

Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA

Dedicated with Love and Devotion to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba



USA Sai Pilgrimage 2010

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To Our Dear Subscribers,

We hope that all have had a beautiful 85th Birthday observance and joy-filled 2010 holy-days. With our tiny volunteer staff being highly involved with many projects having to do with the 85th Birthday, we have had to forego the November-December 2010 issue and pick up again with this January-February 2011 issue. We know that many of you have inquired about the November-December issue via the Sathya Sai Book Center of America and also through the Newsletter e-mail, and that you have missed receiving your issue. Our sincere apologies for this unforeseen delay. We will be extending all the subscriptions by one issue.

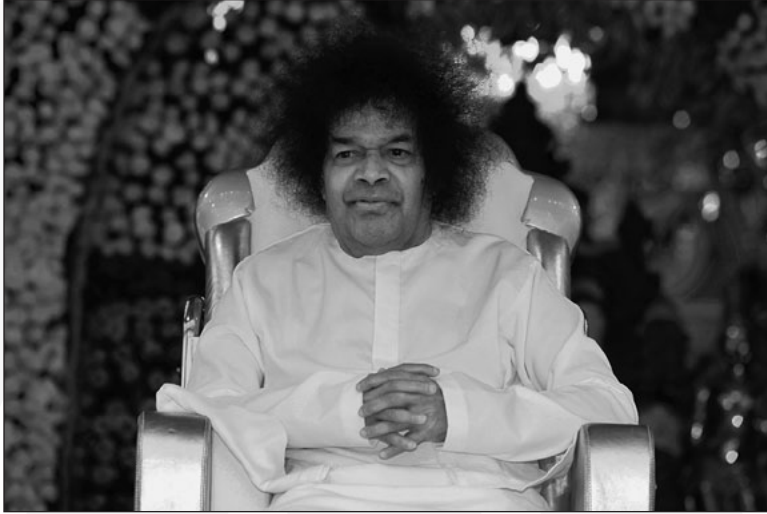
The volunteers of the *Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA* wish all a loving and blessed New Year.

NOTE: We are updating our subscriptions records and adding e-mail addresses. For those of you who have e-mail, kindly take a moment to send us your e-mail contact information by writing to us at: ssnusa@sathyasaibooksusa.org.

—The Editors

SAI'S MESSAGE

DO EVERYTHING IN THE SPIRIT OF UNITY



*Believe it or not, in the next 25 to 30 years, the entire human race will become one. People of all religions—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and so on—will be united. There will be complete unity in the world. It is from Bharat (India) that the spirit of devotion for God will spread to all other parts of the world. Treasure this truth in your heart. People consider culture as a way of life. No, no, it is not so. **Unity of all** is culture; **purity** is culture. You will realize divinity when you burn all your impurities. When you develop love, all your evil qualities, such as hatred and so on, will wither away. ... Whatever work we do, we should do it with the spirit of unity. Perform all your actions to please God.*

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
SSS 41:8, May 31, 2008



USA Sai Pilgrimage 2010

Preparations began for the 2010 USA Pilgrimage to Prasanthi Nilayam in October 2009. Seven sub-committees were formed under the USA Pilgrimage Committee to address the many requirements that such a large undertaking would demand. Of course, a committee was formed for registration and accommodation of devotees in Prasanthi, but many more items required attention. Groups were formed to oversee the cultural programs to be conducted, to provide for spiritual preparation before departing on the journey, for organizing devotees for darshan seating, to address the medical requirements of the pilgrims, to prepare service activities on site, and also for the production of the albums and invitations to be presented to Sai.

Through the wonderful efforts of many dedicated members, the tasks came together and were guided by the Divine Hand. Monthly conference calls and intensive e-mail activity brought together a plan that reflected a disciplined and devoted effort to please our beloved Lord and to comfortably accommodate more than 1,500 devotees. From the beginning, the committee chairs and members acted with unusual dedication

and without ego or any traces of dissension. What resulted from their efforts was a joy to all.

The first USA pilgrimage group arrived on June 23, 2010. This first group of 700 pilgrims immediately set the pattern for duty, discipline, and devotion. Swami had not been coming out for morning darshan for six months, until the USA group arrived. Ashram residents were delighted with the arrival of the Americans, since Swami again started appearing for morning darshan. Many ashram residents and staff members made note of the discipline and orderliness of the devotees in the blue and white USA scarves.

On the evening of June 29, Swami blessed the USA Unison Singing Program to be performed in His Divine Presence. The program comprised a multi-faith assortment of devotional songs adoring the Lord. The program began with a Sanskrit chant, followed by songs in English, Spanish, Latin, Indian, and Hebrew languages. The Group One Unison Singing Program, which involved 624 men and women, was warmly received by Sai.





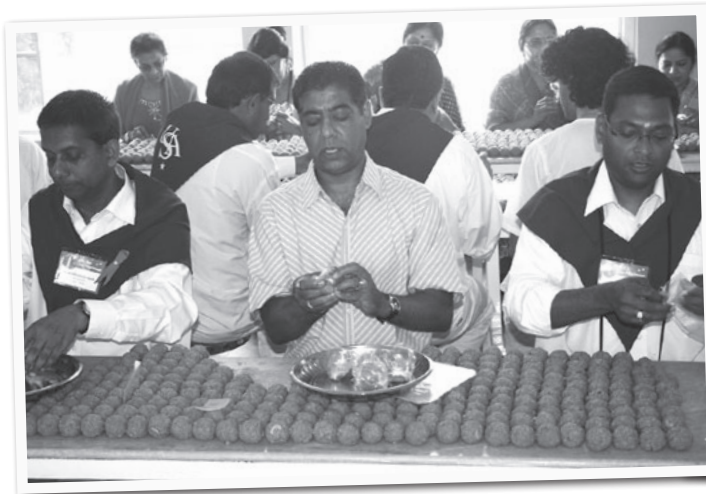
One participant commented:

“Throughout the performance, beloved Bhagavan gazed at the group while gracefully swaying to the songs. Mother Sai’s love encompassed the entire hall as his twinkling eyes lit the lamp of love in every heart. Our *sadguru* left each individual with the unique experience of the deeper understanding that he is not only always with them, but is one with them.”

