

Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA

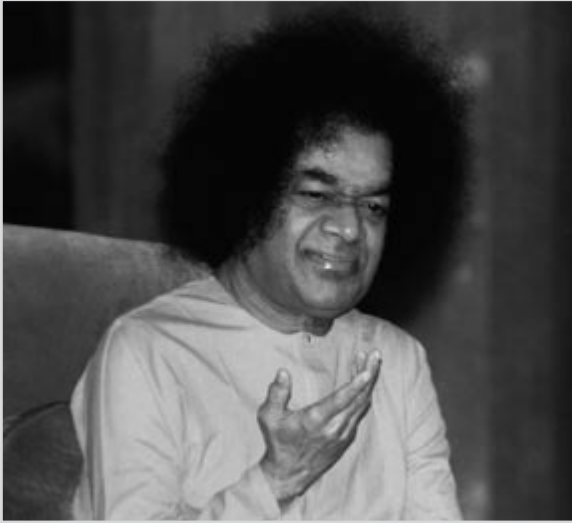
Dedicated with Love and Devotion to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba



Perceiving God's Presence

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SAI'S MESSAGE



Feeling the Presence

Do action based upon wisdom, the wisdom that *all is one*. Let action be suffused with devotion—that is, humility, love, compassion, and non-violence.

Let devotion be filled with wisdom; otherwise it will be as insubstantial as a balloon that drifts with any current of air or gust of wind.

Mere wisdom will make the heart dry; devotion makes it soft with sympathy, and action gives the hands something to do, something to sanctify every minute that has fallen to your lot to live here.

That is why devotion is referred to as “dwelling near” (*upasana*), feeling the presence, sharing the sweetness of divinity.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
Sathya Sai Speaks (SSS) 3:16, July 7, 1963

DR. CHRISTIAN MOEVS:

A DEVOUT CATHOLIC ENCOUNTERS SAI BABA



Dr. Christian Moevs teaches Italian literature at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, USA. He obtained an undergraduate degree in philosophy from Harvard and a PhD in Italian literature from Columbia University. He is a devout Roman Catholic and an ardent devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Swami). When we met him in 1999, he not only read and served at Mass on Sunday in the Catholic church but also taught the young adult Sai Spiritual Education class in Granger, Indiana.

This seeming contradiction has been the subject of curiosity for both the Catholics and Hindus known to him. Dr. Christian had such a profound influence on our children that I interviewed him to learn more about his experience with his religious beliefs in general, and Swami, in particular.

Christian is a soft-spoken, unassuming, friendly person and has been recognized for his exemplary contribution to Italian literature. His book titled *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy* (Oxford, 2005) was awarded the 2006 Best Book Prize from the American Association for Italian Studies and the Marzaro Prize from the Modern Language Association. He was also awarded the first Junior Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching by the Department of Romance Languages,

a Kaneb Teaching Award, and the Sheedy Award for Excellence in Teaching in the College of Arts and Letters at Notre Dame.

Here are some excerpts from my interview with Dr. Moevs.

Can you tell me a little about your family background?

I was born in Boston and grew up there till I was five years old. Then I spent a year in Italy and returned to the U.S. I grew up in a farmhouse near Princeton, New Jersey. I went to college at Harvard and majored in philosophy.

After graduation I lived in New York for quite a few years. I parked cars and then worked for a music management company. I went to Italy for two years and wrote poetry. Then I returned to the U.S. with intentions to pursue graduate studies in philosophy or English literature.

Somebody suggested Italian literature, and that seemed to be obviously right. So I completed a PhD in Italian literature at Columbia. Soon I was hired by the University of Notre Dame.

How did a Catholic professor of Italian literature start teaching Sai Spiritual Education classes that included Hindu children!

I was Roman Catholic—Christian—in my upbringing, my own tradition, and was rather intensely involved with that when I was younger—but more as a kind of cultural or aesthetic attraction, because I never really believed in Christ as God. I realize now that I didn't believe in miracles. I thought that all that was emblematic and not real.

I did not have any real relationship with anything one could call “God.” But I had a very intense attraction to beauty and would cry a lot at the experience of anything beautiful. I didn't realize at that time that “God is beauty.” Even as a child I had these strange fits. I remember one time when my sister plucked a flower, the tragedy of the suffering of this flower made me cry for three hours!

Isn't that rather unusual?

(laughs) Yes, it was unusual. But things like that would happen a lot. I was going between desire, frustration, and rebellion on the one hand, and the compassion and love I would experience every once in a while, on the other. Living in New York, I was looking for bliss everywhere, in all the wrong places. That was essential at the time—to lead a wild secular life in order to see what that is, and what it does not bring.

In the middle of all this—it was around 1985—my sister invited me to dinner. She has always led an intensely spiritual life. At her house was a picture of Sathya Sai Baba, about whom I had never heard before and

knew nothing. I asked my sister about him, and she told me that he is someone who has infinite power over the sky and the earth—someone who can create anything out of thin air. I thought, “Yeah, right.” I certainly did not believe it.

But I was curious, so my sister gave me a book about Baba to read. As I reached the third page of the book, I started crying, because I realized that this was real. There was a kind of ineffable beauty, truth, and sweetness in this book, which is a mark of the Divine. Right at that moment, I was hooked forever to the Divine. But it was a very long process to change my life.

How did your life change?

My own way of life was against everything that Baba teaches (laughs). I was breaking every one of Baba's rules. But that is how Baba works! It's not so much from trying to suppress and change the “bad” in you; it's more falling so deeply in love with the “good” that eventually the “bad” disappears. And that is what the transformation is—the “good,” the “right,” takes over more and more of your life, till all of a sudden you realize that “darkness” has no more power over you. So it was a gradual process. At the beginning, all I did was read about Baba and his talks, and this intense joy and peace would come over me. That became the anchor of my life. Then, very gradually, I began to meditate a little bit, looking at a picture of Baba.

The changes began to happen really only in 1987. I was starting at Columbia (for the PhD) the same year, and at that time a friend

“My own way of life was against everything that Baba teaches ... I was breaking every one of Baba’s rules. But that is how Baba works!”

and I tracked down a Baba center in New York, and we went to a meeting at this center. My friend was not turned on by it. I felt something there and started visiting twice a week for *bhajans* (devotional singing). And that is what really transformed my life. I did not realize it at that time.

I was totally frazzled in all sorts of worldly concerns. I would go to *bhajans* and it would completely transform me. I would come out in a state of bliss. There was this place, in particular, an apartment on West 83rd Street and Broadway in New York. As you walked in, by the time you got to the second floor, you could feel the divinity and sacredness of this place.

The lady who lived there had made Baba the center of her life some years ago, when her life had gone through a huge tragedy. She lived, breathed, and thought Baba. Pictures of Baba were everywhere in her apartment, and all the pictures in the house were covered with *vibhuti* (sacred ash). You cannot go into an environment like that once a week for five years and be the same human being afterward.

Did you ever meet Baba?

I had no intentions or desire to go to India and meet Baba. Everyone would talk about going to retreats; I did not feel called to do that either. But I guess it was 1990 when I was sent to Italy on a fellowship and lived in Rome. I got deeply involved in the Sai

Baba center in Rome, where I experienced a different cultural take on Baba. The intensity and purity of those people’s devotion, the power of their *bhajans*, and the seriousness and sacredness of how they focused on Baba was a giant inspiration. They were organizing a trip to go meet Baba, and I realized that I would be going. It was not a decision. I simply realized that I would be going. It all unfolded in a very magical way.

In January 1991, two groups, one big and one small, left for Puttaparthi. Everybody wanted to go in the big group because the lady who was leading the group had had 50 or 60 interviews with Baba. I was in the small group. I was pulled out of the big group by the travel agent and put into the small group, which was led by a wonderful lady who later became my spiritual godmother. That is how Baba works. Everyone in that group was picked by Baba to teach spiritual lessons to everyone else in the group.

At Puttaparthi, I was in a room with four other young men. One of them had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Another young man, named Gianpaolo, was exactly my age and never spoke. He had been to visit Baba three or four times earlier. He had this intense purity and stillness. I just followed him and did everything he did; I was his shadow. Getting up at 3:00 a.m. for meditation, going to sit on the verandah where Baba walks—anything he did, I followed.

What happened during the course of this trip became the turning point of my life. On January 16, Baba called us for an interview—our small group, not the big group (laughs). Baba called us right over the heads of the big group, who were seated in the front because they were to leave before we were. That group never really had any harmony, and there, again, are all these lessons. Baba always uses us that way.

Baba focused some intense energy on me and ... (overcome by emotion) ... changed my life forever. It is amazing that in the space of ten minutes on January 16, 1991, at 7:12 in the morning, I came out a different human being. There is no explanation except for the overwhelming power of the transcendent—of divine love. Every single person in that group was permanently changed to an extraordinary degree.

A member of our group, Carmelo, who had just found out that his wife was dying of cancer, did not really “believe” in Baba. The interview changed his life. Baba turned to him, did not ask him anything, and with great gentleness told him, “No. No operation; she is in my hands.” Carmelo started crying.

Then Baba turned to the boy with multiple sclerosis. There was a doctor in our group who was dressed like everyone else. Baba asked the doctor, “What is wrong with the boy?” This was Baba’s way of letting the doctor know that he knew who he was.

The doctor answered, “He has multiple sclerosis, Baba.”

“Yes, yes; he hasn’t walked in seven years,” Baba said. The boy had indeed suffered that condition for seven years. Baba then asked the boy to stand up, and he massaged the boy’s side and led him out of the room. The boy just walked out of the room! We all realized that the physical healing was an emblem of inner healing.

Baba is the doctor, and he works on our insides. The doctor in our group became a very changed person. When I met him the next year, he looked radiant and told me this secret: “Every day do one thing only for Baba.” The doctor would go to the mountains and give free medical aid to the poor.

All these people you are mentioning are not Hindus ...?

They were all Italians, all Catholics. There was not one Hindu in that whole group.

What was their driving force? Rome is considered the center of Catholicism, so how did these people ...?

Well, Italy has a very strong spiritual tradition, and so it has a kind of openness to spirituality. Baba is very well known in Italy. Often in Puttaparthi one may find the second largest group of devotees after Indians to be the Italians.

Did you find any opposition from the Catholics in Italy?

People who do not understand and who have not “grown” in their own spiritual tradition will sometimes think that there is a tension or opposition between the two traditions. But that is just being “young” in your spiritual

“Sai Baba is a mirror. He reflects us to ourselves. A thief will see a thief. A spiritual aspirant will see a holy teacher, and a saint will see God.”

growth, or “adolescence.” But as you “grow,” you begin to see things much more deeply.

As far as people in the Catholic church are concerned—they might say that we have only one way to God, and everyone else goes to hell—well, that is not actually *catholic* at all. But it is the way things are sometimes interpreted. For anyone who has had the direct experience of God—one who has tasted the “sugar”—he or she has no interest in what form it comes.

Were they confused by your actions?

Absolutely not.

Does Baba ask you about your own religious beliefs?

Oh, but there is only one religion—the religion of love. Baba teaches that everyone must follow their own religious path. They all lead to the same place. But do it with absolute intensity and follow it all the way. They will all merge in the same place. Baba says, “Let all the religions flourish, as long as they do not extinguish the flame of unity.” Baba also gave a profound message on another occasion. He said, “It is an excellent thing to be born into a religion, but not so good to die in one.”

If you think you are dying a Jew or dying a Hindu and not dying in God, it means you have not reached the goal toward which all religions are leading. All those Italians going to Baba—almost all of them—went to church, too. And I did the same.

At Notre Dame, I am a Eucharistic minister, an acolyte, and a lector at the Basilica. And it is very powerful for me, now that I have some sense of devotion and the reality of Christ that I never had before. I can honestly say that I am a Christian because of Baba. I now believe everything the New Testament says about Christ, and I have seen, with my own eyes, Baba heal people. Baba teaches us to have a sense of reverence for every spiritual tradition.

