center also started serving food to street people, going out on the streets and under bridges to serve some

50 to 100 people each night. A small group of five to seven devotees took homemade soup, bread, bananas, juice, and hot chocolate (in cold weather). Clothing was taken also, from time to time, and each winter, they distributed some 500 blankets. This seva was conducted seven days a week, without fail, for about three years. No night was missed, no matter how severe the weather. The homeless brethren were amazed to see Sai devotees show up when streets were iced over and warnings against driving had been issued by the weather bureau. These underprivileged folks became like family members to those serving them, and vice versa.

"The participants seem to benefit just from being heard when they have something to say, perhaps because they have often felt ignored."

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Eventually, the city disallowed feeding on the streets, due to health and sanitation concerns, and the seva was moved to the Dallas International Street Church for about a year. From there it moved to the Day Resource Center, which the city operated until last May.

On May 20, 2008, “The Bridge” (as in “bridging the way back home”) opened in Dallas, replacing the Day Resource Center. The Bridge is a facility for helping the homeless in various ways, such as assistance finding jobs, temporary and permanent housing, and health and mental health care. The Bridge also offers three meals a day, and Dallas Sai Center devotees serve meals on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings.

On Sunday mornings, the Sai devotees also conduct a class known among Center members as “The SOUL Project” (Sai Outreach to Uplift Lives), but the guests at The Bridge call it the “Story Circle.” The session is loosely patterned

after a Sai group “study circle,” and it features the reading and discussion of stories found on RadioSai.org. It also serves as an open forum for those attending, for discussing whatever is-

suues and concerns they may have, or perhaps telling of their personal stories.

The SOUL Project/Story Circle originated at the Day Resource Center a few years back and moved to The Bridge when it opened in May 2008. Sometimes the homeless guests read a poem or sing a song, often something they have written themselves.

The participants seem to benefit just from being heard when they have something to say, perhaps because they have often felt ignored. The Sai devotees, in turn, feel that they also benefit greatly from the warm, family-type discussions and a feeling of camaraderie with those struggling to put workability back into their lives.

—Sathya Sai Baba Center of Dallas, Texas



The first thing you have to do is look after the welfare of the living community around you.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Albuquerque Seva for Homeless Veterans

The homeless veteran population in the USA is nearly 200,000. Some live in cars or on the streets. Others are in shelters. The population is growing and is subject to deep suffering and unmet needs—emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

The Albuquerque Sathya Sai Baba Center decided to do something to help vets—using “love in action,” the practice of seeing divinity in all. Several members donated clothing, others knitted scarves, and three members volunteered to participate in the New Mexico Veterans Integration Center’s (NMVIC’s) second annual two-day event, called “Stand Down”—a military term meaning “removing combat troops from the field and taking care of their needs in a safe area.”

With the support of the governor of New Mexico and the New Mexico legislature, the New Mexico Department of Veterans works with NMVIC on this program to help homeless veterans to integrate back into the community.

“My own service in the Navy made this selfless service event especially poignant for me.”

On the first day of Stand Down 2008 (October 17), more than 300 homeless veterans crowded onto the grounds of a converted motel, moving among canopy-style booths. The second day (October 18) attracted another 200 vets. Several social service agencies at the event provided assistance and advice, in terms of medical, legal, housing, food, clothing, and employment support. Elsewhere at the event, visitors received cosmetic care—haircuts and shaves.

Following an intake procedure, veterans selected sites specific to their needs—legal aid, housing, ethnic-support programs, a small medical camp, and more. A hot lunch was served, and vets were directed toward a clothing and toiletry distribution area. They browsed through shopping-center-like aisles, where volunteer guides helped them select underwear, sweats, pants, sweaters, toiletries, winter coats, hats, gloves, scarves, blankets, sleeping bags, and rain ponchos.

The Albuquerque Sathya Sai Baba Center volunteers—Betty Ganster, John Trippiedi,

and Barbara Rousseau—served food and distributed clothing.

John Trippiedi reflected, “My own service in the Navy made this selfless service event especially poignant for me. Trying to put myself in the shoes of these veterans created heaviness in my heart and placed me in a solemn mood.

Fortunately, the good cheer of the veterans themselves, with their jokes and clownish antics, brought me out of my melancholy. Near the end of the event, we ran out of scarves to give the gents. To our surprise, one elderly man selected a frilly, feminine, black scarf, tossed it around his neck, and did a little can-can jig for us! They were very happy.”

Betty Ganster commented, “My first thoughts were, ‘Oh Swami, thank you for allowing me to serve you here today. I am so blessed!’ As the long lunch line passed by, I felt compassion for those finding themselves in this predicament.

Most of them thanked us directly for the food. It was encouraging to see that they were generally cheerful and upbeat.”

Barbara Rousseau observed, “All the veterans were polite, appreciative, and even cheerful. Many sweetly said, ‘God bless you,’ as they left with their duffle bags full of clothing and toiletries. One female veteran, Jo, took a long time selecting her clothing items, possibly enjoying our casual conversation. She even came back to ask for our help in repacking her duffle bag.”

After the event, the Veterans Integration Center invited the Albuquerque Sathya Sai Baba Center to be an active partner in future activities. For the holiday season, devotees planned to assemble toiletry bags of combs, soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, and brushes for veteran men, women, and families.

—Devotees of USA
Region 9

Albuquerque, New Mexico



Quilting for a Healthy Start

Small Center Adopts a Workable Service Project

The Salem/Corvallis Sai Center chose a service project to make baby quilts for families in the Healthy Start programs of Marion, Polk, and Linn Counties. Healthy Start is a statewide home visitation program that connects families having a first baby with resources in the community. A quilt is presented to each family during a home visit. These quilts help keep a baby warm in our wet, cool Oregon weather. They also carry the love of the quiltmakers to the hearts of the recipients. In essence, the quilts say, “Others care for you and your new baby in this community.”

It has been a challenge to come up with a project for a center with only three members,



“These quilts help keep a baby warm in our wet, cool Oregon weather. They also carry the love of the quiltmakers to the hearts of the recipients.”

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Healthy Start program directors.

—Sai Center of Salem/Corvallis, Oregon

Reprinted from Region 6 Newsletter, July 2008

who live in cities 30 miles apart. We keep in mind travel costs and fuel use. We get together once a month for group satsang; we also work individually, to be more productive.

We try to incorporate Swami’s teachings into every aspect of our work, including the use of leftover material for making the quilts. We feel great joy in this project and are confident that the families who receive these quilts feel the same love and joy that originates with Swami. The quilts are always greatly appreciated when presented to the

Let love be ever translated into service, into beneficial acts, sweet words of consolation, comfort, and courage, and thoughts of sympathy and compassion.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Sai Medical Camp in St. Louis, Missouri

A Spiritual Endeavor on All Saints Day, November 1, 2008

November 1, 2008, the holy festival of All Saints Day, marked the advent of a “Free Health Check, Blood Tests, Bone Marrow Registration Drive & More,” in St. Louis, Missouri, conducted by USA Region 4 (Mid-Central) of the Sathya Sai Baba Organization of America. The event took place at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Roman Catholic Church on South Florissant Road, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

A total of 193 people (43 men, 73 women, 77 children) benefited from this camp. The health care team consisted of 135 volunteers, including 23 physicians. Members of the Latino community were in prominent attendance, along with a smaller number of African Americans, Asians, and Caucasians. Free “flu” vaccines were a special feature of this year’s camp, administered upon request or via a doctor’s recommendation. A total of 160 flu shots were given to attendees, including 31 children.