During the Group One pilgrimage, Swami hand-picked eminent speakers from the ashram to address the American group after morning darshan. On June 28, Dr. Safaya, Director of Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Medical Sciences, spoke on the topic of Sai Ideal Healthcare. On June 30, Sri S. V. Giri, IAS (Retd), former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (now Sri Sathya Sai University), spoke on the Sai system of education. On June 29, Prof. G. Venkataraman, an eminent

scientist and former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, gave an inspiring talk on Swami’s various social infrastructure projects that are benefiting millions of people in India. And on July 1, Prof Anil Kumar, currently a faculty member of the Biosciences Dept at SSSU and formerly Principal of the Brindavan SSSU campus, gave a talk on Swami’s divinity and the Sri Sathya Sai Organization. The pilgrims were extremely grateful to Swami for directing these leaders to address the group for an hour each, over four consecutive days.

Group Two arrived on July 5 and immediately took the baton from Group One. The pattern of discipline and good behavior established by Group One was



“All American devotees can be proud of the duty, discipline, and devotion shown by those who attended the American pilgrimages.”

carried on by Group Two. Swami warmly received the Group Two USA pilgrims and personally spoke with at least seven of the American Council members in attendance, some several times.

The USA Sai Choir program conducted on July 10, 2010, was a resounding success and demonstrated a high degree of talent and professionalism by all who participated. The divine sounds of the choir drew a capacity crowd to the hall and surely also attracted scores of angels. The leaders of the choir presented a beautiful program invitation and roses to Swami. Our beloved Sai listened to all of the choir's songs, their

encore, and also to all of the bhajans that had been prepared. He even called up one bhajan leader to his chair for the creation of a pendant.

On July 11, 2010, the Native American children's skit, “All Our Relations,” was presented to a packed house in Sai Kulwant hall. One hundred and sixty children presented a beautifully choreographed skit on Native American spirituality and sang songs that well portrayed American values and heritage. In excellent Native American costumes, the children performed a visually stunning presentation before Swami, replete with melodious songs. Swami warmly em-



braced the children and came down from the stage to pose for pictures with them. In a wonderful act of grace, Swami received a rose from George Walking Bear, a Native American medicine elder in attendance, and posed for a picture with him.

Devotees from both groups participated in several service projects at the ashram. Those projects included working in the Western canteen (4:00 a.m. vegetable sorting, 8:00 p.m. cleanup, and serving and cleaning during all three daily meals), picking up trash, wrapping and delivering 30,000 pieces of *prasad* (gift of food) for distribution by Swami after the cultural programs, arranging for blood donations at the hospital, and various other needs as they arose, from moving chairs to storing extra saris.

Devotees were grateful for the opportunity to do service during their stay at the ashram. During one of the *prasad*-wrapping

sessions, 115 devotees signed their names on fine stationery as a way to express thanks to Swami. The signatures were handed to Swami during afternoon darshan of July 15, with the explanation that they represented the gratitude of all the devotees who were able to do service during their stay at the ashram. Swami sweetly accepted the two sheets of signatures and took the time to read each name on both sides of each sheet.

On July 13, Swami had Anil Kumar speak to the American group in the exhibition hall. Approximately 500 American pilgrims attended the event, which again showed their unity and cooperation. As usual, the Americans acted with discipline and unity to receive Anil Kumar's message on the Sai mission.

The American pilgrimages concluded on July 15, as devotees headed back to the USA. The ashram seemed quiet and subdued without the large and well-behaved American groups that had dominated the darshan seating for the previous three weeks. I think many of the ashram staff and residents were sad to see the American group depart. A legacy was left by the pilgrimage of an American Sai community second to none among overseas devotees, in both size and dedication to Sai ideals.

Ours was among the first of the large pilgrimages to be conducted this summer and by all accounts one of the largest groups expected. Based on the excellent planning and execution of the American group organizers and devotees, instruc-



tions were sent to forthcoming groups with recommendations based on our model.

All American devotees can be proud of the duty, discipline, and devotion shown by those who attended the American pilgrimages. The reviews from all involved were universally positive. The Americans made a name for themselves with their dedicated service and disciplined behavior. Unity and cooperation were in the forefront for the full period of the pilgrimages.

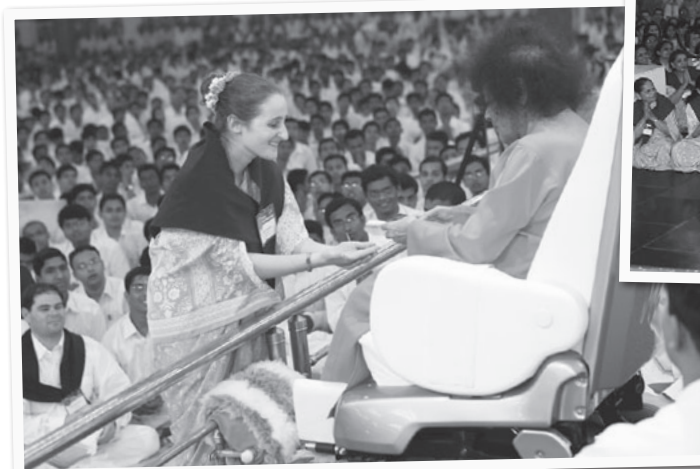
All can review the pictures from the event at <http://us.sathyasai.org/pilgrimage2010/index.html> and enjoy the divine grace that was showered on the American groups by our beloved Sai.