After I came back from that visit in 1991, I began telling everyone about Baba. I had never experienced such happiness. One of Baba’s teachings is that one of the direct paths to God is to “serve God” in others. That means service to humanity. In Rome, Baba’s devotees went to Mother Teresa’s Sisters of Charity shelter near the Vatican. I did the same. The experience was so sublime. They would serve on white floors, white tables, with white linen, shining crystal, silverware—everything polished by hand and set down perfectly, as if Christ were coming to eat.

That is how they served every single person who came to them. Everything was served with discipline, joy, and silence—just as they do near Baba. This was a huge turning point in my attitude toward Catholicism. I had to go all the way to India to get “slapped” personally in the face by Baba, in order to come back and do what my fellow Catholics had been doing for years! It was such a

turnaround! I felt a deep sense of gratitude and devotion to the church.

To a person not familiar with Sai Baba, how would you introduce or explain Baba?

Sai Baba is a mirror. He reflects us to ourselves. A thief will see a thief. A spiritual aspirant will see a holy teacher, and a saint will see God. To most people, Rama is just another king; to those who can see what Rama is, Rama is the avatar.

To know Christ is to completely sacrifice and surrender yourself to the Divine. Understanding comes when you shut your mouth and start serving, begin loving and growing in self-sacrifice. Mother Teresa is an example.

Do you need to keep in touch with Baba?

Initially, yes, but not any more. When I began really to go inside myself, I realized what Baba said—that he is with me all the time.

What was the reaction of your family?

My sister has had a very intense spiritual experience of Baba. At one time when she was anorexic and suicidal, she read a book about Baba. She began to have dreams about being at the ashram where Baba lives, and being held and healed by him. She didn't realize that the dreams were set in the ashram until, after being healed in this way, she visited the ashram. There she recognized the various rooms, including the interview room, because she had already "been there."

It was a bit of a trauma for my mother, who said, "What is all this? I will never set foot in that country." She is a strict Catholic and believes in ritual, but she had not had direct experience of the Divine. But my parents were full of wisdom and love, so their resistance did not last very long.

Through my transformation they began to understand what Baba was. I was in New York, and one day I stood in front of Baba's picture and said, "Baba, please give my mother some taste of who you are." Two weeks later, when I visited my parents, my mother told this story. She had been going through a mental trauma and could not sleep. While pacing around the house she reached my room and saw Baba's picture.

She stood in front of it and said, "Baba, if you are who you are, you must help me." And at that instant something happened. All her worries dissolved, and she felt great peace. The next day, her problem was resolved, through an inexplicable miracle, with touches no ordinary being could have thought of. My mother said that only the Divine could have done that. She later visited Puttaparthi to "thank Baba."

**—From an interview of Dr. Christian Moevs
by Mrs. Varsha Jonnalagadda**

Beaumont, Texas

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Truth, Goodness, and Beauty

(*Sathyam, Shivam, Sundaram*)

There is no truth without goodness; there is no goodness without beauty. Truth alone can confer auspiciousness; auspiciousness alone is the real beauty. Truth is beauty; joy is beauty. Falsehood and grief are not beauty, because they are unnatural.

In the intellect (*buddhi*), consciousness (*chittham*), and spiritual heart (*hridhayam*) reside wisdom, action, and devotion (*jnana*, *karma*, and *bhakti*). The effulgence of truth will reveal goodness; actions must be performed as approved by the higher wisdom, not action born of ignorance. Then, all actions will be auspicious, beneficial, blessed (*shivam*). The experience of that goodness is what is called *beauty*, for that is what confers real bliss. That is my reality. That is why my life is called *Sathyam Shivam Sundaram*. (SSS 3:16, July 7, 1963)

The Atma (inner divinity) is infinite. It has been described as *sathyam*, *shivam*, *sundaram*—truth, goodness, and beauty. From a worldly view, these three qualities appear to be different from each other. But none can be without the others. Beauty imparts effulgence to an object. Truth reveals its real nature. Thereby its usefulness or *shivam* is brought out. The unity of these three aspects reveals the divinity of the Atma.

Like cloth and thread, which have their basis in cotton, the Atma is the basis for all three. Truth dons the mantle of goodness and

appears as beauty. The three terms describe the same object.

Four words [describe the experience of the Atma]: love (*prema*), beauty (*sundarya*), sweetness (*madhurya*), and brilliance (*sobha*). When the heart melts, love flows from it. When love matures, it turns into beauty. When the taste of beauty ripens, it is sweetness. In that experience of sweetness, everything appears brilliant and shining. The whole process may be likened to a flower ultimately becoming a ripe, sweet fruit. The ripeness is all. The spirit is all sweetness. Thus, the devotee sang:

*Your eyes are sweet. Your words are sweet.
All is sweet. Oh Lord of Mathura, sweetness, sweetness everywhere.* (Poem)

It is this divine sweetness that illumines the world. This beauty, sweetness, and bliss are all within you. When you turn your mind to God, the whole universe will wear a new aspect. Without this internal change, all changes in the external physical world are of no avail. Only when the individual changes will the world change. (SSS 22:22, July 2, 1989)

God is love, so you must become love in order to merge in him. He is beauty, so you be beauty, with no ugliness in you; then you can be one with him. He is compassion; be compassionate. . . . God is sweetness. His words are sweet. His light is sweet; he sounds sweet; he is sweeter than sweetness itself. (SSS 8:9, July 23, 1971)

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

The Vase That Fell

*The vase lay shattered on the floor;
it could never be what it was before.*

*A thousand pieces, large and small,
filled the room and part of the hall.*

*The intricate design that made it unique
was lost forever, one would think.*

*Useless, no help to anyone now,
the vase lay alone, wondering how
it could ever again be made whole,
laying broken and bent, having lost its soul.*

*But with fingers so nimble and so light,
the Master started His work that night.*

*Slow, so slow it could drive you mad,
the potter remade with what He had.*

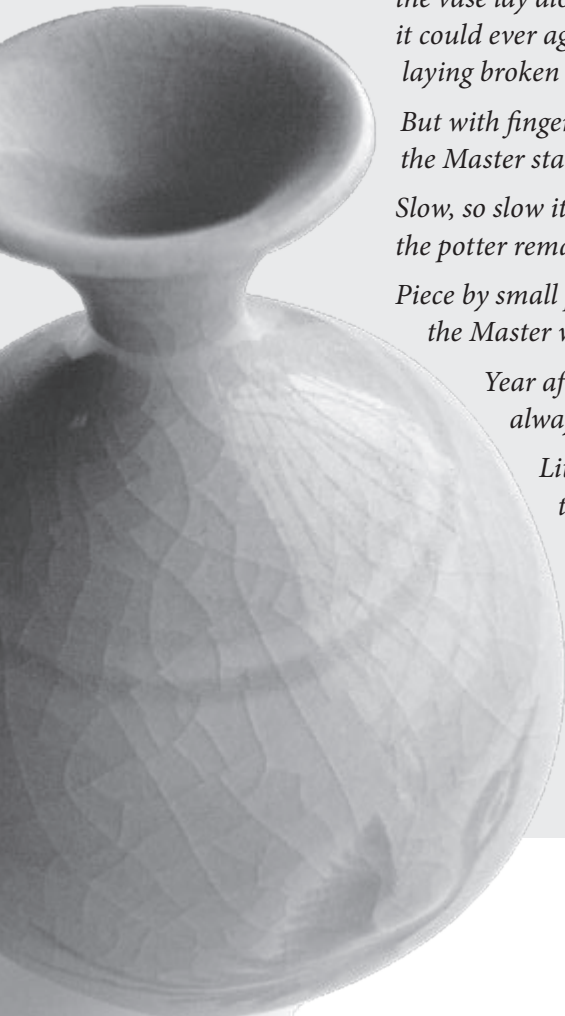
*Piece by small piece, with a gentle stroke,
the Master worked with the vase that broke.*

*Year after year, He kept at His task;
always so patient, never working too fast.*

*Little by little, a form began to appear;
the Master never left; He always stayed near.*

*The design was different, not at all like before,
when the vase lay shattered on the floor.*

*The uniqueness that made it one of a kind
never left the Master's mind.*



*The small pieces were given just as much care
as the big pieces that had fallen there,
And then one day, out of the blue,
the vase was sitting in plain view.*

*Whole and solid it stood on the table by the door,
and oddly enough, much stronger than before.*

*The design on the vase had been changed you see;
It was not the same as it used to be.*

*More vibrant, shimmering, and filled with His light,
the vase understood what had happened that night.*

*Sai Baba Himself had heard the cry
of the vase that thought it was left to die.*

*You can see many cracks in the new old vase;
Baba left them there for His light to escape,
So that others might be drawn to His flame
and find peace in the glory of His name.*

*This story is true; I know it well,
for I am the vase, the vase that fell.*



—J.F. Ziegler
Gilbert, Arizona

BEAUTY CONSISTS IN CHARACTER, NOT IN ANYTHING ELSE.
THERE IS NOTHING MORE CHARMING THAN THAT.
—SRI SATHYA SAI BABA (*Dhyana Vahini*, ch. 9, p. 67)



Idols and Icons

People laugh at you when you worship a picture, and some weak-minded persons feel ashamed when they do so. But they are treating the picture as God, and not God as picture. Worship the stone as God, not God as stone.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 10:8, May 12, 1970)

It has been our experience that people of all faiths—Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, and Buddhists—regularly display icons of one type or another in their homes, cars, and places of worship. Eastern Orthodox Christian churches are famous for their many icons—including the cross, Jesus on the cross, the Virgin Mary, and the Baby Christ. Vedantins (Hindus) use icons/images/statues (*murthis*) as objects of veneration. All these various symbols are used as visual prompts to conjure up the glory of the Creator.

Even Muslims, while avoiding to a large extent the use of human figures as visual prompts for worship, use calligraphy—such as the name *Allah* or the first verse of the Holy Quran—and find comfort and strength in contemplating such symbols of the “holy word.”

The Jewish tradition has its own or similar icons, for example, representations of the menorah, dove of peace, holy tablets, scroll of the Torah, ram’s horn, and so on.

Some Judeo-Christians and Muslims misunderstand and ridicule Buddhists and Vedantins (Hindus) regarding so-called idol worship. People of icon-venerating faiths, meanwhile, find themselves on the defensive in explaining properly to those of other faiths—or even to their own children—the practical rationale behind the use of holy figures such as statues and icons in worship.

An icon is a sacred image created to awaken our faith. But to some Judeo-Christians, the word *idol* has a pejorative connotation, implying that an inanimate object is worshiped blindly by ignorant,

superstitious, or primitive “heathens.” This originates no doubt from Old Testament stories of ancient tribes and civilizations that worshiped “graven images” as gods, and interpretations of two of the Ten Commandments inscribed by Moses:

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” and

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth below, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them . . .” (Holy Bible, Exodus 20:3-4)

But the very same believers who follow the Ten Commandments do not hesitate to make use of, meditate on, and even adore icons or statues depicting the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Jesus on the cross, or a cross alone. Rather than referring to these as idols, they call them statues, images, or icons. These icons of Jesus and Mary are powerful and provocative for Christians and call to mind many godly virtues and attributes.

Helen Keller, who was blind and deaf, told us that most beautiful thing in the world is neither what our eyes behold nor what we touch. It is rather what touches our heart and moves our heart and mind.