All attendees, regardless of ethnicity or race, were encouraged to register in the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP), to potentially save lives via bone marrow transplants for people afflicted with leukemia or other blood cancers. Bone marrow must be matched genetically, and there is an acute shortage of donors from minority and ethnic

populations. The procedure is very simple, consisting of a cheek swab to gather a tissue sample that can be analyzed for genetic matching. Twenty people from four different ethnic groups registered in the program.

The health screening tests were as comprehensive as always and included tests, data collection, and education regarding blood sugar, blood cholesterol, blood pressure, dental health, visual refraction, glaucoma, asthma, height, weight, BMI (body mass index), women’s health, registration for free mammograms, children’s health, lead screening for children, bone health/osteoporosis, general health information, behavioral health, nutrition/diet, diabetes, first aid, poison control, and safety.

One-on-one health education was conveyed using flip charts, videos, posters, and handouts. Attendees had the opportunity to consult with a group of experts in internal medicine/cardiology on the results of their blood tests. At the consultants’ booth, attendees received a list of free and sliding-scale clinics, for follow-up on abnormal test results. A patient who had severe, uncontrolled hypertension was deemed at imminent risk for stroke by the consultant and transported to a nearby hospital by ambulance.

Free reading glasses were given to those who needed them, 39 children were fitted

SAI SERVICE: LOVE IN ACTION

with bicycle helmets, and 60 defective infant car seats were replaced. All the children were given “goody bags” containing books, pencils, crayons, and so on. Two pre-YA students compiled a couple of short stories for younger children in a three-page handout that also included a “brain quest” puzzle. Two pediatricians and a pediatric nurse practitioner gave complete health checks to the children. Sixteen children underwent finger-stick screening for blood lead level.

Under the banner of the Sathya Sai Baba Organization of America, representatives and staff participated from many community health centers—Barnes Jewish Hospital, Cardinal Glennon Hospital for Children, People’s Health Center, Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, American Diabetic Association, American Red Cross, St. Louis City Health Department, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind, St. Louis North, “SAMAR” (South Asian Marrow Association of Recruiters, a Network Partner of the NMDP National Registry).

Other community organizations, such as the Office of Minority Health, Language Access Metro Project (LAMP), Area Resources for Community and Human Services (ARCHS), and Health Care USA, also helped provide

referrals to area resources for optimal health care for the poor and underinsured. This fostered an impressive spirit of unity in diversity.

At a special Sai booth on Health & Human Values, attendees had the option of viewing the video, “His Work,” which describes Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s service projects to humanity in the fields of education, healthcare, and drinking water supply. One participant commented that it was good to learn of our spiritual leader and his teachings.

Another participant commented that all things work together for good to those who love God and to those who are called according to his purpose, echoing the spirituality and selflessness underlying the service activity.

All participants received a brown bag containing nutritional food products as a token of love and well wishes.

Distinguished guests at the event included Miranda C. Duncan, Special Assistant to the County Executive; Dr. Michael T. Railey, Director, Research & Medical Services, St. Louis County; Dr. Dolores Gunn, Director, Department of Health, St. Louis County. The assistant to the county executive aptly described our sentiments when she said, “There is such a good feeling of harmony and bliss in this hall. It is great work done in great spirit. I am so honored to be here.”

—Dr. Chandra Varadachari
St. Louis, Missouri

The joy one gets while promoting another's joy is incomparable.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba



Sathya Sai Medical Camp for the Homeless

A Regional Collaboration with Project Homeless Connect

In efforts to place into practice Sathya Sai Baba's teachings of providing service to those who are most in need in our communities, the Southeast Region of the USA Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization came together to host a medical camp for the homeless on Saturday, September 27, 2008, at the Harborview Center in Clearwater, Florida.

In keeping with the principle of unity, the Sai Organization joined with a collaborative model, called Project Homeless Connect, which has been implemented in over 100 cities around the country, to conduct a one-day, one-stop event to help support the homeless. This event brings together government, private groups, and nonprofit charitable agencies to provide needed services for helping homeless individuals and families transition from the street into their own housing and a life of self-sufficiency. Services provided include social services, job placement, haircuts, food, clothing, bus passes, housing information, and legal services. The Sai Organization's role, as a part of Project Homeless Connect, was to take sole responsibility for the medical component (medical camp) of this one day event.

The model for this free Sathya Sai Medical Camp for the homeless was to put into practice Swami's directive to give the best of the best to

the poorest of the poor. Our goal was to give personal, attentive care, above and beyond what is given in the best hospitals in the country. All visitors were assigned attendants to cater to their every need and guide them individually through the various stations of the camp. These "Sai guides" viewed and treated their visitors not merely as VIPs, but as God himself encased in human form. Their goal was to shower love and positive healing energy.

Assigning a personal guide proved to be mutually beneficial to both volunteers and visitors, as they came to experience an intimate interaction. The guides showered love, and that love in turn opened the hearts of the visitors, who then expressed love back to the volunteers in the form of gratitude. The chemistry and vibrations were divine.

Beyond the worldly purpose of educating, screening, and facilitating the entry of the homeless into needed medical care, the primary spiritual purpose of the medical camp was for showing and sharing love, which spiritually elevates all involved.

For this camp, over 180 non-medical volunteers journeyed from thirteen Region 3 Sai centers and five different states (Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, and Kansas), with many traveling more than 400 miles for

the singular purpose of putting into practice Swami's message of love and service during this one-day event. In addition, 43 physicians and 17 healthcare professionals provided medical care and counseling. An additional 385 volunteers assisted in other aspects of the event.

A total of 881 homeless men, women, and children visited the medical camp. These guests were greeted, registered, and initially assessed for height, weight, BMI (body mass index), and blood pressure. Next, blood was drawn for glucose and cholesterol evaluation. Guests were then served breakfast while waiting for the lab results to be processed. After breakfast, they were escorted by their guide to a primary care physician, where they were interviewed and counseled as to which specialty and educational portions of the camp would be of benefit to them. Customized plans were created, based upon their particular needs. The guides then escorted each visitor to the various specialist and educational booths, according to these plans.

The following specialists gave personal consultations: cardiology, dentistry, ENT (ear-nose-throat), gastroenterology, gynecology, hematology/oncology, pediatrics, psychiatry, pulmonary, and podiatry. Specialty testing, screening, and counseling were also available for pulmonary function, hearing, vision, glaucoma, breast cancer, HIV, syphilis, hepatitis-C, flu vaccination, nutrition, diabetes, and smoking cessation.

A social service booth played a critical role at the camp, giving visitors instruction

and placement for follow-up, depending on their needs, with various government, private, or charitable programs available in the community. All documents were photocopied and the data tabulated.

Following Swami's directive to follow both the letter and spirit of the law, volunteers strictly complied with both HIPAA (Health Information Portability and Accountability Act) and OSHA (Occupational and Safety Health Administration) standards, as well as photocopying and maintaining all records with privacy.