We now have an opportunity and a responsibility as a USA organization to continue this unity and cooperation in all our activities going forward. With Swami's grace and blessing we will further develop and intensify our efforts to act in a manner that pleases him and advances us toward our inner divinity. We pray that we will have more opportunities to work together as a nation in his name.

—Jonathan L Roof

Pilgrimage Chairman

USA Central Council President



Discourse to American Devotees

Given in the Mandir at Prasanthi Nilayam, July 27, 2002

Editor's Note: This discourse was given by Swami to a group of Americans following an International *Seva* Conference at Prasanthi Nilayam that took place around the time of the 2002 Guru Purnima festival. As the discourse was not included in the *Sathya Sai Speaks* series, we are reprinting it here. Its subject matter, as always, is timeless.

Embodiments of love! Many of you assembled here have made repeated visits to Prasanthi Nilayam. You have come here many times in the past and spent a lot of money. Why do you come? You come here to experience bliss, but are you experiencing bliss? No.

Where is bliss? Only when you investigate and find out where real bliss is, can you experience it. You are searching for bliss by going to many places, doing many *sadhanas* (spiritual practices), doing *bhajans* (devotional singing), and visiting many gurus. But still you don't experience bliss. What is the use of reading many books? Are you practicing at least one or two of Swami's teachings? Without practicing Bhagavan's teachings, what is the use of coming again and again?

Many times I have taught about truth, righteousness, and peace (*sathya*, *dharma*, and *shanti*). What is truth (*sathya*)? There are three syllables in the word *sathya*: *sath-a-yaa*. *Sath* means permanent. That is life. *Aa* stands for *annamu* (food). *Yaa* is the procedure for this investigation.

For life, food is essential. *Yaa* is the Sun (not *son*), who provides the food. For *sath*, which is life, you need *aa*, which is *annamu* (food), and the Sun is essential for providing food. So, *sathya* means, by the grace of the Sun (God), you appease hunger and lead a comfortable life.

There is another way to look at the syllables *Sa-tha-yaa*. When you consider these in reverse order, *yaa* stands for the *yama* and *niyama* (discipline; dos and don'ts) of *sadhanas*. That leads to *tha*, which is *thathwa* (reality), which in turn leads to *sa*, divinity. When you do austerities, observing *yama* and *niyama*, you experience divinity.

Man should talk less and do more *sadhana*. You come here for spiritual *sadhana*, but how can you progress when you indulge in too much talking even here? Today you undertake spiritual practices such as penance, *japa* (repetition of prayers or holy names), worship, and meditation. You can never attain divinity by such routine practices.

Make Proper Use of God's Gifts

Buddha did many spiritual practices, visited many places, read many books, and visited many gurus. But he found futility in all of them. Then he inquired as to what the gifts of God are. When we make use of God's gifts properly, we can experience peace and happiness.

For example, God has given us the tongue. We should use it properly, by speaking sacred words to others so that they can gain understanding. Buddha inquired if he was doing this or not. God has gifted us five senses, five life breaths—i.e., *prana*, *apana*, *ryana*, *udana*, and *samana*. Space (*akasha*) is awareness. Wind is life. Fire is effulgence. Water is life. You are not making proper use of these gifts of God. First, Buddha realized that the tongue is given for speaking soft, sweet, truthful, and noble words. Then he inquired whether he was speaking words that were sweet and useful to others, or only for his selfish purposes.

After such thorough investigation, he threw away all the books, finding they were not useful. Then he sat under the bodhi tree (sacred fig or pipal tree, *Ficus religiosa*). He first realized the importance of *samyak vaak* (correct speech). He realized that he was not uttering any words that were useful to others, and thus his life was being wasted. Merit lies in helping others, and it is sinful to hurt others. So he prayed to speak only truthful, sacred, and noble words that would give benefit to others.

Later Buddha closed his eyes. The eyes are given to see the world and God. But he

realized that he was using his eyes only to see the unreal and transitory world and not God. He felt disgusted with the futility of this world full of sorrow. He found the world to be the source of all sorrows and misery, but not of happiness. Thus he realized the value of *samyak drishti* (correct vision).

After realizing the importance of good speech and good vision, he inquired about good listening and realized the importance of *samyak shravanam* (correct hearing). Thus he felt he should only see good, hear good, and speak good.

Then he realized that the fundamental basis for all these is *samyak hridayam* (correct heart). If you have a good heart, you have good speech, good hearing, and good vision. The heart is like a generator, and the power that comes from it makes the ears, eyes, and speech function. Thus, he came to the conclusion of *samyak bhavam* (proper feelings). For everything, feelings are important. If you don't have good feelings, you cannot have good speech, good vision, or good hearing. *Bhava shuddhi* is *jnana siddhi*—pure feelings lead to perfect wisdom. Wisdom or knowledge (*jnana*) cannot be realized by reading books. Thus the Buddha acquired good speech, good vision, good hearing, and good feelings.

Ultimately he inquired how all these were going to be useful for society and the world. Then he realized the need for *samyak karma* (correct actions). Instead of doing good work, if you are thinking only about the world, collecting information about

the world, and involving yourself only in mundane activities, it will be useless.

Pray for the Gifts Only God Can Give

In Gujarat, there was a great devotee named Patel. He had money, possessions, conveniences, vehicles, and children. He used to sit for meditation as soon as he got up in the morning. Once his friend, a businessman from America, came to meet with him. Patel sent him a message that he would see him after his meditation was over. After a long wait, when Patel showed up, his friend asked why he was meditating when he had plenty of money, comforts, children, and all the conveniences of life. Patel replied he was praying not for worldly objects, which he had in abundance, but only for that which he did not have—namely, peace and bliss, which only God could provide. Then the American realized the sacred feelings of Bharatiyas (Indians). He admired their attitude of giving up what they have and desiring what is in the possession of God.