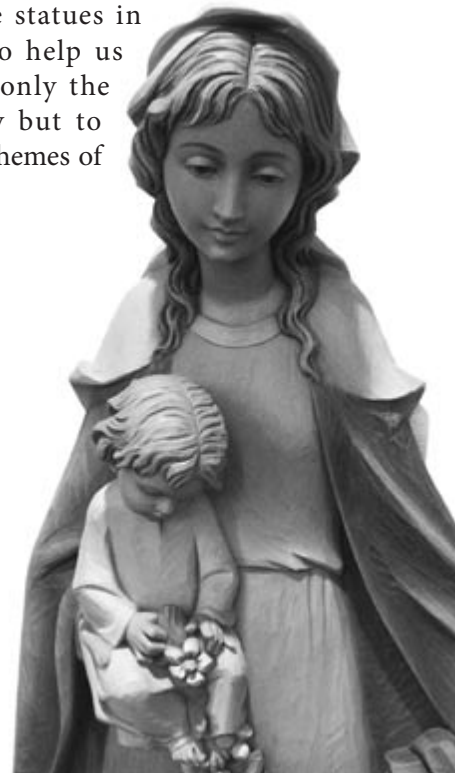
Idol worship is not a sign of barbarism. The idol is revered as the swarupa (image) of the Lord. He who pervades everywhere is invoked and visualized in the idol and approached reverentially by a cleansed mind.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
(SSS 2:35, April 5, 1962)

It is extremely difficult for the human mind to focus on or internalize something abstract; hence the need for a visual symbol, model, or prompt. A corollary in science would be how we simplify complex theories by creating visual models, such as DNA as a helical, string-like structure, or an atom as neutrons, protons, and orbiting electrons. We are aided by simple visual representations to focus on the ideas these models represent.

The visual prompts or logos used in advertising and commerce are also very powerful. Some people salivate upon seeing a golden arch logo, because it immediately conjures up the thought of hot fast food. Likewise, a simple “swoosh” icon on a sports shirt may conjure up associations with a world of sophisticated shoes and sports gear and an active lifestyle.

Governments throughout the world place statues in public places to help us appreciate not only the art and beauty but to inspire us with themes of





patriotism and religion. In Washington DC we can see religious statues of St. Vincent de Paul, Buddha, Joan of Arc, John Wesley, the prophet Daniel, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to name a few. These sights have the power to enable us to turn to the Creator in praise and thanksgiving for their heroic lives and examples.

Icons are symbols that tell a story and have been in use since before print. They invoke meanings and truths for us to enjoy and cherish. Religious icons contribute to the beauty of worship. They are like windows to the kingdom of God, bringing the awareness of God present with our prayers on earth. And although icons are images, they are not simply illustrations or decorations. They are symbols of God incarnated, a presence offering to the eye a visual symbol of the spiritual message, equivalent to the holy word addressing the ears.

When we make use of an icon, we don't reduce God to an icon but reaffirm that God, being omnipresent, is in the icon too. Vedantins do not adore the image as matter but adore the Creator of matter, who has become matter for our sake—who chose to dwell within matter, and who through matter causes our salvation. In this way, Vedantins are not “idol” worshipers but “ideal” worshipers.

Shankara (the great sage and proponent of nonduality) worshiped images in childhood and he knew the value of Saguna swarupa (God as endowed with qualities). He advised the practice of Saguna aradhana (worship of the Divine as form) to the majority of people, even later in his life. Little children must be taught with the help of slates and boards on which illustrations are drawn. Temples, images, and pictures are the slates and boards for children in spiritual progress. But if you play with a toy elephant, you can not derive the experience of contacting the real one. The formless can be conceived only when you have transcended form.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
(SSS 3:12, April 28, 1963)

In the Christian tradition, the catechism of the Catholic church officially sanctions the practice of worshiping holy images.

Father Paul Fohlin, OCD, author of *Standing in the Light: Meditation and the Icon* and an iconophile for over 30 years, has given many retreats on the spiritual meaning of icons. The following are excerpts from Fr. Paul Fohlin's review of *The Mystical*

Language of Icons, by Solrunn Nes (Alba House, St. Paul's Publishing, 2000):

"Nes consistently points out that spiritual beauty and truth are one in the icon."

"Orthodox iconography has form that inspires serenity and content that invites meditation."

"The icon is a holy object, the form being merely a receptacle for the content. The content is determined by the Holy Scriptures and the tradition of the Church. That is why the painting of icons is marked more by discipline than by inspiration."

"The icon is never complete in itself. It can never stand alone as an autonomous work of art, but refers to a spiritual dimension and forms part of a concrete religious practice."

Saint John of Damascus (676-749), a Father and Doctor of the Catholic church, was a famous champion of the practice of revering sacred images and icons. St. John defended the church's understanding of images against the Iconoclasts, an Eastern Christian group opposed to the veneration of icons. He encouraged the use of icons, not as objects of divine worship, but as aids to devotion and sanctification:

"I worship not the material [*hyle*], but ... the fabricator [*demiourgon*] of the material, the one who ... through the material has wrought my salvation." ("Apologetic Treatises against Those Decrying the Holy Images," Eng. transl. by Mary H. Allies, *St. John Damascene on Holy Images, Followed by Three Sermons on the Assumption*, London, 1899)

Due largely to St. John of Damascus's work, the Iconoclast episode retreated into history.

We will close with the following two quotes:

"Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive aspects as images leading us on to God incarnate. The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as image, but leads toward That whose image it is."

—St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

There is nothing so grand and sublime as the Lord in whom you find refuge. Call on him by any name, or speak of him as the nameless one. He is both sa-akara (with form) and nir-akara (formless). The ocean takes the form of the vessel that contains a portion of it. Thereupon, the formless takes form; the absolute is reduced to the particular. You will find that all the joy is derived from the form-full aspect of God. The formless causes no joy or grief; it is beyond all duality."

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
(SSS 1:34, Nov. 23, 1960)

—**Asan G. Tejwani**
Germantown, Tennessee

See the Power Inherent in the Idol

A Little Story

There was once a spiritual seeker (sadhaka) who approached a guru for guidance. The guru gave him an idol of Vishnu and also the necessary instructions for daily worship. But the sadhaka found that even after some months of meticulous worship, he did not get any spiritual reward or elation. So, he reported his dissatisfaction, and the guru gave him another idol, this time of Shiva, and asked him to have another try. The disciple came after another six months, demanding another idol, because even Shiva had failed him.

This time, he got a Durga idol, which he duly installed in his domestic shrine. The two previous idols were standing, dust-ridden and neglected, on the windowsill. One day, while he was performing Durga-puja (ritual worship of the Goddess Durga), the disciple noticed that the perfumed smoke from the incense-stick was being wafted by the breeze toward the idol of Shiva on the windowsill.

He became incensed at the idea that the ungrateful, stone-hearted God, who had been deaf to his powerful entreaties, should enjoy the perfume intended for his latest idol! So, he took a piece of cloth and tied it round the face of Shiva, blocking its nostrils so it could not inhale the perfume.

Just at that moment, to his immense surprise, Shiva appeared in all his splendor and glory before him. The man was dumbfounded and wondered how his ill-treatment had induced the Lord to give him darshan.

What had happened, really? The seeker for the first time had treated the Shiva idol as alive, conscious, chaitanya-full (full of awareness); it was this belief that induced him to tie the bandage over the nose. The moment he felt that the idol was full of chith (consciousness), he attained the realization he had been struggling for.

Therefore, the spiritual seeker should see not the stone that is the material stuff of the idol, but the power that is inherent in it, that is, symbolized by it—the same divine power that is inherent in his own heart and that pervades and transcends all creation.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

SSS 2:5, April 6, 1961

Idols and Omnipresence

Understand the Atmic Principle

There is an atomic particle subtler than the atom. There is something vaster than the vastest you can imagine. The atom is in the immense, and the immense is in the atom. The Atma is in the atom as spirit. (TELUGU POEM)

The entire phenomenal universe is a manifestation of the atom. The water you drink, the air you breathe, and the sounds you hear are all composed of atoms. The five basic elements (space, air, water, fire, and earth) are all made up of atoms and pervade the universe. The cosmos is the embodiment of the five elements. For this reason, the ancients regarded the universe as a manifestation of God.

Long before men started exploring the secrets of the atom and the nature of atomic energy, even before scientists began to understand the nature of spirituality, Bharatiyas (Indians) worshiped the earth as divine. Because the five elements were present on the earth, they adored the earth as Bhu-devi, the earth goddess. Moreover, they worshiped water as Ganga-devi, recognizing the divine element in water. The fire god was next. The fourth was Vayu-deva, lord of the wind. The fifth was Shabdha-Brahman, the Divine as primal sound. Thus, all the five elements were considered manifestations of the Divine and

worshiped as such by the Bharatiyas. Outsiders who did not understand the profound significance of the worship of the elements, treated them with levity.

Worship of Forms or Idols

Every atom has a form. There is no object in the universe without a form. The form is *vigraha* (an expression of the divine form).

Members of other faiths considered idol worship as irrational. They ridiculed idol worship as a form of superstition, but they made no attempt to explain the worship of the formless.

People can learn about all objects only in relation to their form. People could not conceive of God, who is in every object and every individual, as omnipresent. Some were able to conceive that the atom is present in every object and everywhere. It was only in the 17th century that atomic physics came into existence.

But long before this, the child Prahlada realized the omnipresence of the Divine. He told his father, "Do not have any doubts that the Divine is present here and not there. He is omnipresent. You can find Him wherever you seek Him." What Prahlada declared millennia ago, the scientists of today are

discovering, namely, that the energy present in the all-pervading atom is divine.

I point my finger at the microphone and tell you, "This is a mike." After you have seen the mike, you don't need the finger to point it out. I point to a flower and say, "This is a flower."

After you have seen the flower, there is no need for the finger to point it out. Likewise, idols are used to point out God. Until God-realization comes, idols are essential. After God-realization, there is no need for idols.



*I point to a flower and say,
"This is a flower." After you
have seen the flower, there is no
need for the finger to point to it.
Likewise, idols are used to point
out God.*

Why Worship Idols?

If a girl before her marriage is asked to describe her future husband, how can she do so? She can describe the husband only after the marriage. Likewise, after worshiping an idol and gaining the experience of divinity by such worship, one will be able to describe one's experience of God. Before worshiping God and gaining spiritual experience, how can anyone say anything about the nature of the Divine? Thus, it is necessary to develop faith in idol worship. It should be realized that every object is a manifestation of God. Every atom is divine.

Faith in the National Flag

Some people ask whether it is not foolish to worship an inanimate, unconscious figure

as God. This question is born of ignorance. Today 900 million Bharatiyas hoist the national flag and revere it. Before the flag could attain this status, many sacrificed their all for the freedom of the country. Many suffered long terms of imprisonment.

They went through all this suffering so that they could have their own flag in a free country. On August 15 and January 26, the national flag is hoisted all over the country and revered as a symbol of national freedom. In the same manner, people

in other countries revere their respective national flags. Moreover, people respect even their party flags.

Is this flag alive? Has it any vitality or power? When you inquire like this, you discover that it is faith in the flag that makes it adorable. Likewise, if one asks whether a stone idol that is worshiped has any life or consciousness in it, one may find the answer from the example of the honor done to the national flag.

How does a square yard of cotton cloth made into a flag acquire its value? The value is derived from the fact that the flag is a symbol of the victory achieved in the freedom struggle. That victory has no form, but the flag demonstrates the achievement of the victory. Without the flag, how can one demonstrate the victory in the freedom struggle?

Take another example, a 100-rupee note. It is lifeless. But you take good care of it because it represents wealth. All people seek wealth. Money as such has no qualities such as goodness. But the possessor of money has qualities. Money is a symbol of power. The fragrance emanating from a flower has no form, but the flower has a form. Love has no form. But the mother who exhibits love for her child has a form. If there is no mother, how can there be love?

Every Form Deserves to Be Worshipped

Idols that are worshiped are the answers to those who go about asking, “Where is God?” The truth is, God is present in every atom. Every atom represents the power of the Divine. Every atom deserves to be worshiped. All objects in creation have to be respected. Men must cultivate this feeling of reverence for all things.