At another booth, those curious to learn about the inspiration behind the camp and the motivation/loving behavior of the volunteers were given an opportunity to find out about Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Upon leaving, visitors received some useful gifts—a backpack containing a blanket, towel, toiletry set, several bottles of sunscreen lotion, and socks.

At the conclusion of their medical camp journey, visitors had an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences at the medical camp, via an exit interview. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. Two comments were particularly revealing: "I've never seen so many happy and loving people before," and, "These people (the volunteers) are so different from any other group that offers help. Let me know the next time they come, so I can make sure to be there."

—Devotees of USA Region 3 (Southeast)

(See photographs on page 30.)

Eyeglass Cleaning Service Project

Millions of children and adults in developing nations lack access to basic eyecare services and corrective lenses. Poor vision profoundly affects their quality of life. In children, vision loss can lead to failure in school, delays in development, learning disabilities, and even juvenile delinquency. For adults, uncorrected vision can lead to unemployment and the inability to support a family. Seniors with vision loss face limitations in performing essential activities, possibly depriving them of an independent lifestyle.

On the first Saturday of each month, devotees from the Sai Baba Center of South Bethesda, Maryland, and nearby centers, volunteer at the local Lions Club Eyeglass Recycling Center, which receives thousands of pairs of donated eyeglasses.

One of the first tasks is to separate out the scratched and broken eyeglasses. The remaining eyeglasses are then thoroughly cleaned and dried. The prescription is then read with a lensometer and recorded on the bag in which the glasses are stored. Glasses are then sorted by prescription and packaged 50 to a box. The boxes are stored until a request for that prescription is received. The Eyeglass Recycling Center then provides the glasses to optical

missions sponsored by Lions Clubs and other organizations that distribute glasses free to needy people throughout the world.

Eyeglasses with scratched lenses are also reused: if the frames are in good condition, they are shipped to an Oklahoma-based international relief nonprofit group called Feed the Children.

Bhagavan Baba instructs, *Offer service according to the need of the situation.* (SSS 21:31, Nov. 21, 1988) *Seva must satisfy a local need, solve a local difficulty.* (SSS 13:18, Nov. 14, 1975) This is truly one seva where the need for volunteers is great. The demand for eyeglasses globally is overwhelming, but the eyeglasses cannot leave the Eyeglass Recycling Center until they are prepared through the steps described above. Thousands of donated eyeglasses sit in boxes, waiting to be readied for reuse.

With Bhagavan's grace, we have been his instruments to help ensure that eyeglasses will be available when a mission travels overseas to distribute them. Our gratitude has also increased for the blessing of being able to obtain vision services when needed. Thank you, Baba, for permitting us to work as your instruments.

—Devotees of USA Region 2 (Mid-Atlantic)

(See photographs on page 30.)

USA National Service Project: Bone Marrow Donor Registration Drive

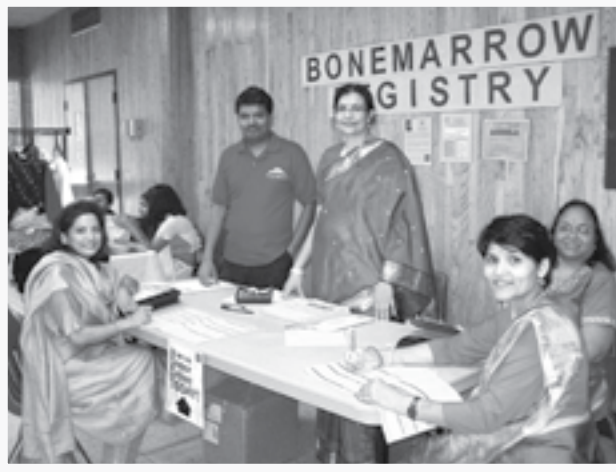
In 2008, the USA Sathya Sai Baba Central Council approved a proposal suggested by the USA national service coordinator, Jack Feely, PhD, to undertake a nationwide bone marrow registration effort, through the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization of America. Thus began the first official national Sri Sathya Sai service initiative in the USA.

Currently a critical need exists, in the National Bone Marrow Registry, for South Asian registered donors. The National Bone Marrow Donor Program has 5 million registered donors, but less than one percent of the donors are South Asians. Other ethnic groups in the US are also highly under-represented in the registry. Consequently, a viable treatment remains out of reach for many Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and others with various forms of cancer, whose lives could otherwise be saved.

Bone marrow registration is a very simple process. A tissue sample is taken from the inner cheek mucous membrane using a cotton swab (no blood is drawn). A registration form is filled out and mailed, with the sealed swab, to the National Bone Marrow Donor Program. Later, if a match is found, donors can decide whether or not to actually donate their bone marrow, after being contacted by the National Bone Marrow Donor Program.

Various regions began immediate plans to implement the bone marrow registration drive in their areas. Region 4's St. Louis Medical Camp, in November 2008, collected tissue samples from members of several ethnic groups.

Also in Region 4, Vijay Surpuriya, of the Sathya Sai Center of Memphis, Tennessee, reports: "Our center devotees were very excited to participate. Since this was during Indian festival season, we thought we could go to the festival



Bone marrow registry volunteers in Memphis, Tennessee

sites and try to get more participants. During three drives, over 20 volunteers, including young adults and SSE students, registered 65 members of the Indian community. It was a great experience, and devotees really enjoyed it. We were also able to contact the local

office of the National Marrow Donor Program and get training as well as kits directly from them. They were very cooperative.”

From Southern California, the regional service coordinator for Region 8, Rohan Balasuriya, writes: “With the divine grace of our beloved Swami, our region arranged to participate in the national seva project and sponsor such a drive by setting up a registration area during the Akhanda Bhajan and Swami’s birthday celebrations on November 8-9 and 23, 2008, in partnership with the organization, Asians for Miracle Marrow Matches (A3M), who are directly associated with the National Bone Marrow Donor program.”

To date (February 2009), bone marrow registration drives have been conducted by Sai centers in over 20 major U.S. cities. Many centers have conducted multiple drives on



Collecting oral tissue swabs in St. Louis, Missouri

multiple dates. Due to the selfless service of Sai devotees, over 1,200 people have been added to the National Bone Marrow Registry, which means that 1,200 more possible bone marrow matches are available to those who may need to receive treatment for life-threatening

illnesses. While the need for registrants is still high, especially among South Asians and other minorities, the national service project of the Sai Organization of the USA has already made a significant contribution, and will continue to host bone marrow registration drives throughout 2009.

All devotees who are healthy and between the ages of 18 and 60 are encouraged to register and participate in this wonderful seva opportunity, not only as potential donors, but also in the registration drive efforts.

Devotees or centers who would like to host a bone marrow registration drive can contact their Regional Service Coordinator, who will have all the information and contacts necessary to guide them in establishing a registration drive.

*Every seva done with sympathy and skill to anyone in distress,
anywhere in this world, is Sathya Sai seva.*

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
SSS 7:14, Mar. 29, 1967



Announcements

“Love All, Serve All” – New e-Newsletter of Regional Reports

In order to publish and share more local and regional Sai-related activities that are constantly underway across the USA, a new e-publication, “Love All, Serve All,” has recently been initiated by the Sathya Sai Organization of the USA. This beautiful full-color e-newsletter contains descriptions and photos of Sai service projects and other Sai events that will touch the hearts of all who read it—devotees and nondevotees alike.