So, you should all pray for the things that only God can give. Peace and bliss are not in the world; they are the gifts of the Lord only. In the world you find only *pieces*, not peace. You can experience bliss only in the presence of God. So for peace and bliss you should pray to God only. After such inquiry, Buddha prayed for sacred vision. What is sacred vision? You should see only good.

In general, people in the world hurt others but do not help them. The people who help have good hearts. This is the message of God in the sacred texts—the Bhagavad

Gita and the Bhagavatha. The Bhagavatha preaches that helping others is meritorious and hurting others is sinful.

So, “Help ever and hurt never.” Feed those who are hungry, and it will give you satisfaction. Your words should be sacred. People use harsh words. Always speak softly and sweetly, using nectarean words. But sweet utterances can come out only if the heart is full of sweetness. So, you should fill your heart with peace, bliss, and sweetness. Once you fill your heart thus, your words will also be sweet and peaceful.

Therefore, you should develop these five virtues—*samyak drishti* (sacred vision), *samyak sravanam* (sacred hearing), *samyak vaak* (sacred speech), *samyak hridayam* (sacred heart), and *samyak karma* (sacred actions). That’s why Bhagavan says:

*See no evil; see what is good. Hear no evil;
hear what is good. Speak no evil; say what
is good. Think no evil; think what is good.
And do no evil; do what is good. This is the
way to God.*

These five are the gifts of God. Buddha’s cousin, Ananda, did not know this truth, and he was crying at the deathbed of Buddha. Watching this, Buddha told him that it was not good or proper for Ananda to cry when Buddha was experiencing bliss. Also Buddha chided him, saying, “Your name is Ananda, which means you should be in bliss and not sad.” He told him to be happy, blissful, and not jealous when Buddha was experiencing bliss. Buddha told him to give up jealousy, and then breathed his last.

Then Ananda realized the truth. He felt remorseful that throughout his life he had not helped others and did not give happiness to others, nor did he enjoy any happiness. He felt the purpose of life was to fulfill the meaning of the name, *MAN*: *M* stands for *maya* (illusion), and the message is to give up *maya*. *A* stands for *Atma* (the Self, the Inner Divinity) and the message is to experience Atmic consciousness. *N* stands for *nirvana* (liberation). It is sad that despite having the sacred title, *MAN*, man is not able to give up *maya*, experience the Atma, or attain *nirvana*.

What is the purpose of life? Man has to get rid of *maya*. *Maya* means believing that the unreal is real. There is nothing permanent and real in this world, and all worldly things are passing clouds. What is the purpose and use of human life, when despite all one's knowledge and intelligence one behaves like an animal? At least animals have a reason and season [for their behavior], but nowadays man does not have reason or season. This is disgusting.

Develop Higher Knowledge

As a man, one should develop *prajnana* (higher knowledge). The Vedas and the Bhagavatha teach the following four principles:

1. *Prajnanam Brahma*. God has given man *prajnanam*, but man misuses it and engages in bad thoughts. *Prajnanam* is not worldly knowledge but **constant integrated awareness** [of the all-encompassing divinity],

which is a gift from God. So one should manifest this awareness.

2. *Tat-Twam-Asi* means "That Thou Art." You should realize that **God is not separate from you**, that **God is in you**, and that **you are in God**.

3. *Aham Atma Brahma* ("I am Atma Brahma") means that you are not man but Atma and Brahma (God). Being Brahman, if you do not realize that you are the Atma, what is the use of your life and all the education you acquire? You should realize the truth: **"I am I"—that you are with God, in God, and that God is in you.**

4. *Aham Brahmasmi* ("I myself am God"). Realize the truth that **you are God**. As a separate individual you are *jiva*, and as cosmic Self, you are God. God is unity in diversity. Without realizing this, there is no use reading books or giving lectures. At least practice one or two of Swami's teachings. Even at the worldly level, are you helping anyone? **Help ever and hurt never.**

Never use any harsh or hurtful words. The words come from the heart, and if you fill your heart with sacredness, your words will also be good. If you want to speak good words, you should fill your heart with good feelings.

A great saint named Thiruthonda Alvar realized he was not separate from God and that God resided in him. He said to God, "I and you are one." That is why Bhagavan says repeatedly, "Never consider God as separate from you." God is *Hridaya Vasi* (the Resident of the Heart), *Antharyami* (the Indweller) and *Atma swarupa* (the embodiment of the

Atma). When you say *I*, it refers to Atma. You should always remember that God is with you, in you, around you, above you, and below you. Realize this fundamental truth.

Practice Bhagavan's Teachings

Many do spiritual practices but don't get any permanent results. These practices are like passing clouds. People get up in the morning and do *japa* and meditation [for a short while]. But these practices should be practical, not temporary and imaginary.

God neither comes nor goes but is eternal and infinite. You don't need to search for God anywhere outside you; rather, turn your vision inward. When you see all the faces in the outside world, they are in fact projections of what is already in you. In other words, everything is a reflection, reaction, and resound of your inner being.

You feel sad that someone criticizes you. No one is criticizing you. You are, yourself. You think others are hurting you. In fact, there are no others.

Jesus also mentioned *JOY*, which means *J*, Jesus first; *O*, others next; and *Y*, you last. In the end, you must realize that you are Jesus and that you are God. When you repeatedly think that you are God and not separate from God, verily, you become God. If you consider God to be separate from you, God will always remain separate from you. God is not separate from you. God is in you, and you are in God. First realize this truth.