But, believing that the physical body is permanent and the all-in-all, men waste their lives in pursuit of the ephemeral and the transient. There can be no action without the body. Without action there can be no fruits of action. Thus, the body is at the base of everything. The body is a *vigraha* (embodied form). The mother is a form. The preceptor is a form. All are forms.

The term *vigraha* also means an idol that is an object of worship. But these *vigrahas* have a certain value, because through them we can realize the Divine. In this world, it is impossible to conceive any kind of worship without a form. Worship of the formless is misconceived. Only misguided persons

preach against idol worship. In every religion there is a distinct form for worship.

The Power of Attraction

As another example, take nature (*prakriti*). Nature has the power of attraction. It contains all the five elements. We get our food from nature. Nature is the source of all minerals and the sustainer of man in ordinary life. This being the case, what is wrong in adoring nature? Should we not be grateful to that which provides so many things for our needs? That gratitude is a form of worship. Every man is composed of the five elements. Man cannot exist without these elements. Is there no obligation to express one’s gratitude to them?

Nature has the power of attraction. This is called magnetism. Nature has immense magnetic power. Every object is affected by this magnetic power. The object also gets magnetized in the process and acquires magnetic power. Today scientists are trying to understand this power of attraction in nature.

Consider a temple. Thousands of people go to the temple for worship. The magnetic power in the earth extends to the idol in the sanctum. The thoughts of the worshipers are also focused on the idol. Thereby the power of attraction in the idol gets intensified. The rituals performed for the idol also enhance its power of attraction.

This process can be noticed if a couple of nails are placed near a magnet. After two days it will be found that the nails also have been magnetized. In the same manner, when

worshippers go to a temple, where power emanates from thousands of worshipers, the power of attraction in the idol gets immensely intensified. The idol surcharged with this power energizes the worshipers.

Thus, in the world there is no object without this power.

Atomic energy is present everywhere. It is only when the true character of this atomic power is understood that the power of the Divine can also be understood.

[Shiva's] name, *Shankara*, is made up of the two words, *Sham* and *kara*. What does *Sham* mean? *Sham* is that which is all-pervading, like air. The air is filled with bliss. *Shankara* is one who offers his bliss to all. *Nityananda* (everlasting bliss), *brahmananda* (supreme bliss), and every kind of bliss is conferred by *Shankara*.

"Eashwara," the Embodiment of Wealth

Shiva is also called *Eashwara*, meaning the embodiment of *aishvarya* (every form of wealth and prosperity). *Aishvarya* is not confined to material wealth alone. It includes also the wealth of health, intelligence, and physical prowess. *Aishvarya* represents this omnibus opulence, including *ananda* (bliss). *Eashwara* is one who confers every kind of opulence. What is the form of this *ananda*? Experience alone is the form of this bliss.

This bliss can be experienced only by God-realization and not by any other means. Bliss is all-pervading but invisible. Its existence cannot be denied for that reason.

Eashwarathva (divinity) is all-pervading. By losing faith in the Divine, turning

into unbelievers, and moving away from bliss, men become prey to worry. This is totally wrong. A life without faith is like water poured through a sieve. Bliss must be secured through faith. The Divine is omnipresent. All of you are forms of the

Divine. All of you are endowed with electromagnetic energy, atomic power, heat, and other forms of energy. Magnetic energy is the most important power in man. From this magnetic energy comes electrical energy.

The strength of electrical energy is related to the strength of magnetic energy. When electrical and magnetic energies come together, divine power operates. This divine power does not come from outside. It is within human beings. Our very form is divine. That is why I address you all as Embodiments of the Divine Atma.

By failing to recognize this truth, people search for God here and there. God is everywhere. Make every effort to recognize this fundamental truth.



Idol worship should not be regarded as a meaningless exercise. It is a good practice, because from the basis of the idol, higher consciousness is attained.

Meaning of “the Search for Truth”

People talk about *sathya-anveshana* (searching for truth). What is this search? Truth is everywhere. Consider this example. Your eyes see the mother, the child, the wife, the cook, and the daughter-in-law. The eyes are the same, but they see different persons, each with different feelings. The search for truth means seeing everything in its own true, specific nature. All the persons may be feminine, and the eyes that see them are one and the same. But to find out the truth, one has to determine how each person should be viewed in relation to that person’s state.

Consider, also, the role of the tongue. The same tongue may either indulge in falsehood or stand for truth. The same tongue may revile others or praise them. The tongue’s role in the quest for truth is to determine whether to utter a lie or speak the truth, or whether blame or praise is justified.

Truth resides in you. It is the appropriate application to specific objects that determines what is true. Hence, if you want to discover the Divine, who is omnipresent, you must experience a change in perception within you. When you realize your own inherent divinity, you will be able to recognize the divinity in others.

Significance of Idol Worship

Idol worship should not be regarded as a meaningless exercise. It is a good practice, because from the basis of the idol, higher consciousness is attained. In a home, one finds pictures of grandparents and great-grandparents. The present generation has

not seen them, but they offer garlands to the pictures and revere the ancestors. Do the pictures have life? Do they exhibit any love? Do the pictures by themselves reveal any relationship? Not at all. But the pictures are revered out of the feeling that they represent one’s ancestors. If such a loving feeling did not exist, the pictures would not be kept in the house.

Likewise, it is the attachment for an object that inspires respect and reverence. This is called devotion. This devotion should be shown toward all objects, because the Divine is in everything, in every atom. It may be difficult to cultivate such devotion, but once its rationale is properly understood, the practice of devotion will become easy.

There have been controversies and doubts about this in the past. For instance, a school of philosophers known as the Charvakas (atheists/materialists) used to deride idol worship. But later on, they came to recognize its value. They realized that everything in the world has a form, from the atom onward, and that everything with a form was a *vigraha* (idol) fit for worship.

How the Formless Acquires Form

What is the form of water? Here in this tumbler is some water, and its form is derived from the tumbler. Likewise, air acquires the form of the balloon in which it is confined. Similarly, when the body is filled with divine energy, the Divine acquires the human form.

The all-pervading Divine thus acquires the form in which it manifests itself. Perform

your worship to the Divine with awareness of the truth that the Divine is omnipresent and is therefore in the idol that is worshiped. Then you are bound to have a vision of the Divine.

The truth about the omnipresence of the Divine was evident to the Gopikas (cowherd maidens devoted to Krishna), who sang in praise of their Lord:

O Krishna! How can anyone know your mystery? You are subtler than the atom and vaster than the vastest thing in the world! You are present in the myriad of beings in this vast universe, in innumerable forms. How can we ever know you? You are a thief among thieves, a good man among the good. You manifest the qualities of the object in which you dwell. You are everything.

Infinite Forms of the Lord

Those who have studied the Vibhuti Yoga chapter (Chapter 10) in the Bhagavad Gita will know the infinity of forms that the Lord assumes. All forms are his. If one has faith that the Lord is present in the atom, one will have a vision of the Lord, even in the atom. But if you make distinctions between different objects, treating some as pure and others as impure, you will not get that vision. Until the realization dawns inside one's consciousness that everything is permeated by God, one must worship an idol as a sacred symbol.

A sculptor creates an idol out of a rock. Because of the form given to it, it is installed in a temple and worshiped. In fashioning the

idol, the sculptor chisels away many chips of stone. The chips may proclaim verily their kinship with the idol worshiped in the temple. They may say, "You and we are one. The only difference is, you have a form and we have none." Thus, the Divine exists both in the form and in the "formless."

It is because this concept of the universe is not understood that faith has declined. Faith is at the root of spirituality. If you believe that God exists, he exists. If you have no belief, as far as you are concerned, God does not exist.

When you believe in God, you develop faith in the divinity of all things. Faith is the basis of worship. Worship leads to oneness with the Divine. The sense of separateness will persist as long as there is no God-realization. Separateness ends with realization.

Unity of Science and Vedanta

Scientists are beginning to realize the basic unity of the energy that fills the universe. Vedanta describes that unity as *Brahman* (the supreme, all-pervading, Absolute Consciousness). The terms used may differ, but in substance they are saying the same thing—namely, that the One subsumes the many.

With regard to Divinity, there is no meaning in making a distinction between the Divine with form and the formless Divinity. How can you conceive of the formless Divine? You cannot avoid idol worship until you have experience of the Divine within you. Ramakrishna Paramahansa once asked a disciple—who had inquired why he (the

disciple) was not able to see God—whether he yearned for God with the same intensity with which the disciple sought many worldly things. If he did so, he would certainly have a vision of God. When a similar question was put to the Buddha, he answered that without indulging in speculation about God, if one practiced truth, righteousness, and nonviolence, he would have the highest experience.

The Ways of Swami

Many people who have some questions regarding Swami do not realize the ways of the Divine. They look at all things from the worldly point of view. They should look at things from the divine point of view. Change the angle of your vision. When you practice seeing the world from the point of view of the omnipresence of the Divine, you will get transformed. You will experience the power of the Divine in everything in creation.

You cannot hide anything from God. Many imagine that Swami does not see what they are doing. They do not realize that

Swami has myriad eyes. Even your eyes are divine. But you are not aware of your true nature.

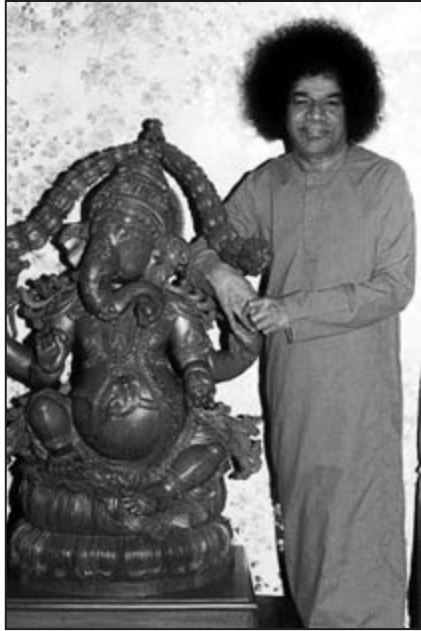
When you have faith in yourself, you will have faith in God. Realize that there is nothing

beyond the power of God. Love God with that supreme faith. Then you will be drawn toward God. This requires purity. A magnet cannot attract a piece of iron that is covered with rust. Similarly, God will not attract an impure person. Hence, change your feelings and thoughts and develop the conviction that God is everything. God will not give you up when you have this conviction.

Today is Shivaratri, the night of auspiciousness, an occasion for cherishing auspicious thoughts and praying for auspicious action and conduct in life. You must get rid of narrow and petty feelings.

People today have lost the spirit of sacrifice. Three things are essential for every person: love

of one's country, sacrifice, and following the godly path of spirituality. One is a true



*When you have faith in yourself,
you will have faith in God.
Realize that there is nothing
beyond the power of God. Love
God with that supreme faith.
Then you will be drawn toward
God.*

(Continued on page 32)



Lessons from God

Perceive God in All Creation

I run an aircraft maintenance hangar and a flying school at Biggin Hill Airport, UK, with my two sons and Ashley, our Chief Engineer. We fly Cessna and Piper aircraft.

One day I was walking into our hangar, carrying out Gayatri mantra discipline—of chanting the Gayatri mantra a few thousand times a day, even while working. As I reached my office, outside it right in front of me was the largest beetle I have ever seen—ugly, dead, and large. I am terrified of beetles. I closed my eyes and kicked it aside, thinking that I would ask one of my staff to throw it out later. Then, with the demands of work, I forgot all about this beetle.