Issues of “Love All, Serve All” will be e-mailed directly to the regional service coordinators, who will forward them to the local Sai center service coordinators in their respective regions. Center service coordinators will distribute them to the devotees in their centers. Issues will also be placed on the

official Sai website (<http://us.sathyasai.org>) for all to download. Vol. 1, No. 1 of “Love All, Serve All” debuted in mid-February 2009, featuring many of the projects that have been written about in this and past issues of *Sathya Sai Newsletter USA*—and more.

Those wishing to contribute articles and photos describing Sai service activities and other Sai-center-sponsored events to the new e-publication, may submit them to “Love All, Serve All” via their regional service coordinators.

Editor’s note: Articles and photos may still also be submitted to the *Sathya Sai Newsletter USA*.



SOUTH BETHESDA, MARYLAND:
Eyeglasses Cleaning Service Project



CLEARWATER, FLORIDA:
Sathya Sai Medical Camp for the Homeless



USA Retreat Dates, 2009

Updates and information on regional retreats may also be viewed at the official Sai website:

<http://us.sathyasai.org/> or <http://us.sathyasai.org/infoconf.htm>.

Region 4 (Mid-Central): May 15-17, 2009, at Camp Wyman, near St. Louis, MO. The main speaker is Sri Ajit Popat of the UK, whom Swami refers to as his “Puppet Show.” Swami personally gave Sri Popat both the theme of this regional retreat, “Love for God, Fear of Sin, Practice of Morality in Society,” and the topic of his keynote address, “How to Inculcate Human Values.” Contact: Jack Feely, jfeely@ta-stl.com. Region 4 centers will work together to present “Sai Odysseys,” creative ways to describe the conference theme as it relates to self, family, and/or social networks.

Region 1 (Northeast): May 22–24, 2009, at Russell Sage College, Troy, NY. Theme: “Love for God, Fear of Sin, and Social Morality.” Speakers: Sri Ajit Popat, Sarojini and Shyam Kangala. Contact: Cheruvu S. Murthy, saicheruvu@hotmail.com or 845-227-8567.

Region 2 (Mid-Atlantic): May 22–25, 2009, 34th Annual Regional Retreat, at Camp Westmont, Poyntelle, PA. Keynote Speakers: Berniece Mead (National Education Coordinator) and Srinivas Raghavan (devotee from San Diego, CA). Contact: Piyush Ghayal (President), 973-328-4002, 973-519-2142, vrall1@verizon.net; Ajit Virani (Vice President), 703-709-9343, 703-505-7056, or ajitvirani@yahoo.com; or Balasubramanyam Karanam (Devotion Coordinator), 410-988-5239, 443-841-6311, or balukaranam@yahoo.com.

Region 8 (Pacific South): May 29-31, 2009, at Camp Buckhorn, in the San Jacinto mountains near Idyllwild, CA. Guest speakers: Mr. Abhimanyu Kaul, Mr. Nimesh Pandya, plus special music, Sai sharing, bhajans, and much more. Contact: Mike Congleton, 760-602-1064 or mwc108@gmail.com.

USA National Youth Conference: May 29-31, 2009, at Camp Duncan, Ingleside IL (near Chicago). First-ever national youth conference. Theme: “We Are One for Sai.” Registration fee: \$95, includes lodging and meals. The guest speakers are Prof. Anil Kumar (India), Mr. Shitu Chudasama (U.K.), Mrs. Malini Srinivas (U.S.A.), and Dr. M.V.V. Veerabhadra Rao (U.K.). Info and online registration at www.saiyausa.net or through YA representatives and advisors.

Region 5 (North Central): Sept. 4–7, 2009, (Labor Day weekend), 19th Annual North Central Regional Retreat, at Camp Henry Horner, 26710 W. Nippersink Road, Ingleside, IL 60041. Theme: “With Love, We Are Divine.” Speakers: Dr. Samuel Sandweiss and Sharon Sandweiss. Contact: Vijay Sai Reddy, Regional Communications Coordinator, 847-452-2777, info@sathyasaicenters.org, or www.sathyasaicenters.org.

Region 9 (Southwest), New Mexico: Sept. 4–7, 2009, Land of Enchantment Retreat at the Bodhi Mandala Zen Center, Jemez Springs, NM. Fri.–Mon., \$165. Contact: Elaine Hausman, 505-660-0283 or ehausman@rockridge.biz. (NOTE: No Sai Amrith Retreat in Prescott, AZ, this year.)

Region 9 (Southwest), Colorado: Oct. 23-25, 2009, at Highlands Presbyterian Camp and Retreat Center, Allenspark, CO. Contact: Terri Dodd, 303-910-0132 or t.dodd@att.net.

The Spirit of Service

Social service does not mean merely going out into the streets [and public areas]. Whatever work you are engaged in, whatever duties you perform as an official or an employee, to do your duties efficiently, with diligence and devotion, is also *seva* (social service, selfless service).

Those in authority who discharge their functions well enough to justify the salary they receive are rendering real service. But such persons are rare. Employees agitate for more wages but do not render commensurate service to justify the incomes they receive.

Sincere, unselfish service ennobles man and raises his stature. Such service endows people with the requisite intelligence and skills for refining their human nature. It is not enough simply to do one's duty diligently; one must also cultivate qualities such as love, sympathy, fairness, compassion, and forgiveness. Only when one has these qualities will one be able to render dedicated service.

The sense of dualism—of “mine” and “thine”—accounts for all of one's joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes. This dualism is rooted in selfishness, which makes one think that as long as he is all right, it does not matter what happens to the rest of the world. Such a self-centered person, who regards his

body, wealth, and family as all that matter to him, looks upon truth as untruth and the false as the true. To get rid of this deep-seated malaise, men must engage themselves in service. They have to realize that the body has been given not to serve one's own interests but to serve others.

Service is an expression of gratitude to society

Service should not be done in a spirit of condescension or to achieve some ulterior selfish objective. Not recognizing the sacredness and purifying power of service, people hesitate to embark on social service. It should not be imagined that one promotes the well-being of the nation by one's service; one should realize that he is bettering himself by rendering service!

Service should arise out of an awareness of what one owes to society. Name, fame, and the comforts one enjoys are all derived from society. One finds fulfillment in society. That being the case, if one does not serve society, whom else can he serve? Sheer gratitude demands that one should serve society, which is the source of all benefits enjoyed by man. Men without gratitude are worse than wild animals.

The first requirement for service is not money or materials, but a loving heart. All service done without a love-filled heart is as dry as dust. Fill your hearts with love. When you are filled with conceit, everything looks distorted. But when you are immersed in the spirit, everything looks good and beautiful. Forgetting this higher destiny of man, people are ceasing to be human.

The money obsession

Men are engaged today in the all-absorbing occupation of acquiring money and more money. They are obsessed with the feeling that through money alone, they can get all they want. This obsession is the root cause of the crisis facing mankind. Although money is needed for certain purposes, it is not the main source of security and happiness. Men should learn to lead good lives with modest incomes. Ostentation and pride are enemies of spiritual progress.