You do many spiritual practices and also service activities in the organization. As long as you consider yourself as a man and have

the feeling of *I*, you should serve others. Then, slowly, you will realize that the one you are serving is your own reflection, reaction, and resound.

God is one; the goal is one, but it appears as many in society. You should see unity in society because unity is divinity. Then only will your spiritual practices be fulfilled.

Today you read many books without doing any practice. **Swami stands for practical science, not platform speeches.** You need not do a lot, but at least practice one teaching. When you practice even one sincerely, you will be redeemed. Are you at least following one of Bhagavan's teachings? No. Then, what is the use? Having come to Bhagavan, you should practice his teachings and share them with others. You do not need to go into the streets and publicize anything. First, share your love. Start this at home by respecting your parents and loving your brothers and sisters. Sharing love is your first spiritual *sadhana*.

Help Others According to Your Ability

When you see that someone is suffering, you should try your best to help. However, do so within the limitations of your capabilities, but not beyond. If you render help in excess, beyond your limits, it will be harmful to you. If you do it in *mita* (within proper limits) and *hita* (beneficially), it will lead you to success. Hence the saying, "No success without discipline" (*Na sreya niyamam vina*). If you don't follow discipline, it results in danger. If you are thirsty, you need only a glass of water, not the entire Ganges River. But nowadays

people's desires are unrealistically inflated. Similarly, when you are hungry, you just eat enough to appease your hunger, but not bags altogether of rice. You may have all things, but you might not survive until tomorrow. You should have everything within limits, not in excess.

Swami gives us repeated warnings that many people are misusing Swami's name. The people who misuse Swami's name will face the consequences.

When you do spiritual practices like *bhajan*, it should come from the heart, and others should be able to join in. First, Guru Nanak started community bhajans. One is happier doing *bhajans* with others than doing them alone. So, *samyak bhajan* (community *bhajan*) is very good. When you are alone at home, you may do them by yourself. Otherwise you should join with the community and sing the glory of God together. If you don't like to join in community *bhajans*, you may do them alone.

See that no one is hurt by your actions. To the extent possible, you should teach only good. When outsiders come, explain Bhagavan's teachings clearly. Your explanations should be based on your experience. Then it will reach their hearts.

Embodiments of love! There are many devotees in this world. Devotion is there, but not the proper type. One should first understand what is meant by devotion and spirituality. Spirituality means eliminating one's animal tendencies and divinizing one's human qualities. This is real *sadhana* (spirituality).

Spirituality does not merely mean doing *japa*, meditation, and *bhajan*. You have to kill the bestial temperament in you. Man's life is fulfilled only when the animal qualities are annihilated and the human qualities are transformed into divine qualities.

Embodiments of love! You are practicing many types of spiritual disciplines. But most important, help the needy and distressed. Help others. There is no higher spiritual practice than this. Swami says:

Charity is the ornament for the hands, not bracelets. Truth is the ornament for the throat, not necklaces. Listening to the scriptures and dharma are the ornaments for the ears.

These are the true precious jewels for the human body. Only truth should emanate from the throat.



When you get difficulties,
say, "This is good for me. This is good for me. God has given these troubles and difficulties for my good." So, do not be troubled or disappointed. Your disappointment is my appointment.

Embodiments of love! Women do a lot of work. Some doctors are also doing sincere work without any selfishness. Women feel sad that they are not able to do more work, but they are not independent. If they were really independent, they would spend more time in service activities, but women have their husbands, who are like bondage for them. So naturally they have to follow their husbands and serve them. In fact, they serve their husbands, respect them, and make them happy. To help others like this is real spiritual practice. Even if you cannot do much, at least make others happy by speaking good words.

Questions from the International Seva Conference

(Bhagavan asked Dr. Goldstein if he had any questions, indicating that he would answer them.)

Dr. Goldstein: Swami, at the service conference, some questions were asked by delegates. They wanted to know if the Sathya Sai Organization activities can be affiliated with any other humanitarian organizations?

Swami: In my opinion, there should not be any kind of affiliation. Do service according to your own rules and regulations. There should not be any comparison with other organizations. They do their way, and you do your own way.

Dr. Goldstein: Devotees are asking how they can bring Swami's message to the public, and how the Sathya Sai Organization can interact with the public and bring out Bhagavan's teachings. Also, how can they

bring knowledge of Swami and the advent of the Avatar to the public?

Swami: In order to bring Bhagavan's message to the public, poetry and literary gimmicks are not necessary, but your practice of Swami's teachings in your life will be the best message for the public.

In foreign countries, some Indians are claiming themselves to be Swami's devotees, and they are telling many lies using Swami's name for collecting money. Some claim they are constructing temples and schools for Swami, and they collect money. These are all blatant lies. Swami has not solicited any money for any purpose. So be careful, and keep those people at a distance who approach you for money in the name of Sai.

Dr. Goldstein: Many devotees are asking how the centers in the various countries can be a better reflection of spirituality within their own society? The selection of *bhajans*, the appearance of the Sai Baba Centers, and all of the programs should be a function of each culture, because Swami has planted the seed of divinity in the land of every country all over the world.

Swami: Each country should follow its own procedure and culture and not compare itself with others. You should not imitate others. Swami does not stretch out his hand asking for anything from anyone. Swami says, *I am not a 'beggar' but 'bigger' in good thoughts*. Bhagavan declares that his life is his message, and that you should follow the example of Swami's life. Do what pleases Swami, and definitely you will attain divinity. There is no higher spiritual practice.