A couple of hours later I lit an incense stick. We have an altar to all the divine beings—Ganesh, Jesus, Guru Nanak, Amma (the hugging saint), Sai Baba, Buddha, Allah, and so on—a small shrine in our hangar. We have maybe 15 staff members, and we light incense and do prayers in the hangar many times a day. Anyway, I said, “God, thank you for allowing our aircraft to be safe and for our pilots to train safely, and thank you for looking after us. God, I love you.”

Suddenly Sai Baba appeared, waved his hand, and the wall in front of me at once became a huge TV screen, and on the screen I saw myself walking into the hangar. Baba then said, “Amarjit, you don’t love God; you live in pretense.”

“What’s wrong with you, Baba,” I said, “I love God! Look at the TV screen. I am chanting the Gayatri mantra prayers as I am walking.”

Then Baba said, “Look, Amarjit, you have just kicked me.” (The screen showed me kicking the beetle.)

“The beetle is not you, Baba! What is wrong with you!”

“It was God you kicked, Amarjit,” said Baba.

I blurted out, “But the beetle is dead; it’s lifeless—it has no life in it.”

Baba then said, “Amarjit, **lip service to God is no service at all**. You might as well not chant any prayers if your consciousness does not perceive God in all you do and see.

“Your next lesson is to perceive and see God in everything you do and see. I am in the chair you sit on. I am in the incense stick you are lighting. I am in your aircraft, in your staff, and in your clients.

“Whatever wrong you do, anywhere, I feel it instantly. I am in the floor you are standing on. I am everywhere. I am the air you breathe. I am the totality of creation.

“This is your next lesson in learning to merge with God. Raise your compassion to see God in all.” Saying this, Baba dematerialized, leaving me to ponder and think hard.

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things . . .” (Holy Bible: Acts 17:24-25)

In June 2003 I was flying our Piper Seneca G-BBLU twin-engine aircraft on a test flight with another pilot, Julian. We departed from Biggin Hill Airport, Kent, and during the test flight, the undercarriage or landing gear failed to extend or rotate down. This meant we would have to land without wheels, which could be disastrous. We were flying above Maidstone, about 20 miles east of Biggin.

We flew back to Biggin and from 2,000 feet overhead contacted the airport. They asked if we wished to declare a problem, as they could confirm using binoculars that our wheels were not down.

We said no. We tried again to extend the wheels; again they failed to lower. We jiggled the aircraft this way and that—still no wheels.

Julian, my pilot, said, “Singh, we have two choices: (1) We land and crash and hope for the best, or (2) we ask Sai Baba (he knows about Baba from our altar in the hangar), but what can he do? This is a mechanical failure.”

I said, “Okay, we will ask Babaji, but only if we both ask together.”

So we prayed, “Dear Baba, Dear God, please help us. The undercarriage will not lower, even on emergency extension. Please lower it so we don’t get hurt.”

Suddenly, a voice boomed in the cockpit, “Amarjit, you are both so worried about not hurting yourselves; what about the aircraft, the ground, the air, and any other lives that may be hurt—and what about the trauma the very air, the five elements of creation, will sustain in the crash? How can you be so selfish and think only about yourselves?”

We understood his message straight away and said, “Dear Babaji, please extend the undercarriage; we do not want anything else to get hurt—



the aircraft, the ground, any insects on the ground, or anything else. Please allow us to land safely.”

As soon as we said this, the wheels/undercarriage came straight down on their own accord and locked. The instrument panel showed three green lights, and we landed safe and sound. On later inspection, we found that the aluminum pipe for the wheels/hydraulic fluid had burst due to corrosion, and there was no way apart from divine intervention that the undercarriage could have extended, as even the emergency extender had failed.

We then thanked Sai Baba and the angels.

October 22, 2005, was a lovely warm day, and I was very excited, driving to have darshan with “Amma” (Amritananda Mayi). I was nearly at her hall when the mobile rang and the airport security officer informed me, “Your aircraft has crashed.” I drove back to the airport in turmoil.

She (G-BYLE, a Piper Tomahawk single-engine plane) was one of our flying school aircraft and had crashed, killing the two pilots shortly after takeoff from Biggin Hill Airport, Kent. We had just employed the instructor, who was an old friend. It was his first day at work, and in his preflight checks he had forgotten to check the fuel for water contamination. It had rained heavily for a week prior, and with condensation, water had collected in the tanks, and the engine had stopped upon takeoff.

I was praying and asking for forgiveness for the deaths of the pilots in our plane, when I heard Sai Baba’s voice saying, “Amarjit, you are crying only for the two pilots who died. What about the countless insects that die when you are driving your car?” He showed me a scene wherein I was driving and insects were hitting the car, with many of them being killed. “Why are you not mourning for them as well? Is your heart so lifeless that you do not perceive God in all creation?”

He then said, “Amarjit, your heart must always be a temple for the Divine. How can you know your inner God if you do not perceive God in any part of creation, be it inert or living. I am the totality of creation. See me in everything you touch, see, or do; I am in all. I am the chair you are sitting on; I am the pen you are holding. Learn to walk like the gods while treading on God’s creation. Learn to breathe in like the gods the air and all particles living or inert in the air, which will sanctify and purify what you breathe. Every particle of creation has the same soul/spark of divinity as the human body.”

*I am the totality of creation.
I have come to raise your compassion;
this is your next level.*

—**Amarjit Singh Bamrah**
Kent, UK

Gas Mask Grace

Take a Mindful Step toward Swami

When I was in U.S. Army basic training (boot camp) in 1963, we were trained in the use of gas masks. First the sergeants gave us hands-on instruction in wearing the mask. Then we were placed in a gas-filled room, where they had us remove the mask briefly, for a brief experience of tear gas.

Later, as the platoon waited in formation to be led to the next activity, the drill sergeants surprised us by dropping several canisters of tear gas without warning. Pandemonium and chaos reigned as trainees struggled and jostled to don their masks. Trainees ran pell-mell in all directions, trying to escape the searing gas. Some fell to the ground, suffering the effects.

I happened to be in a position where I could see the canisters, the sergeants, and the wind direction. Because the sergeants were upwind from the gas, they wore no masks—and they were laughing heartily. I realized that all I had to do was step to the upwind side of the canisters and then put on the mask. (Despite the sergeants not wearing their masks, I, as a trainee, still had to put on mine.)

Though this took place over 45 years ago, the memory returned to me recently in meditation. I believe the incident highlights how Swami is always standing by my side—calm, loving, in control—maybe even

laughing. Yet most of the time I do not even remember or acknowledge that he is there. Shucks, I'm lucky even to be able to have these thoughts.

Usually, though, my mental habits encourage me to believe that I need to view life's events and situations with a feeling of panic, anxiety, or urgency. Those emotions lead to action, and I am off and running. . . .

On the other hand, if I so choose, I can take a step toward Swami and imagine myself at his side. I always want to feel him as real—as *really standing there*—instead of me merely imagining it. It's the same with repeating his name; all too often I say it, and it feels rote, hollow, insincere.

But something in me keeps me trying to make the effort. Is it my Atma? I think what keeps me trying are the moments when he is real to me. These moments leap vividly into the present, when I remember them, like embers in my heart bursting into fire.

I cannot say that I relished boot camp. I am surprised and grateful, however, to have harvested such a wonderful lesson.

—**Carl Hirsch**

Clayfield, Rhode Island

I Forever Wonder, Why Me?

This experience is so precious and personal that I have not shared it with many people, save those I thought would understand. Whenever I do, tears well up within me because I feel so undeserving of the miracle Swami performed. But even more than that—that he thought I was deserving of his one-on-one presence in the dream (what else can I call it but a dream?).

I have to begin at the beginning, before I ever heard of Swami. In 1954, when I was 27 years old, married, and living in Connecticut with two children under the age of three, I contracted polio. From that time until 1982, I suffered daily with the continuous shrinking of the gastrocnemius muscle in the calf of my polio leg, i.e., terrible cramping.

It was after we moved to Arizona and somehow heard of Swami that this miracle happened. By the time we landed in Arizona in 1970, we had lived in four other states and had three more children.

The Miracle:

Prior to going to bed on July 18, 1982, I was praying to Baba, asking him to take the pain that my mother, who lived in New York, was experiencing from arthritis, and to give it to me. I distinctively said to Baba, “I know what pain is like, and I don’t want to see her suffer.” Then, realizing what I had said, but

meaning it in my heart, I backed off, asking, “No, I don’t think I could handle any more pain; forget what I said.”

Upon falling asleep that evening, I was visited by Swami. He walked through my open bedroom door, stood at my left side dressed in his orange gown, and rubbed my polio leg, just like one would pet a kitty cat.

When I awoke in the morning, I instinctively stretched out my arms and legs—something I could not ever do without the immediate cramping. Only then did I remember Baba being there by my bedside. I had slept through the whole night without getting out of bed, as usual, to straighten out the horrendous cramping that I had lived with for 38 years.

I turned to my husband Tom (who was sound asleep) and said, “Guess who was here last night?”

My leg is still skinny with the muscle loss, but all pain and cramping have been gone since that night.

I was shocked to be pain free, but more so, humbled, deeply humbled that Baba came to me. I never asked anything for myself. All I ever desired was to be a good devotee. He has spoiled me, and I forever wonder, why me?

—Winifred Bolton
Mt. Angel, Oregon

My First Year with Swami

It was the wake up call of a lifetime, received in mid-February of 2008. At around 3:45 a.m., I was awakened by a Voice so powerful that it pulled me from a dead sleep. I jumped straight up from bed and began checking on my husband and children, thinking perhaps one of them had called my name. It wasn't my husband, and I didn't believe it was either of my children, because my son had just turned two years old and my daughter wouldn't call me by my full first name. No, this was a masculine but graceful voice...and it wasn't *Lil* or *Lilly*, it was *Liliana*. It was more like the call you would hear when you were a child and your father was trying to wake you up.

Days before the wake-up Voice called me, I had been in a very emotional state, overwhelmed by problems. One night while sitting on the sofa in our living room, my feelings of sadness were so strong that I felt I couldn't bear the pain any longer. I was at a breaking point. In desperation I called out to God for help. While I was sitting there, I noticed a translucent figure hovering benignly in the dining room. The figure reflected the color orange. To be honest, I wasn't threatened by it, but at the same time I was so upset that I didn't really care to figure out who or what it was. All I knew was that

I could see it from time to time out of the corner of my eye.

During this time of turmoil, my mother-in-law, Susan, had been in India, visiting Sri Sathya Sai Baba, whom she had followed for over twelve years. When Mother Susan came back from Puttaparthi, she spontaneously and without direct knowledge of what had been happening with me, drove from Maryland one morning to surprise us.

I look back now and realize it was Swami working through her, directing her, to help me get out of the web of *maya* (worldly illusion) that I had spun around myself. While I had known she was a Sai Baba devotee for many years, I had never wanted to learn any more about him.

Susan stayed for the night, and we talked a long time. She gave me love, support, and understanding, all without once mentioning Baba. The next morning, after she had left, I was thinking about the recent events, when suddenly a realization hit me with an electric shock that went straight through the heart. I said aloud, "It's you, Sai Baba! You've been watching over me!" I wept like a baby as the enormous realization sank in.

That day, I surrendered my heart to him and began my love journey with Sathya Sai Baba.

Swami graced me with a constant connection to him within a short period of time. One of the ways he communicates with me is when I look up to the sky. Swami has shown me many signs, including single and double rainbows, across and through clouds, around the sun, and contained in odd shapes where one would not normally see a rainbow. All the signs I witness in the sky continually remind me that he is with me, with all of us.

On November 23, 2008, Swami's 83rd birthday, I awoke full of energy, and my first thought was to wish Swami a happy birthday. I hurried downstairs to say my morning prayer to him while lighting incense. For the next 45 minutes, I cleaned the house, all the while singing *bhajans* (devotional hymns). My mom stopped by, and we talked for a few minutes until I happened to look out the back window and saw something float by. I went to the sliding glass door and saw a half-inflated helium balloon, which had landed on the deck floor. In front of the door, facing me, sat the balloon, with the words, *I Love You*. (See picture.)