Thyaga (renunciation, spirit of sacrifice) is essential for rendering dedicated service. Pride is the first evil trait that has to be renounced. Getting rid of bad qualities is true sacrifice; it is also *yoga* (communion; means of unifying with God). This is the message of Bharathiya (Indian) culture. As this is not being properly conveyed to the populace, people tend to go astray and take to wrong paths.

They do not realize that to whomsoever they may give service, they are indeed serving the Divine in various human forms. Those who serve must cherish this sublime and sacred feeling. They must strive to see God in everyone.



Whatever your official duties, whatever your profession or occupation, if you discharge your duties properly and efficiently, that is also social service.

Embodiments of the Divine Atma! You must realize that your service activities are done for the sake of your own spiritual purification and uplift, and have nothing to do with Swami.

All actions should be done with a view to purifying the mind and removing all its dross. This is Swami's teaching. It is wrong to think that through actions alone you can attain liberation or redeem your lives. Actions have to be done only for the purification of the *chitta* (heart). Without purity of heart, life cannot be spiritualized.

Human birth is the result of *karma* (actions). Right action is *dharma* (leading one toward God). Through dharma, the Divine has to be realized. Birth, action, righteousness, and God are interrelated in this manner.

Duties and service

To plead that you have no time for service activities due to official duties or other preoccupations is an utterly lame excuse. Even in your official work, you can render service. There is no need to go to public

areas for street cleaning [for example]. That is not the only means of serving the public. Whatever your official duties, whatever your profession or occupation, if you discharge your duties properly and efficiently, that is also social service.

For officials in authority, the correct attitude toward service should be to ask themselves whether the services they render are commensurate with the salaries they receive.

Seldom do we see persons in employment, whether in labor or management, doing the amount of work that justifies the salaries they get. They all want more remuneration but are not prepared to work more. They should realize that this attitude is a betrayal of the nation. Whose money are they receiving as wages? It is the public's money.

To fail to discharge one's duties to the public is a grievous disservice. If a teacher imparts education along the correct lines, he is rendering real national service. Likewise, if a merchant conducts his business on the basis of not earning more than what is needed to meet his reasonable needs, he will be rendering public service. When this attitude prevails, there is no need to claim that one is engaged in service. One should be content to abide by the dictates of one's conscience.

Set an example to service organizations

What will please Swami is the proper performance of one's duties. This constitutes seva. Avail yourself of every possible occasion to render service to society. Such service need not be limited to individuals.

It is important to do national service.

You need not even search for what kinds of service should be done. Whenever you find that you can render help to anyone in need, offer it. Do not make distinctions between rich or poor, or the deserving and

the undeserving. Offer service according to the needs of the situation.

The Sai service organizations must set an example to service organizations all over the world. There is no place in them for differences in caste, creed, or community. Character is greater than caste. All your activities should be based on love and sacrifice. "Speak the truth, act righteously." This Upanishadic injunction sustained Bharat's (India's) way of life for centuries. When people live up to these ideals with sincerity and zeal, [they will] stand out as example[s] to the world.

—SSS 21:31, Nov. 21, 1988

Service without distinctions

Through right action, one achieves purity of heart, which leads to the acquisition of *jnana* (higher spiritual knowledge). When



Whenever you find that you can render help to anyone in need, offer it. Do not make distinctions between rich or poor, or the deserving and the undeserving.

right action is coupled with *jnana*, there is true service. To feel that one should be the sole enjoyer of the results of one's actions is a sign of selfishness; [likewise,] it is naive to think that one alone is the doer of one's actions.

All the things in the world are not intended for the exclusive enjoyment of any single person. They are to be shared by all. It is only when attachment to the fruits of one's actions is discarded that the action becomes *yoga* (divine communion).

Members of the [Sai] service organization should overcome the sense of "mine" and "thine." When embarking upon service activities, they should regard the activity of serving others as a privilege and consider it a form of worship. They should look upon service to society as the means of finding self-fulfillment in life. With faith and courage, they should face whatever problems may arise and carry on their service activities without fanfare, in a spirit of humility and dedication.

Spirit of sacrifice

In the Sai organization, there is no room for distinctions such as race, religion, caste, class, or community. All should regard themselves as children of one God. When united by this sense of divine kinship, they will act with love toward all. They should shed all narrow and limited ideas and engage themselves in service with a heart full of love

for all. True *seva* can come only from a pure and loving heart.

The world has any number of service organizations. The uniqueness of the Sathya Sai service organization consists in the fact that it regards *seva* as a form of service to the divinity in each being. The bliss that is derived from such service is incomparable. It is a spiritual experience.

You should not be content with what you have accomplished so far. You should do a great deal more to [be] examples, to the world, of great spiritual ideals. . . . [We should aim for] *thyaga* (spirit of sacrifice) and not *bhoga* (indulgence in luxury). *Thyaga* is *yoga*; *bhoga* is *roga* (disease). To live up to the ideal of *thyaga* is your duty.

In the world today, one does not see unity or love anywhere. Life appears to be a totally mechanical affair. "Man" does not mean merely the external appearance of a human being. We should have the conviction that man is a soul dwelling in a body.

This may be an act of faith. But without such faith, life has no meaning. Today we believe in things that should not be believed, and we have no belief in the things that we ought to believe. We should have faith in ourselves. We should understand our true nature and rectify our failings. Discovering our true self, we should live up to its demands.

—SSS 17:27, Nov. 18, 1984

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Seva brings out all that is great in man. It broadens the heart and widens one's vision. It fills one with joy. It promotes unity. It proclaims the truth of the spirit.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

New Sri Sathya Sai University at Muddenahalli

College Upgrade to Be Completed in Less Than a Year

There is a Sathya Sai college in Muddenahalli, near Bangalore. Boys from poor families in the nearby villages are studying in this college. A number of philanthropists extended help to the college in different ways—some built classrooms, others a bhajan hall, etc., but this institution is not affiliated with any university. Once the boys finish their education here, they have to go to places like Bangalore to pursue a degree course.

When I thought of their plight, I got a good idea. Here in Puttaparthi, our college and university are housed in spacious and beautiful buildings. Suppose we establish a campus in Muddenahalli; the boys there will also be happy, is it not? Therefore, I have decided to establish a college campus of Sri Sathya Sai University in Muddenahalli too.

My divine will is irrevocable and immutable. Now that I have decided, I will initiate the process starting tomorrow. Since the boys studying in the Muddenahalli college come from a rural background and are very poor, they are unable to pursue higher education in cities and towns, so they discontinue their studies and take to farming activity. Of course, farming is also necessary, but secular education helps one to make a comfortable living, so education is of top priority. Once

they finish their education, they can go into any occupation, including agriculture.

I have therefore decided to provide a university education to the boys in Muddenahalli. Side by side with academic subjects, there must be provision for teaching epics and sacred texts like the Ramayana, the Bhagavata, and the Bhagavad Gita. The boys must be given good training and allowed to spread the message of these epics in the villages around. All secular education is useless without a spiritual base.