Spiritual practice really means respecting and following Swami's teachings. It is important to respect all. Don't expect others to respect you. Even if others do not respect you, you should respect others, because the same divinity resides in all. When you respect everyone, you respect God. Even if someone criticizes you or abuses you, still you should respect him. If he criticizes you, you should not criticize in return. Then only will there be transformation in the other person. You should remain silent and fill your heart with love. There is nothing higher than love. Swami's entire property is love only, and all of you have a share in my property. So all of you are shareholders in the property of Bhagavan. Wherever you do service, Bhagavan is with you, in you, and around you.

Respect Everyone and Speak with Love

Embodiments of love! Many of you come and go, but you are not able to understand Swami's teachings and put them into practice. You need not do any spiritual practice, but respect everyone and speak with love. Then, even if they are not devotees, they are bound to change. First, there should be transformation in you; then the whole world will be transformed.

Earlier Swami mentioned a devotee named Patel, who was praying to God for peace and bliss. But modern man has limitless desires. Though he has plenty, still he wants more. What is the use of having plenty if it is not put to good and sacred use?

Sacred use does not mean giving money indiscriminately to anyone who asks. You should help only the deserving person. Observing your giving nature, many people may run after you. If you give to everyone without discrimination, it becomes misuse of money, and it is a mistake to do so. You should discriminate if it is good or bad, right or wrong, and then give for good uses only. Then only is the purpose fulfilled.

All organizations have their eyes on America now because it has lots of money, but though it is a rich country, it is really poor. Who is the poorest man in the world? The one who has many desires is the poorest man. He who has much satisfaction is the richest man. Keep these two principles in mind.

Clear All Doubts by Remembrance of God

In my view, you should never give any scope to doubts. By the remembrance of God, all doubts will be cleared. Doubts come and go in this world; they are like passing clouds. You should not be mindful of these passing clouds. You may face some difficulties, losses, and sorrows in life, but you should not worry about them. Consider that they are all good for you.

When you get difficulties, say, "This is good for me. This is good for me. God has given these troubles and difficulties for my good." So, do not be troubled or disappointed. Your disappointment is my appointment. If you develop these kinds of good feelings, you will have bliss. If you experience depression from disappointment,

even God will not come near you. But if you consider disappointment as a gift from God, then he will come to you and relieve you of your difficulties.

Some youngsters have many doubts. This is because of their ignorance. You have to blame yourself, not others. You should not accuse or criticize anybody. You should always be blissful. Every Sai devotee should lead a blissful life.

Imbibe the Correct Food

In my opinion, food is very important. As is the food, so is the head. As is the head, so is God. Food, head, and God are interrelated. Americans find it difficult to give up eating meat. Bhagavan will not force you to give it up. It is good to give up eating meat, because doing so will help you develop *satvic* (sacred, pure) tendencies.

Our thoughts depend on the food we eat. Bad food is the main cause for all bad thoughts. You have to exercise control over these three: drinking alcohol, eating meat, and smoking. These deplete your good thoughts.

After smoking, if you breathe forcibly on a white cloth, you will find a yellowish-black spot on the cloth. It is like poison, and you are taking it inside. This will lead to many diseases, such as heart ailments, asthma, eosinophilia, and stomach disorders. All these diseases are due to smoking.

Eating meat is very bad. Why do you want to eat meat? Do you think you need to eat meat because it contains vitamins and proteins? You can get plenty of protein from

curds (yogurt), pulses, and milk. Do you think you can get better protein than these by eating meat?

Now I am going to tell you a secret. In countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Germany, due to nuclear explosions from nuclear testing, the seawater is polluted. The creatures in the waters consume this poison (nuclear pollutants). When you eat these creatures, you also take in part of the poison. This leads to cancer. Because of this, even children in countries like Singapore and Malaysia suffer from cancer of the head and other parts of the body.

There is a lot of polluted food in this world, and this harms human beings. Modern day doctors say that the increased incidence of cancer nowadays is due to better diagnostic facilities, whereas in the olden days it went undetected. But they say this merely to justify themselves. In earlier days, there was some incidence of cancer but it was not this rampant. In those days they used to call it a growth. Nowadays if there is any little swelling, everyone including the doctors get alarmed that it may be cancer. They want to do tests for everything to rule out cancer. If you take pure and sacred food, cancer will not come anywhere near you. Cases of cancer are increasing because of the pollution of air, water, and food. Once cancer sets in, it may not be possible to cure it.

So, you should imbibe the correct food to prevent illness and lead a healthy, happy life. Embodiments of love! Lead a happy, healthy, peaceful, and long life. What is the use of good health when you do not have peace?

Be healthy and happy, and share happiness with others.

Diseases Come and Go

(Upon conclusion of Bhagavan's discourse, one of the devotees asked Swami when the swelling on his face would go down. For several weeks preceding Guru Purnima, Swami had developed a large area of swelling on his right cheek. It had subsided substantially by Guru Purnima but was still evident.)

Swami: It will go down tomorrow. Diseases like smallpox, chickenpox, and typhoid run their usual course of time. Similarly, even this glandular swelling lasts for 21 days. No medicine would help it. Diet has to be controlled and observed carefully.

After 21 days, it subsides spontaneously. Today is 19th day, and by day after tomorrow it should be gone. Today being the 19th day, it has already decreased and there is not much swelling.

By taking the illness on myself from that other person, I gave comfort to him. Even so, bearing the ailment patiently, I do not waste any time. How many discourses am I giving and how much work am I doing? The swelling started near the joint of the right cheek. It was difficult even to talk and drink water.

When the International Seva Conference started, the All-India President, Mr. Srinivasan, requested Swami to give a discourse. When I tried, I could not even speak. Then I felt, what is the use if I can't give happiness to all these people? Then I willed that the swelling move from the joint to a forward point. I

do not cure myself, because then it becomes selfish. There is no selfishness in me. On the 13th day, I shifted the swelling. That day the pain was unbearable and excruciating.