I know Swami is omniscient and omnipresent. I've learned that he gives all of us signs, in many different ways that are meaningful to each one of us. As he's said, "Life is a game, play it." We just have to pay attention and look for the game's clues and signs.

I was overjoyed, because I knew this was directly from Swami. I took a photo and sent it to Mother Susan, with whom I share all of my Baba experiences. We spoke later on the phone and marveled at how Swami used an ordinary object, such as a balloon descending from the sky, to convey his message of love to me. Without the awareness of Swami's omnipotence, one might wonder why the balloon landed and stayed at my house instead of blowing to a nearby neighbor, when it was a day filled with high winds? Must be luck. Or why this particular message, of all the many messages that one could receive on a balloon? Must be a coincidence.

This year, I've learned from Swami to no longer take anything for granted that comes my way. I look at life daily with a new, fresh awareness and see signs of him because I know Swami is omniscient and omnipresent. I've learned that he gives all of us signs, in many different ways that are meaningful to each one of us. As he's said, "Life is a game, play it." We just have to pay attention and look for the game's clues and signs.

To handle the ups and downs of life, I now study Swami's teachings, spend time daily in *sadhana* (spiritual discipline), practice equanimity, stay focused on love, and avoid living in the painful past or worrying about the future. Not a day goes by when I don't think to myself how incredibly fortunate I am to know of him. Thinking of Swami and the many blessings I have received never fails to bring tears to my eyes.

It was almost a year since I had been awakened by that Voice. With Sai's boundless grace, on January 1, 2009, I, along with Mother Susan and a few family members, were part of a group ushering in the New Year by sitting in the Sai Kulwant Hall, happily awaiting the divine darshan of our Lord, Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

—Liliana Waugaman
Woodbridge, New Jersey

Ninth Sri Sathya Sai World Conference, Pre-Conferences, and Pilgrimages

The Ninth Sri Sathya Sai World Conference will be held in conjunction with Swami's 85th Birthday celebrations in November 2010. The theme of the conference is "Sai Ideal Human Life."

This world conference will be preceded by conferences in each of the nine zones of the Sai Organization. Drs. Michael Goldstein and Narendra Reddy will participate in all nine of these conferences. Sai devotees in the US are invited to attend the conference to be held in Orlando, Florida, April 17-18, 2010.

As part of the events leading up to Swami's 85th Birthday, Sai Organizations throughout the world are planning pilgrimages to Prasanthi Nilayam. Two USA pilgrimages are planned for this summer: June 23-July 2 and July 5-14, and we expect well over 1,000 devotees on each of them. The goal of the pilgrimages and our spiritual practices leading up to them are to deepen our understanding of Swami's teachings, to understand more about the Sai Ideal Human Life. To that end, optional readings, study circles, and other activities are being prepared for all devotees, not just those going on the pilgrimage. Also, these pilgrimages will prepare cultural programs that reflect the American culture and heritage and are expected to include a combined USA choir and orchestra.

Information about the April 17-18 conference and pilgrimages will be distributed in January and will be posted on the USA Sai Organization website, us.sathyasai.org.

—David Gries, Chair, Zone 1 (Canada, West Indies, US),
for the US Sai Organization Conference-Pilgrimage Committee

(Continued from page 23)

human being only when he has these three qualities. To know is the function of the mind. To act is the duty of the body. To remain as the Eternal Witness is the function of the Atma. Mind, body, and Atma together constitute humanness. The Divine is present in all three.

God has provided everything for man's good in the world. But there is one condition that has to be observed. The results of your actions will be according to their nature, whether they are good or bad. Men today want to reap the fruits of good deeds without performing good deeds. This is impossible. Nor can they escape the consequences of their evil actions. God is only a witness.

At least from now on, develop good thoughts, do good actions, and redeem your lives. You have to start with the *karma marga* (path of action), and end with the

jnana marga (path of wisdom). In between is the *upasana marga* (path of worship). This is the path you must follow today. For this, you have to get the conviction that God is omnipresent.

When you have that conviction, you will not indulge in falsehood or practice deception, you will not abuse others or cause them harm, and you will acquire all virtues. This is the purpose of observing Shivaratri as a sacred night. The nightlong vigil should be dedicated entirely to contemplation of God.

Develop the firm conviction that God is within you and that you are divine. Love is God and God is Love. Live in love, and make your entire life a saga of love.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

SSS 28:4, Feb. 27, 1995, Shivaratri Night

This year's Mahashivaratri festival
will be observed on Feb. 10, 2010.

A LITTLE HASSIDIC STORY

Rabbi Zusya of Hanipol said, "My mother Mirl did not pray from a book because she could not read. All she knew was how to say the various blessings. But wherever she was when she said the morning blessings, that place radiated God's presence the whole day."

—Traditional (Judaism)



Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Committee

Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Conference Summary

Anaheim, California, USA, October 10-11, 2009

Under the guidance and with the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Conference took place in Anaheim, California, USA, on October 10–11, 2009. The theme of the conference was “Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare and the Sathya Sai Global Health Mission.” This Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Conference was unique in that it took place in the USA and not in Prasanthi Nilayam; nevertheless, Bhagavan provided guidance from its very inception and blessed the program in countless ways.

Preparations for the conference took place over several months, culminating in the arrival of about 400 health care professionals from all continents of the world and many countries, including the USA, Canada, UK, El Salvador, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil, Peru, India, Venezuela, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand, Russia, Colombia, Trinidad, Guatemala, Panama, Switzerland, and Nigeria. A large contingent of delegates consisted of young physicians eager to participate in the Sathya Sai Global Health Mission and practice Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare.

Each delegate was welcomed and cared for lovingly, from online registration to departure. This included transportation to and from the airport, accommodations, and meals. The speakers for the conference hailed from various countries and were all highly accomplished in their respective fields of medicine—some as heads of departments at prestigious universities, and others with extensive histories in research and publishing. All the speakers have been involved in the Sathya Sai Global Health Mission for several years, and being part of this selfless service movement has helped them to practice Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare.

The conference had three main parts: talks by distinguished speakers addressing the conference theme, workshop sessions in which delegates were given the opportunity to participate, and a medical exhibition highlighting activities worldwide related to the conference theme.

The conference began Saturday morning with a soulful rendition of “Amazing Grace” by Mrs. Berniece Mead, followed by a welcome address by Dr. Michael Goldstein, stressing the importance of Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare in treatment and prevention of disease and

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delivery of free healthcare with love and compassion.

Dr. Narendranath Reddy then stated the principles of Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare, based on the Divine Messages of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba as given to health care professionals over the last five decades. He also summarized the Sathya Sai Global Health Mission and gave an overview of the conference. Following this, delegates viewed a short video, “Healing with Love,” depicting some of the medical activities undertaken by the Sathya Sai Organization around the world.

Dr. Michael Rakoff and Dr. Choudary Voleti then presented an overview of the Sri Sathya Sai medical institutions in India, where universal, comprehensive, free, state-of-the-art healthcare is provided with love and compassion to all, setting an example and standard for the practice of ideal healthcare elsewhere in the world.

Practicing Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare begins with an inculcation of strong ethical values early in doctors’ careers, a principle

that was eloquently presented by Dr. Alan Gradman and Dr. Anil Nanda. Dr. Gradman emphasized that moral education should be part of the curricula in medical colleges, and Dr. Nanda related how the incorporation of human values and faith in the Divine has resulted in better patient outcomes in his neurosurgical practice.

Bhagavan has stressed the importance of prevention in disease management. In this regard, insightful presentations were given by Dr. Rhoda Nussbaum on cancer detection and prevention, Mr. Kalyan Ray on malaria prevention, and Dr. Ramachandiran Cooppan on prevention of obesity and diabetes, followed by a workshop on preventive healthcare.

Subsequently, a Youth Forum took place, to discuss how young physicians can become more active members of the Sathya Sai Global Health Mission, beginning with service in their own communities. This Youth Forum, attended by over 70 young physicians, proved to be very productive, and the participants were inspired to incorporate Swami’s ideals

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of love and compassion in their interactions with patients.

The Saturday afternoon session opened with an inspiring talk by Dr. Valluvan Jeevanandam on self-transformation through the practice of ideal healthcare. He related incidents of sharing Sai's love, not only with his patients but also with his peers and subordinates, which have given him much joy and peace.

Next, reports on medical camps and permanent medical clinics undertaken in North America, Central America, and South America under the guidance of Sri Sathya Sai Baba were presented by Dr. Joe Phaneuf (USA), Dr. Jorge Berra (South America), and Dr. Héctor Castañeda (Central America). Dr. Geetha Kamath and Dr. Chandra Varadachari gave short presentations on guidelines for conducting free medical camps and clinics.

The Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Committee arranges for speedy and compassionate delivery of medical care throughout the world to victims of natural disasters such as

floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, fires, and hurricanes. The nature of such events and timely delivery of medical care were discussed in a workshop after presentations on disaster relief by Dr. Hari Conjeevaram (USA) and Dr. V. K. Ravindran (Malaysia). Dr. Jaya Aysola, a young physician, related a touching story about loving service rendered during the Katrina hurricane disaster in USA.

On Saturday evening, all delegates were welcomed to a magnificent dinner, during which many erudite speakers shared personal experiences of implementing Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare in their medical practices.

The next day began with a heartfelt musical performance by the Sathya Sai Choir of the USA (based in Southern California), who received a standing ovation for their excellent music.

The Sunday sessions then commenced with talks by Dr. Samuel Sandweiss (USA) and Dr. Venkatraman Sadanand (Canada), who stressed the significance of including the body,

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mind, and spirit of the patient in a complete treatment plan. Bhagavan has repeatedly stated that physicians must give comprehensive treatment and not neglect the mental and spiritual health of their patients.

The next session, presented by Dr. Surendra Upadhyay (UK) and Dr. Kathirvelpillai Nadanachandran (Australia), described medical camps and clinics that have taken place in the UK, Europe, Russia, Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, and Asia.

The final session of the conference, “Vision for the Future,” began with “The Future of Ideal Healthcare,” wherein young physicians summarized what they had learned in the conference and how they planned on implementing these ideals in their daily practice. The young physicians voiced their eagerness to learn and seek guidance from Bhagavan and their elders on how to practice ideal healthcare, and to take a more active part in the Sathya Sai Global Health Mission.

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s Ideal Healthcare has not only been delivered in

person to people all over the world, but has also addressed the needs of patients in distant villages where Sathya Sai physicians could not be present physically or regularly. This has been achieved using state-of-the-art technology for “tele-health” and telemedicine. It was inspiring to hear about these projects from Dr. Vijaya Chundi (USA), who described how the Sathya Sai medical institutions in India provide medical services to villagers in the remote areas of West Bengal and Orissa. Dr. Chundi showed a video illustrating this service and presented how the technology helps the physicians and postgraduate students in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS)—Bhagavan’s super-specialty hospitals—to take part in teaching and continuing medical education (CME) programs in conjunction with experts from the USA and UK.

Dr. Krishnamurthi Narasimhan (India) gave an inspiring presentation on the Sri Sathya Sai Mobile Hospital and how it provides free, diagnostic, therapeutic, preventive, and follow-

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up medical services to poor villagers at their doorstep. This model could be emulated in other countries where shortages of physicians and medical facilities exist. A brief movie on the Sri Sathya Sai Mobile Hospital touched the hearts of all the delegates.

This was followed by a panel discussion led by Dr. Michael Goldstein, Dr. Narendranath Reddy, Dr. Krishnamurthi Narasimhan, Dr. Jorge Berra, Dr. Rhoda Nussbaum, and Dr. Geetha Kamath, in which they provided guidance and responded with answers to various questions posed by the delegates. Dr. Goldstein, in his closing remarks, called on young physicians to take an active part in Bhagavan's global health mission and pledged to them the support of the International Sri Sathya Sai Organization.