There are millions of educated people in the world, but what is their contribution to society? Nothing. They don't even care for society. They are crazy about the luxurious life in towns and cities. They indulge in bad practices like gambling and club life. The children too are taking to bad ways, observing their parents.

Children should be taught to tread the right path. Observing them, the elders will follow them later on. With this in mind, I have decided to establish the university campus in Muddenahalli. Perhaps it will cost about two to three crores (20-30 million) of rupees. I do not mind this expenditure. It is my resolve that this is needed.

The boys in Prasanthi Nilayam are excellent. They are pure gold. It is possible that one

or two may stray from the right path, but very soon they adjust themselves to the academic environment and follow the mainstream. Yesterday, the boys staged a play. It conveyed a great message. The theme of the play was two brothers quarreling for their share of property in a small village. They were counseled saying, “Dear brothers, if you quarrel with each other like this, how can our village prosper? You must be united and lead an amicable life.” Finally, they were corrected. Boys should therefore be encouraged to take up such village development programs.

Students, no doubt, are good today, but elders spoil them by their bad behavior. It is the elders who divert them to bad ways. However, the students quickly realize their mistakes and retrace their steps. I know of boys who advise their parents who are addicted to alcohol to desist from such bad ways, saying, “Dear father, do not indulge in these bad habits. By doing so, you will only be encouraging us also to take to drinking. This is not good.”

If elders take to drinking, smoking, and gambling, the children follow suit. They get

spoiled. Hence, if the children are to lead a virtuous life, the elders must lead an ideal life first.

I have therefore decided to establish a University campus in Muddenahalli to teach boys to lead an ideal life with clean habits.



At the ceremony for laying the foundation stone on Feb. 14, 2009, Swami announced that the construction will be completed in six months and that the dedication will take place Feb. 14, 2010.

The boys there cannot afford to go to a city for university education, nor can their parents afford the expenditure. I have decided to establish a university campus with all the equipment and facilities, such as classrooms for all the courses and a good hostel. It will be ready for opening within a

year and is my divine will.

I always wish to do some good to every individual. Now, I propose to establish a University campus in Muddenahalli for the benefit of students studying in the Sri Sathya Sai College. I watched with my own eyes the difficulties the students were undergoing due to a lack of facilities for higher education, and I was moved. I therefore assured them that I would provide the necessary facilities.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
November 23, 2008

Earnest Preparations for National Sai Youth Conference in May

“We Are One for Sai” : May 29-31, 2009, at Camp Duncan, Ingleside, IL (near Chicago).
Registration fee: \$95, includes lodging and meals. For info and online registration, see
www.saiyausa.net or contact your YA representatives and advisors. See also p. 31.

Our journey has begun, and together we are traveling toward a special moment in our country’s Sai Youth movement. This golden opportunity reminds us of the importance of being in human form during the age of the Avatar, and how we want to spend our lives in pleasing him, offering all our actions to him, and finally reaching him.

Our most important contributions are our efforts in self-transformation. As part of these efforts we have embarked on a pre-conference program to further our spiritual progress. Along with a monthly newsletter building up to the conference, we are offering to Swami a garland of flowers from youth around the country, containing our individual pledges on areas we would like to improve as a part of placing a ceiling on our desires.

Our pre-conference program centers on four aspects of spiritual discipline: Meditation, Gayatri Mantra practice, Ceiling on Desires (COD) program, and Service.

Meditation: Swami says, “Observe meditation with innocence, purity, and humility. Then, without fail, you can attain whatever you strive for.” Monthly meditation podcasts are posted online at www.saiyausa.net.

Gayatri: Chanting the Gayatri mantra three times a day is encouraged, as well as sharing our experiences via the Gayatri Experience Bank online at www.saiyausa.net.

Ceiling on Desires (COD): Youth can share thoughts and strategies in the COD section of the Forum at www.saiyausa.net, and participate in monthly “Energy Wise” workshops.

Service: To be reminded of service every time a new browser window opens, one’s web browser home page can be set to “Service Thought for the Day” (see link under Service Initiative on www.saiyausa.net). Share your experiences, get reminders about ways to serve, and be inspired by others’ experiences at the Forum on www.saiyausa.net. More details can be found in the Service section on www.saiyausa.net.

Let us continue to walk together, to open our hearts to Him, and to become His instruments. If you haven’t yet climbed aboard this USA train to self-transformation, it’s not too late! Join now, and be a part of the Oneness for Sai. Ask yourself: *What can we offer to Swami?*

—National Youth Conference Team

Pre-Conference Testimonials

“During the past few days, I have been reflecting on ‘living service.’ Today, I was feeling sad about not having opportunities to serve. While studying in my room, I had a sudden realization. I looked around my room and thought, if Swami were physically present in my room, how would I serve him? The answer was simple: keep it clean. I realized that I was spending a lot of time thinking, ‘Who can I serve today?’ when I could have been thinking, ‘How can I serve Swami today?’ Ultimately Swami is everyone, everything, and everywhere. I just need to remember that.”

“When I go shopping, I try to remember Swami’s saying, ‘Less luggage is more comfort.’ I used to buy unnecessary things and then would end up returning them. One day my roommate suggested that I could meditate or chant a mantra before shopping in order to alleviate this problem and avoid frivolous purchases. This opened my eyes to how prayer could help me do my regular chores. Since then, I have tried to chant the Gayatri or do Namasmaraṇa when I go shopping. This helps me stop for a moment, think it through, and only buy an item if it’s really needed. Practicing this has helped me lead a simpler life, feel Swami’s divine presence, and grow closer to him.”

“I had a dream where I was sitting down before a projector-screened image of our beloved Bhagavan in his orange robe. As I gazed at his photo, Bhagavan manifested

from the image. He stared into my eyes and began chanting *Aum*. The symbol *Aum* appeared from his mouth in blue misty light. He began teaching me how to chant Gayatri, line by line. As I looked at his lips and into his throat while he chanted, I saw the entire universe revolving within. I was delightfully stunned by this divine vision.”

“Meditation has always been a tough thing for me. Usually what comes to my mind is ‘Okay, I’m sitting here; what do I do next?’ and ‘Am I going in the right direction?’ After trying many times and feeling as if I were not making any progress, Swami came to the rescue. I met a devotee who had been practicing meditation for some time. We did group meditation, but my mind was still filled with thoughts and discomfort. Sensing what I was going through, he said that when starting meditation, a powerful way to calm the mind is to find the top three ‘worries,’ and then come to a resolution for each one. He made me state these out loud, along with a firm resolution for each one. At first I was embarrassed to share my personal worries, but one by one, I felt my mind calming, and after the third resolution, I was gone! The next thing I sensed was the man saying, ‘Now come back to this room.’ I realized 30 minutes had passed, and I felt a glowing energy through my body. This technique of coming to a resolution has served me well ever since, both within and outside of meditation. Thank you, Swami!”

Thank You, Swami ...