I preach to everybody to get rid of body attachment and develop attachment to the Atma (true Self). So I had to show by example not to have body attachment and to ignore the terrible pain. That's how I could do so much work and give this many discourses. I do not take any holidays like you—no Sundays or any other holidays, only holy days for Swami. I do not pay much attention to the ailment as it comes and goes. Still two more days are remaining. Day after tomorrow, it will be normal.

You may not be aware that the swelling was the size of a ripe orange. No one should feel sad that Swami has taken on this illness. These things come and go. Who invited them and who bids them farewell? They come and go. But you have to control your thoughts. If you pay too much attention to the illness, it will cause you more pain.

A child was suffering, and the principal of the school sent a telegram to the child's parents. The parents took the child to the doctor, but the doctor said there was no cure; the child had to undergo the suffering. The child was crying all the time, without eating or drinking. I went by car to the school and called the child along with the parents into a room. I asked the boy, "What do you want?" He wanted the pain to be removed. I said, "I will remove the pain; you tell me what food you would like." He wanted biscuits, as he had not eaten for three days. I materialized

the biscuits, fed him, blessed him, and told him to go to his classroom at the school.

The parents were concerned and wanted to take the child home. But I told the child to stay at school. Then he returned to the classroom and had no pain. That's how I took his illness upon myself.

All Avatars Take On Illnesses

I do many things like this. Once I took upon myself the paralysis of a devotee. There was a devotee called Krishnappa, a flower vendor in Bangalore. He suffered from paralysis and had to support a large family, so I took his paralysis upon myself. Even though I take these things on myself, I don't cure myself. If I cure myself, it becomes selfish.

Then, in Nainital, there was a mother of three children who lost her husband. She was working as a clerk, and there was no one to support her. She was grieving the demise of her husband, and she used to work day and night to support the family.

While going to the office, she suffered a heart attack. I was in Bangalore when this happened in Nainital. I said, "Laxmi, do not fear." At that time, I left my body, and the students who were with me were worried. Then I came back and told them not to worry, but to take me upstairs. Thus I took upon myself the heart attack, and she became well and the children were happy.

The second day, I sent her a telegram, asking her to come to Brindavan. She came, along with her children. I called them privately and told them not to worry and to go back to work. I took upon myself the

illness for nine days and could not move. I suffered and then got better.

Sometimes I have to take on these illnesses. This happens to all avatars. It happened to the Shirdi avatar and the Krishna avatar. Though all these are not recorded, all incarnations have taken over the sufferings of devotees. God does his duty, whether it is recorded or not. I am ready to take on the sufferings of anyone, when they cannot bear it. I am ready, ready, and ever-ready for this.

These incidents are not obstacles in the way of God. Everything will go on as usual. As you have seen, during the last fifteen days I attended all the functions; I had to do lots of work and gave many discourses. Doctors came and advised me to take rest. I don't want or need any rest. It is a mistake to think that I will become healthy by taking rest. Doing work while undergoing suffering *is* my rest."

(This was followed by *bhajans* by the American devotees, concluding with *arati*).

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
July 27, 2002

A Sai Student on Pilgrimage to Sai¹

USA Pilgrimage Group 1 – Unison Singing Program

The first time I heard about the USA pilgrimage trips was via the Boston Sai Center announcements. A survey was sent out asking for our preference—whether we wanted to be in Group 1 or 2. Most of our region planned to go with Group 1, and I felt that the Unison Singing program being planned for Pilgrimage Group 1 would be something I could participate in.

While thanking Bhagavan for this opportunity, our local group from Region 1 (Northeastern U.S.) began preparing and communicating with others working on the Unison Singing program, especially with musicians and coordinators in Regions 3 (Southeastern U.S.) and 10 (South Central U.S.). The idea behind the Unison Singing was to provide a way for all members of the pilgrimage group to participate in the singing program—an expression of unity in devotion that we hoped to be able to present to Bhagavan.

The Preparations

The planning began through several conference calls among representatives

from Regions 1, 3, and 10 to come up with a list of songs to be offered in the program. The outcome was a list of songs (mp3 files and lyrics) that were first posted online by Region 10 and then published and kept updated on the USA pilgrimage website.

A couple months prior to the pilgrimage date, some of us from Region 1 met in Boston to work on the songs. The songs did not seem overly complicated but were definitely different from the typical “Indian” songs that we were used to, being an assorted mix of Hebrew, Latin, and American tunes.

The Unison Singing program was still in rough form but was presented at the Zone 1 Pre-World Conference in mid-May in Florida. The performance brought to light some inconsistencies among how different people were interpreting the music that needed to be addressed, and we made some adjustments in the program as well—cutting back on long narrations between the singing, for instance. All part of the process Bhagavan was gifting us with—of people from different regions and musical backgrounds learning how to work together and blend into a smooth program.

At about the same time, a cross-regional retreat was held in Boston to help train the instrumentalists. The outcome of this retreat

¹ The author, now residing in the USA, graduated from Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (SSSIHL, now Sri Sathya Sai University) in 1988, receiving a gold medal from Swami as “Best All-Around Student.”



was a series of karaoke-style recordings of the songs for people to practice with. Also, this retreat helped the instrumentalists not only to learn the pieces but also to render each one in a consistent and unified manner.

A couple more practices were held in Region 1, where songs were taught, to those who were interested, by a core group of people who had taken the initiative to master the songs. By our second practice, people seemed familiar enough to play them with less effort.

Equipment

As the practices continued, we began to think of the next steps: how could we ensure that we have all the equipment available that we would need for the music program? A questionnaire was sent out to all the instrumentalists to find out their equipment needs. The responses to this questionnaire helped us understand that apart from the musical instruments' needs alone, we also needed extra audio mixing equipment, cables, pick-ups, backup audio systems, monitors, and proper power converters.