A medical exhibition on the conference theme, "Sathya Sai Ideal Health Care and the Sathya Sai Global Health Mission," featured nine kiosks with fifty-four posters and two kiosks with movies, depicting various Sathya Sai medical service projects throughout the

world. Delegates and special invitees viewing the exhibition during the conference found it to be informative, inspiring, and enlightening.

The conference concluded with Arati, and participants emerged deeply touched by the exuberant flow of love during the conference. Everyone felt the Divine Presence of Bhagavan throughout the proceedings. All delegates realized the magnitude of Sathya Sai's global health mission and achieved a deeper understanding of Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare. All participants resolved to serve patients with comprehensive, state-of-the-art, loving, compassionate, and free health care, following the principles of Sathya Sai Ideal Healthcare. Delegates expressed gratitude to Bhagavan for the blessed opportunity to participate in this conference and to be recipients and ambassadors of his divine love and message.

Lovingly, in the service of Sai,

—**Dr. Narendranath Reddy**, Chairman
Sri Sathya Sai International Medical Committee;
Director, Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation



SUMMARY, NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE 2009

Unifying love for Swami brought over 400 young adults from across the USA together for the National Sai Youth Conference, held at Camp Duncan near Chicago, Illinois, May 29–31, 2009, and themed “We Are One for Sai.” The program, first of its kind in the country, provided USA Sai Youth with a rare opportunity to share thoughts, receive guidance, and think progressively about how to expand and live Swami’s message of love throughout their lives and onward to future generations.

The weekend-long program included brainstorming sessions, cultural programs, workshops, and sharing of service- and other YA-related ideas.

SETTING INTENTIONS

“Setting Intentions” was the first of many enjoyable and thought-provoking activities to help young adults from across the nation meet one another. Unacquainted delegates paired off and answered questions, such as, “What is important to you right now?” and “What spiritual goals are you

moving toward?” Pairs merged into groups of four, then groups of eight, and then sixteen. At each stage, delegates answered new sets of questions about spirituality, goals, and specific hopes for the weekend. The questions, though simple, brought up spiritual issues at the core of everyone’s journey to God.

THE SPEAKERS

The weekend’s four main speakers were Mr. Shitu Chudasama (UK), Dr. M.V. Veerabhadra Rao (UK), Prof. Anil Kumar (India), and Mrs. Malini Gadepally (USA).

MR. SHITU CHUDASAMA opened the conference with an encouraging call to action. He explained the importance of youth in the future of the Sai organization, citing Swami’s specific messages to young people. He challenged us to find out what we can do to make our country and world a better place. He encouraged YAs to move beyond apathy and complacency, and summed up, saying, “May He (Swami) push you to greater heights and courage so that you may fulfill your destiny.” Mr. Chudasama concluded by

reading a letter from Dr. Michael Goldstein, which also encouraged youth to continue Swami's work with passion and love.

DR. VEERABHADRA RAO is a dentist who trained as a neurosurgeon at Swami's suggestion. Dr. Rao opened with a Telugu poem about the great opportunities that exist for youth, and sprinkled such poems throughout his speech. He focused on applying the theme, "We Are One for Sai," through synchronizing thought, word, and deed, and the importance of this to the leadership process. He pointed out that synchronizing thought, word, and deed is not merely acting out likes and dislikes, but rather changing feelings of negativity and dislike to positivity, and acting with an all-encompassing feeling of love.

PROF. ANIL KUMAR, Swami's current translator, was the third speaker. Prof. Kumar stressed the importance of inspiration and self-confidence in developing true leadership. He urged us to transcend ordinary thoughts and to inspire others to do Swami's work through the mission of love, citing the work of Mother Theresa as an example. He explained that not only is inspirational spirit important for youth, but also self-reliance and self-confidence, especially to fulfill our roles as leaders and in the future of Swami's mission. We need the drive to do things on our own, to be able to lead effectively.

Furthermore, he explained that a true leader is hardly known. He or she does not struggle for name, fame, recognition, or admiration from followers, but rather helps others discover themselves, by congratulating, encouraging, and giving credit to oth-

ers. Prof. Kumar explained that as leaders, we should not make the mistake of working for personal gain or worrying about things we cannot change. Instead, if we remain enthusiastic about living Swami's message and remember the tools to foster true leadership, we can make a significant impact on the world.

MRS. MALINI GADEPALLY wrapped up the speaking sessions, focusing on the importance of today's youth in the future of the Sai organization, and how vital it is that we act now, using our time as youth to do service and to make the best of it. She explained that as Sai Youth, it is our responsibility to integrate values into our daily lives, conduct self-analysis, and act with self-confidence. Touching on her experiences as a student at Swami's school in Anantapur, Mrs. Gadepally explained that our individual experiences with Swami should not be compared to each other's, because we are all his children.

In a presentation, she explained how we can exemplify Swami's message by "Being a Youth 4 Sai." She urged us to "Be in God Awareness," by observing our lives "normally" for one week, and then for the next week, thinking of Him always, and noting the impact this has. By integrating head, heart, and hands, we can eliminate bad thoughts, serve with love, and cleanse our hearts.

Mrs. Gadepally also spoke about the four D's—duty, devotion, discipline, and discrimination. By fulfilling our duties as youth, devoting ourselves to the Lord, maintaining discipline (which helps us deal

with life's disappointments), and developing a sense of discrimination by cultivating God-consciousness within, we will be able to develop the self-confidence necessary to integrate Swami's values into our lives. She concluded her speech by reminding us that if we remember God always and repeat his name, everything else will fall into place naturally.

WORKSHOPS

The conference workshops addressed various applications of spirituality. These sessions were planned and facilitated by YAs from all over the country, and were grouped into three tracks: The Sai Life—Swami's Teachings Applied; Sai Leadership—Leading with Love; and United for Sai—Developing Strong Young Adult Programs. A total of 18 different workshops featured equally beautiful messages. An example from each workshop track is detailed below:

MAKING SMART CHOICES WITH OUR HUMAN VESSEL This soul-searching and progressive workshop helped us to open up and share some of our challenges in making right choices. The inclusion of younger and older youth made this much more interesting, since the experiences at various stages of youth are different, and participants could hear and learn from experiences other than their own. Abstinence from meat, smoking, and alcohol was discussed, keeping in mind the ultimate goal of spiritual progress. While some of the YAs left this workshop with answers, others left with clarified questions

and a renewed commitment to search for the answers.

FINDING YOURSELF: HARNESSING THE INTELLECT AS LIFE'S CHARIOTEER This workshop, full of activities and exercises, explored the differences between mind and intellect through practical examples and contextual exercises. Participants experienced the joy of diving deep into elements of wisdom by approaching the ultimate question, "Who Am I?" in a creative way, engaging in rapid Q&A with partners to generate (1) what we think of ourselves, (2) what others think about us, and (3) what we would like to be. This jumpstart helped participants open up to these concepts, which many had found previously to be complex and unapproachable.

NARRATING OUR COLLECTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: THREE SENTENCE MEMOIRS This workshop focused on writing a story as a team. Starting with individuals writing sentences, teams then brought the separate pieces together by combining their sentences into several topical words. "Story" topics ranged from life-changing events to ethical dilemmas. The experience was capped by teams singing out their stories to music and rhythm—a very fun-filled program unifying thought (memory), word (story), and musical rendering (action)!

SERVICE SYMPOSIUM This workshop gave YAs from across the nation an opportunity to share the projects and activities in which they participate at their centers, and to share inspiration and experiences as Sai Youth. YAs were able to talk about the successes and challenges of particular projects, which

benefited groups from across the country for planning purposes at their own centers.

For those new to the Sai organization, or perhaps for those who were not aware of some of the service opportunities available to youth, this symposium was particularly inspirational. Seeing the devotion and outpouring of love from all corners of the USA was one of the most touching parts of the conference. So many devotees were eager to share their acts of devotion with the entire group, and the tireless work of Sai Youth from across the nation is truly remarkable.

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF SPIRITUALITY

The Cultural Program Team put together a number of fantastic games and activities to entertain and involve all the delegates. Friday's "Sai Cranium" was an interactive game of Sai trivia, charades, singing, and Pictionary. The groups formed by the Setting Intentions activity split into teams of four, and each team competed to reach the ultimate goal of Swami on a computerized game board.

"It's All Sai's Line Anyway," also on Friday, was a crowd favorite. Youth from across the country participated in improvisational comedy routines, such as acting like Parthi monkeys and offering up odd Young Adult service ideas. The laughter sounding loudly in the prayer hall gave aural evidence of the delegates' unity. Cheering on the performers, each delegate felt pride, joy, and oneness.

Saturday evening's cultural program was an amazing show of cooperation throughout the nation. Young adults from many regions

showcased their varying talents, from dance, to music, to poetry, to acting. Classical and contemporary musicians wowed the delegates with their melodies, and dancers—performing in styles ranging from Latin American, to modern, to fusion—moved to Swami's beat. When glow-sticks were distributed to the audience during the Latin American dance, the waving of the glowing sticks through the air brought a sense of togetherness and beauty to the entire delegation.

YAs also brought talent and devotion to the weekend's devotional singing sessions, which helped strengthen the spiritual atmosphere. In each session, the delegates' enthusiasm was infectious and powerful.

THE WAY FORWARD

A "Way Forward" session on Sunday followed through on key points gathered during the weekend. Fourteen teams were created, such as "National YA Strategy," "Personal Transformation," and "Medical Service," with thoughts structured as "building blocks," which were then arranged to build "houses" of concrete action items.

Teams then held separate breakout meetings to discuss visions, ideas, and high-level action priorities. For instance, the National Strategy team discussed ideas such as forming a YA council, helping YAs understand the objectives of the youth program, and the YA program's role in the Sai organization. Also, various other suggestions were shared, such as updating the master database of contact lists and creating interactive sharing portals.

Each group's ideas and notes were then shared with the entire group of YAs. Thus many were able to share their ideas and find a way to get involved in turning their spiritual thoughts and vision into actions.

The Sathya Sai USA-YA website hosts many useful resources that came out of the National Youth Conference. YAs are encouraged to visit www.saiyausa.net (*Home->General Info*) to:

- Get involved in the USA-YA “Way Forward” programs. Select a “house” that you want to contribute to, and get involved! “Houses” include “Going Green,” “Health & Wellness,” “Human Values Projects with Community Youth,” “Living the Sai Life,” “Medical Service,” “National Infrastructure, Communication, and Planning,” “Refugee Projects,” “Rehabilitation Projects,” “SSE Group 4,” and “Sai and the Arts.”
- Find detailed information about each service activity featured during the service symposium.
- Download/listen to the speeches, presentations, and devotional sessions from the conference.
- Stay in touch with other regions and initiatives across the country.