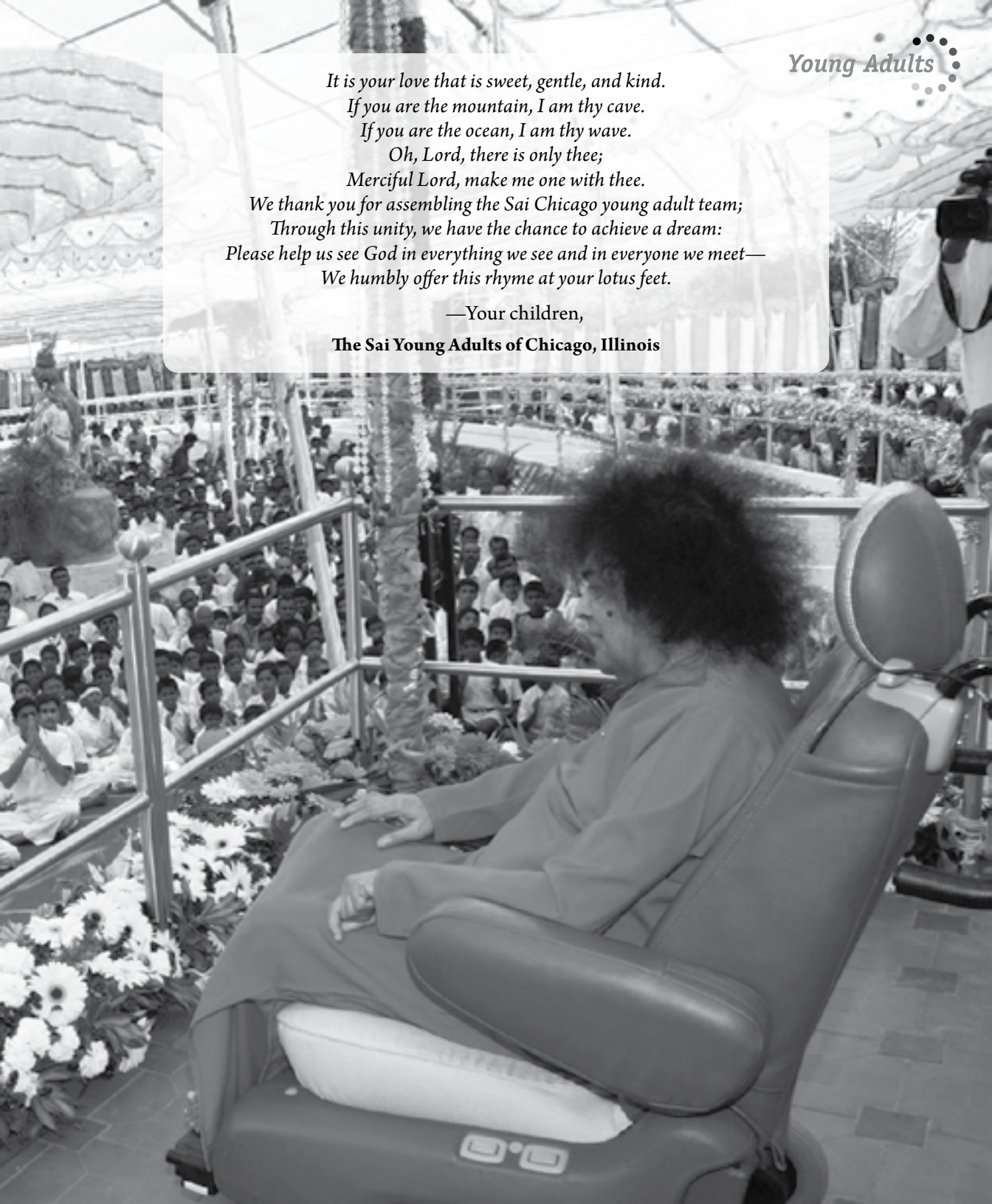
*Dearest Swami,
Thank you for giving us this opportunity
To connect with divinity;
As we attempt to practice living seva,
We offer our loving salutations to our Sarva Dharma Priya Deva.*
Please help us remember the human values each day;
Your sun lights the path of truth for us with every golden ray.
Please install yourself in every home,
So we have the chance to feel the universal form of AUM.
Please be with us at work and school,
And through all challenges, let our heads remain cool.
Please help us remain consistent in our thought, word, and deed;
It is only because of your will that we can succeed.
Please help us see good, do good, and be good;
It is with your guidance that we do what we should.
We often forget and search for you far and wide;
Grace us with the awareness that you are always by our side.
You are the one who fills our lives with bliss;
Please help us go beyond your physical form that we always miss.
Please continue to be the temple in every heart;
It is from you that we shall never part.
Grant us your grace to stay with you;
We will try our best to do what is true.
Make us your instruments to spread your glory;
We want our lives to be a part of your story.
On earth you have given us a role;
We must fulfill our duties to reach the goal.
Thank you for showering us with your grace;
With you, the world is easier to face.
Thank you for giving us all your love;
It is truly a precious gift from above.
You have taught us how to uphold dharma;
You are so kind to have helped us alleviate our karma.
You are our Vedas, our Ramayana, our Gita;
You have taught us lessons through the story of Rama and Sita.
You are our lives, you are love, you are light;
You are beyond the highest height.
You are our Krishna and our Rama;
It is truly an honor to witness your drama.
You have taught us to tame our monkey minds;*

** Sarva Dharma Priya Deva: Loving God of All the Faiths*

*It is your love that is sweet, gentle, and kind.
If you are the mountain, I am thy cave.
If you are the ocean, I am thy wave.
Oh, Lord, there is only thee;
Merciful Lord, make me one with thee.
We thank you for assembling the Sai Chicago young adult team;
Through this unity, we have the chance to achieve a dream:
Please help us see God in everything we see and in everyone we meet—
We humbly offer this rhyme at your lotus feet.*

—Your children,

The Sai Young Adults of Chicago, Illinois



What Is the Best Service?



Once there was a king who always had three questions on his mind: (1) Who is the best individual? (2) What is the best action one can do? (3) What is the best time of all?

The king was very eager to find someone who could answer these questions. He asked all he met if they could answer the three questions.

One day the king went to the country to walk among the forests and meadows. He came to a spiritual center, an ashram, and decided to go inside and rest. The first person he saw was a *sadhu*, a holy man, watering some plants.

The sadhu noticed the king. He stopped what he was doing. He greeted the king politely and offered him some cool water and fresh fruit.

While the king was enjoying these refreshments, a commotion arose near the gates. Some people came in, carrying a man who had fallen and injured his leg.

As soon as the sadhu saw this, he went straight to the injured person. He cleaned the man's wounds and gave him some healing herbs to help cure the wounds. He spoke to the man sweetly and lovingly, consoling and comforting him.

The king, meanwhile, was ready to take his leave. He approached the sadhu to express his gratitude. Suddenly, the king remembered his three questions. He said, "Sir, I am greatly troubled by three questions. Perhaps you can tell me the answers: Who is the best person? What is the best action one can do? What is the best time to do it?"

The sadhu answered, "O king, can you not see that the answers to your questions are in the actions you have just witnessed?"





“When you came to the ashram, I was watering the plants. That was my duty.

“But then, seeing you had arrived, I gave up that duty and came to you. I served you water and fruit. This was correct, because you are a guest.

“Then, while relieving you of your thirst and hunger, an injured person arrived. Therefore, I gave up my duty of serving you and began tending to the injured man.

“Here, then, are the answers to all your questions: First, whoever comes seeking your service is the best person at that time. Second, the best action is whatever satisfaction you can give while serving that person. Third, the best and most sacred of all times is the present, when you can do whatever is in your power to help.”

—Adapted from Sri Sathya Sai Baba,
“The Three Best Things,” *Chinma Katha*, Vol. 2
—Illustrations by Phyllis Wohlberg

Sai Spiritual Education Lesson Plan

What Is the Best Service? (Group 2)

VALUE: Right Action • **SUBVALUE:** Service

QUOTE: *Love all; serve all. . . . Whenever you find that you can render help to anyone in need, offer it. Offer service according to the needs of the situation.* —(SSS 21:31, Nov. 21, 1988)

PRAYER/AFFIRMATION/SILENT SITTING: *Let me love and serve you in everyone. Help me to see where and how I can be of help to those around me, at all times.* (Sit silently 2-5 minutes.) **SONG:** “Giving and Forgiving”

PRE-STORY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: *What kinds of service can you do for others? How can you know what is the **best** service to do for someone?*

STORY: “What is the Best Service?” (See pages 43-44.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: *What were the three questions bothering the king? What events did the king witness when he came to the ashram? How did the sadhu answer the king’s questions? What kind of service can we give—at home? at school? with friends? at the Sai Center? How can we notice who—or what—needs our help? What kind of help can we give that we might not have noticed before?*

ACTIVITY: Work with students to prepare and enact a skit based on the story. Then have students role-play similar scenes that might happen in their life. You may wish to prepare several scenarios ahead to give them. For example: *You are at home doing one of your regular chores. (Have students name the chores they do.) One of your parents’ friends comes to the door, but your mother is on the phone and cannot come to greet the friend. What will you do? Then, your little brother, who is playing in the yard, falls down and begins to cry. What should you do?* Make sure all students have a chance to role-play being interrupted or called away from other activities to give service where and when needed.

LIFE APPLICATION: (1) Have students copy the quote in their spiritual journals. Ask them to reread it every day and to pray to be shown ways to put it into practice. (2) Have students participate in service activities and in opportunities to host guests and serve refreshments.

EXTENDING ACTIVITY: Familiarize students with the contents of a basic first aid kit; demonstrate how to use each item safely. You may wish to arrange for students to receive qualified training in first aid, safety, or disaster preparedness.

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

Sitting Downwind from Flowers

From the book *Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul* by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Cynthia Brian, Cindy Buck, Marion Owen, Pat Stone, and Carol Strugulewski. Copyright © 2000 by Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, LLC. Published by Health Communications Inc. Chicken Soup for the Soul is a registered trademark of Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, LLC. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Several years ago in Seattle, Washington, there lived a 52-year-old Tibetan refugee. “Tenzin,” as I will call him, was diagnosed with one of the more curable forms of lymphoma. He was admitted to the hospital and received his first dose of chemotherapy.

But during the treatment, this usually gentle man became extremely angry and upset. He pulled the IV out of his arm and refused to cooperate. He shouted at the nurses and became argumentative with everyone who came near him. The doctors and nurses were baffled.

Then Tenzin’s wife spoke to the hospital staff. She told them Tenzin had been held as a political prisoner by the Chinese for 17 years. They killed his first wife and repeatedly tortured and brutalized him throughout his imprisonment. She told them that the hospital rules and regulations, coupled with the chemotherapy treatments, gave Tenzin horrible flashbacks of what he had suffered at the hands of the Chinese.

“I know you mean to help him,” she said, “but he feels tortured by your treatments. They are causing him to feel hatred inside, just like he felt toward the Chinese. He would rather die than have to live with the hatred he is now feeling. And, according to our belief,

it is very bad to have hatred in your heart at the time of death. He needs to be able to pray and cleanse his heart.”

So the doctors discharged Tenzin and asked the hospice team to visit him in his home. I was the hospice nurse assigned to his care. I called a local representative from Amnesty International for advice. He told me that the only way to heal the damage from torture is to “talk it through.” “This person has lost his trust in humanity and feels hope is impossible,” the man said. “If you are to help him, you must find a way to give him hope.”

But when I encouraged Tenzin to talk about his experiences, he held up his hand and stopped me. He said, “I must learn to love again, if I am to heal my soul. Your job is not to ask me questions. Your job is to teach me to love again.” I took a deep breath. I asked him, “So, how can I help you love again?”

Tenzin immediately replied, “Sit down, drink my tea, and eat my cookies.” Tibetan tea is strong black tea laced with yak butter and salt. It isn’t easy to drink! But that is what I did.

For several weeks, Tenzin, his wife, and I sat together, drinking tea. We also worked with his doctors to find ways to treat his physical pain. But it was his spiritual pain that seemed to be lessening. Each time I arrived,

Tenzin was sitting cross-legged on his bed, reciting prayers from his books. As time went on, he and his wife hung more and more colorful *thankas*, Tibetan Buddhist banners, on the walls. The room was fast becoming a beautiful, religious shrine.

When the spring came, I asked Tenzin what Tibetans do when they are ill in the spring. He smiled brightly and said, “We sit downwind from flowers.”

I thought he must be speaking poetically, but Tenzin’s words were quite literal. He told me Tibetans sit downwind so they can be dusted with the new blossoms’ pollen that floats on the spring breeze. They feel this new pollen is strong medicine. At first, finding enough blossoms seemed a bit daunting. Then, one of my friends suggested that Tenzin visit some of the local flower nurseries. I called the manager of one of the nurseries and explained the situation. The manager’s initial response was, “You want to do *what?*” But when I explained the request, the manager agreed.

So, the next weekend, I picked up Tenzin and his wife, with their provisions for the afternoon: black tea, butter, salt, cups, cookies, prayer beads, and prayer books. I dropped them off at the nursery and assured them I would return at 5:00. The following weekend, Tenzin and his wife visited another nursery.

The third weekend, they went to yet another nursery. The fourth week, I began to get calls from the nurseries, inviting Tenzin and his wife to come again. One of the managers said, “We’ve got a new shipment of nicotiana coming in and some wonderful fuchsias,

and oh, yes! Some great daphne. I know they would love the scent of that daphne! And I almost forgot! We have some new lawn furniture that Tenzin and his wife might enjoy.”

Later that day, I got a call from the second nursery saying that they had colorful wind socks that would help Tenzin predict where the wind was blowing. Pretty soon, the nurseries were competing for Tenzin’s visits.

People began to know and care about the Tibetan couple. The nursery employees started setting out the lawn furniture in the direction of the wind. Others would bring out fresh hot water for their tea. Some of the regular customers would leave their wagons of flowers near the two of them. It seemed that a community was growing around Tenzin and his wife. At the end of the summer, Tenzin returned to his doctor for another CT scan to determine the extent of the spread of the cancer. But the doctor could find no evidence of cancer at all. He was dumbfounded. He told Tenzin that he just couldn’t explain it.

Tenzin lifted his finger and said, “I know why the cancer has gone away. It could no longer live in a body that is filled with love. When I began to feel all the compassion from the hospice people, from the nursery employees, and all those people who wanted to know about me, I started to change inside. Now, I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to heal in this way. Doctor, please don’t think that your medicine is the only cure. Sometimes compassion can cure cancer, as well.”

—Story by **Lee Paton**

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