CONCLUSION

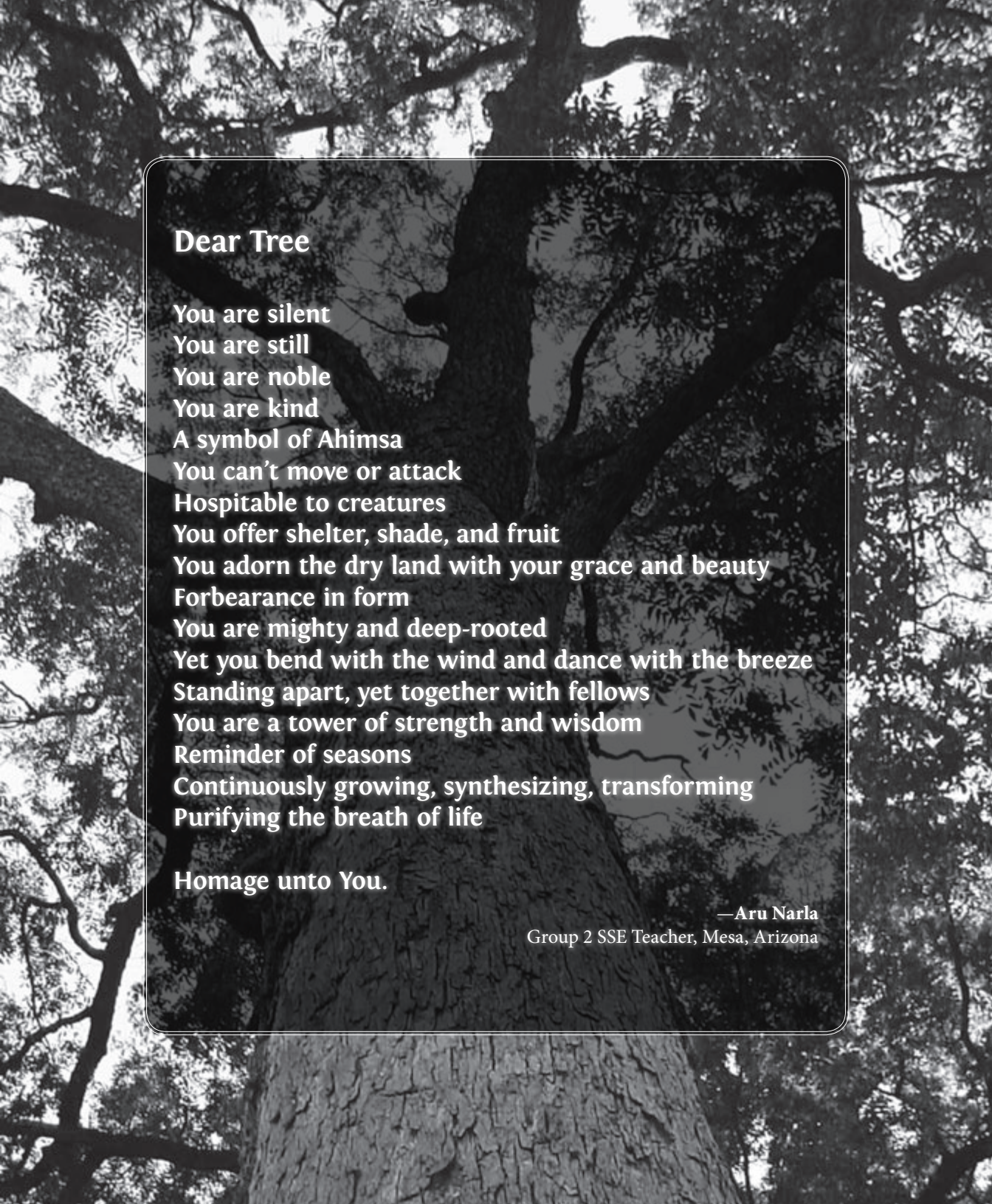
The National Youth Conference was, for many delegates, even greater than they expected. Delegates left feeling energized, excited, and full of love. Additionally, the

young adults began to understand the power they have as youth and the opportunity Swami has given them to live his message, live in his love, and share that love with others.

In the closing reflections, one of the YAs referenced Bhagavan's teaching that we are like a drop of pure water when we are free of the distractions and illusions of the world, but when we mix with a bowl of milk, which represents the world today, our consistency changes because of our surroundings. Contrastingly, if we as a drop of water mix only with a bowl of pure water, our purity remains intact.

The conference seemed to embody this concept, as getting the opportunity to be surrounded by youth from around the country with a mutual love for Swami proved to be extremely unifying and powerful. All the delegates, surely, are looking forward eagerly to the next youth conference, and to using their newfound sense of oneness to move forward in Sai's mission.

**—NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE
PUBLICATIONS TEAM**



Dear Tree

You are silent
You are still
You are noble
You are kind
A symbol of Ahimsa
You can't move or attack
Hospitable to creatures
You offer shelter, shade, and fruit
You adorn the dry land with your grace and beauty
Forbearance in form
You are mighty and deep-rooted
Yet you bend with the wind and dance with the breeze
Standing apart, yet together with fellows
You are a tower of strength and wisdom
Reminder of seasons
Continuously growing, synthesizing, transforming
Purifying the breath of life

Homage unto You.

—Aru Narla
Group 2 SSE Teacher, Mesa, Arizona

St. Francis of Assisi: “Canticle of the Sun”



St. Francis is the patron saint of Italy, of animals, and of the environment. He loved all the elements of nature and considered the elements to be brothers and sisters to human beings. He also considered all animals to be our brothers and sisters.

St. Francis composed a beautiful hymn praising God through all of nature’s wonders—the sun, moon and stars, winds and air, water and fire, plants and herbs, and all creatures. This hymn, called “Canticle of the Sun,” is one of the earliest pieces of literature written in the Italian language. St. Francis believed that all people should be able to pray to God simply and praise him in words they can understand easily—in their native language. Here is an English translation from “Canticle of the Sun.”

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord!
All praise is yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing.
To you, alone, Most High, do they belong. . . .

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
in the heavens you have made them bright, precious, and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
and clouds and storms, and all the weather,
through which you give your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us,
and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you;
through those who endure sickness and trial.

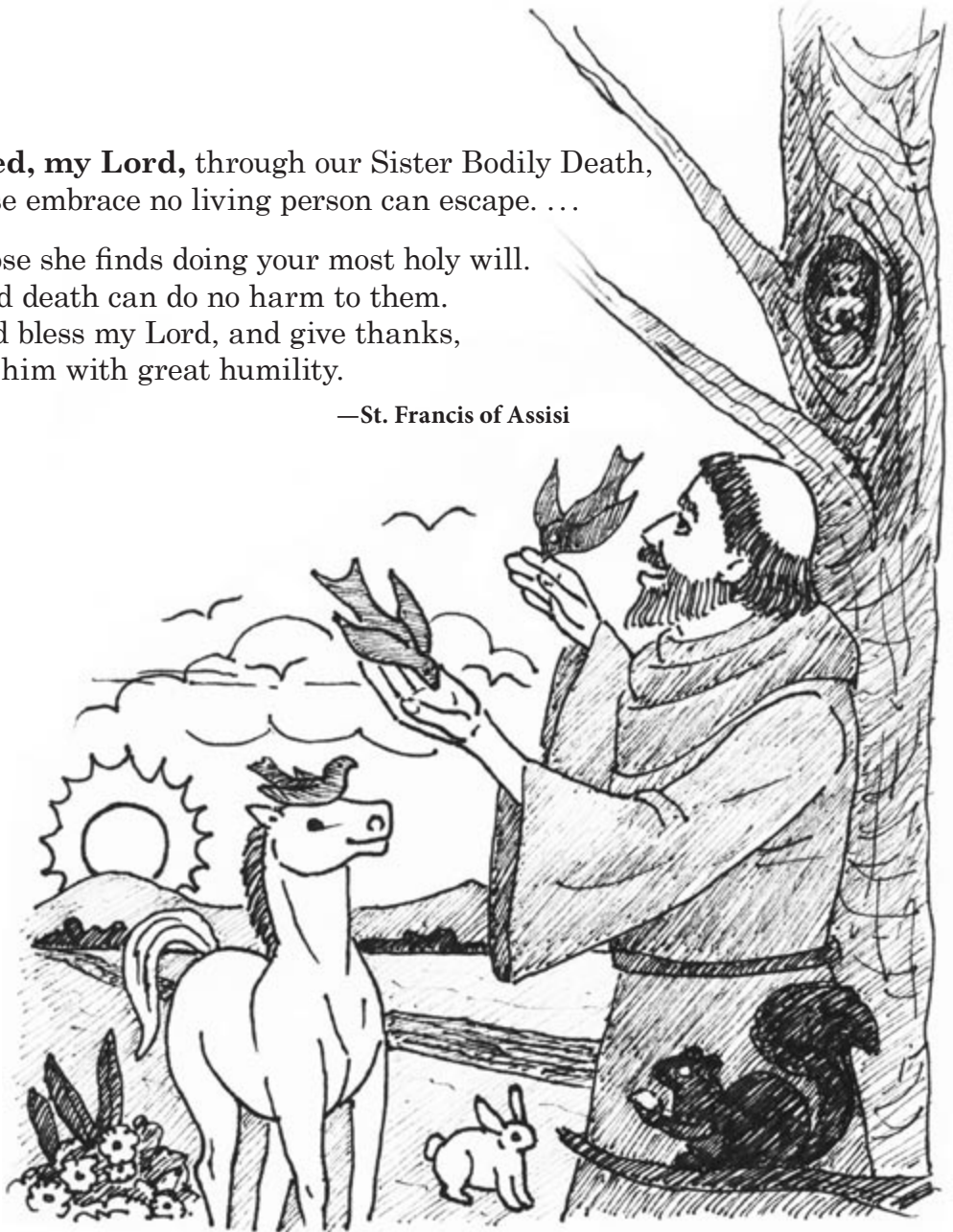
Happy those who endure in peace,
for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.



Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whose embrace no living person can escape. ...

Happy those she finds doing your most holy will.
The second death can do no harm to them.
Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks,
and serve him with great humility.

—St. Francis of Assisi



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Sai Spiritual Education Lesson Plan

St. Francis of Assisi: “Canticle of the Sun” (Group 2)

VALUE: Love • **SUBVALUE:** Reverence, Adoration

QUOTE: *Everything in the cosmos is made up of the five basic elements, which are manifestations of the Divine... When you love God with all your heart, the bliss you experience is unexcelled. ... Students! Whatever you may do in life, never forget God.*

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 29:37-1, Aug. 21, 1996)

AFFIRMATION/SILENT SITTING: “Loving God with all my heart, I praise God in everything.” Children sit silently 2-3 minutes.

SONG SUGGESTIONS: “Like the Sunlight, Like the Moon Bright.” Teachers may wish to introduce students to the popular Christian hymn, “All Creatures of Our God and King,” which is based on St. Francis’s poem, “Canticle of the Sun.” (See words and melody at: http://www.sermonaudio.com/hymn_details.asp?PID=allcreatures; listen to choral arrangement at: http://www.choralcds.org/mp3/TR-JC026/CTC_1.mp3)

STORY/PRAYER: Read St. Francis’s “*Canticle of the Sun*” with students. Afterward, have students take turns restating in their own words the meaning of each stanza of the poem.

DISCUSSION: Discuss the different people and things that students can be thankful for every day, that help them in the many tasks they must perform at this stage of their life (mother, father, teacher, relatives, friends, and so on). Remind them of their school activities, and what they use and may take for granted—pencil, paper, playground equipment, computer, vehicles, and so on. Have children make a long list of these suggestions; keep asking questions to elicit more ideas from the children.

ACTIVITY: Have students use ideas from their list to write poems, to add to this repeated line from St. Francis’s poem, “**Be praised, My Lord, through . . .**” Examples: “*Be praised, my Lord, through my mother, who . . .*” “*Be praised, my Lord, through my father, who . . .*” “*Be praised, my Lord, through my teacher, who . . .*” “*Be praised my Lord, through the food I eat, for . . .*” Discuss how this adds a feeling of reverence and sacredness for each person or thing they may have taken for granted.

LIFE APPLICATION: Students can practice awareness of the Divine in the people and things in their lives, and honor them through their actions, seeing God in all.

EXTENDING ACTIVITY: This lesson may also be used or adapted for Groups 3 and 4. Older students can (1) discuss and expand on the lines about forgiveness, “endurance,” humility, and death in St. Francis’s poem, or (2) draw parallels between this hymn and the Gayatri Mantra, Vedic hymns, or prayers/psalms from various traditions praising God in myriad forms.

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