Both before and after arriving in India, Bhagavan helped us in various ways. First, Vedanarayanan Sir,² an alumnus and faculty member at the Sai institutions who is also involved with the Vedam chanting group, came to our help regarding the microphone system in Sai Kulwant Hall. Even before we left for India, we received assurance that we would have 18 microphones available. That helped us to speed up plans regarding other arrangements.

Brother Hariharen, a professional musician and alumnus of SSSU living in Puttaparthi and Bangalore, along with his student, Govinda, from Bangalore, helped us make arrangements for the necessary audio components, keyboards, cables, and miscellaneous instruments. Sandeep Menon and Pavan Krishnamurthy, young adults (YAs) from our Boston area, were instrumental in coordinating with Govinda. Pavan flew down to Bangalore and with help from Govinda was able to procure/rent the required equipment. He loaded the items in his car and brought them to Parthi. After the performance, another YA from Boston, Anupam, returned the equipment safely to Bangalore.

Another alumnus from SSSU, Prasad Kalsi, and Ravi Iyengar from the Houston Sai Center, worked with the SSSU senior students' hostel and made arrangements to have a 16-channel mixer ready for our practices and performance. Using this mixer, we were able to add extra microphones and control the instrument pickups ourselves, separate from the Sai Kulwant Hall sound system.

When we landed in Parthi, a number of Bhagavan's students and faculty helped us all along the way. The warden of the student hostel, Siva Sankar Sai Sir, gave assurance that we would get anything we needed for the program. He even assigned brother Sai Hareesh, a PhD scholar at SSSU, to help us

² "____ Sir" is a respectful form of address. The author, like all students of the Sri Sathya Sai University (SSSU), is accustomed to referencing elders and those in positions of authority using certain respectful terms, such as appending "sir" or "garu" to the person's name.

get what we needed. I recalled with great gratitude how the warden had helped us during our 2005 Region 10 trip as well.³ This time, when our Octapad (digital percussion pad) stopped functioning, the hostel loaned us their only Octapad, the one they use for their programs.

Suryanarayana Sir, who works in the SSSU student hostel at Parthi, also seemed ever ready to help us with anything we needed. Dr. Shailesh Srivastava, SSSU faculty member in the physics department, also was constantly inquiring about our equipment needs. Shailesh even asked another of the PhD scholars, Harish Mani, to help us out with any of our musical instrument requirements. It is so difficult to enumerate all the tremendous help extended to us by the student hostel as a whole. Their kindness and generosity was and is highly appreciated.

The Pilgrimage Begins

I arrived in Parthi on June 22, the day when the Group 1 pilgrimage officially started. That evening darshan was blissful. I was sitting in the “old students” (alumni) block—and continued to sit there every day until the end of the pilgrimage, while my family sat with the USA group. As Bhagavan saw me sitting in the front row, I felt reconnected once again; gone was the weariness of the journey, the pain of jetlag, and I was once again energized. I could sense a tiny smile of recognition on His face.

That first evening was quite important, since we were able to connect in person

with a number of key people: Siva Sankar Sai Sir; Prof. Nanjundaiah, who was the former controller of examinations at SSSU; Shailesh; Vedanarayanan Sir; and KBR Sir, a faculty member of the physics department at SSSU who is in charge of the Sai Kulwant Hall audio system. Some of them advised me to meet with Chakravarthy *garu* and give him an update of my personal profile. That was valuable advice indeed. That night, we had a brief practice session in the exhibition hall, which we ended by 9:30 p.m.

Daily Routine

The next day, we were up and ready by 7 a.m. I left the kids with the USA group and ventured to the old students’ seating block. Practice was to be held daily, immediately after darshan. Bhagavan was so kind that he started giving us morning darshan—whereas previously he had not been appearing in the mornings very often at all. So, after darshan, the morning practice took place until around noon. We would disperse at noon and reconvene after evening darshan. The USA group afternoon line-up would start around 3 p.m. daily.

Bhagavan’s Call

After the first couple of days, Bhagavan very kindly accepted my first letter and gave me *padnamaskar*. On the third day, as I stood outside waiting to be let into the old students’ block, some of the other old students asked me if I were Vidyanand. They told me that Bhagavan had been inquiring about me in the morning! That morning, we had decided that instrumentalists were not to

³ The author formerly lived in Texas and was Region 10 devotional coordinator.



go for darshan, but I had quietly snuck out for darshan. Bhagavan had entered the hall at 8:10, and immediately after he passed the old students' block, I left to go to practice, at 8:15. Had I waited another five minutes, I would have had the opportunity to answer Bhagavan's call, but I was already on my way to the exhibition hall when Bhagavan asked for me at 8:20.

That evening, I hoped Bhagavan would still want to talk to me, but he only looked at me that evening, and I thought I had "missed the bus" for sure.

It turned out that Bhagavan had been looking for me to find out the exact numbers of the USA group, information that I did not have in the morning. And had I been there, I would have given him the wrong numbers. So, in a way, Bhagavan had protected his student (me) by calling me only when I wasn't there, besides letting me know he was thinking of me.

Meeting with Chakravarthy *Garu* and Brother Satyajit

On the third or fourth day, at noon, a couple of other SSSU alums now living in the U.S., Bala and Siddarth, and I ventured to meet Chakravarthy *garu* at the IT center (east of the Radio Sai complex in the ashram). Chakravarthy *garu* was in a meeting with Brother Satyajit when we arrived at the IT center. Chakravarthy *garu* was kind and gracious. He told us that he would meet with us the next day, and meanwhile to talk with brother Satyajit.

We spent the next 15 to 20 minutes with brother Satyajit. Satyajit asked us for the numbers of the USA group, and we gave him the numbers. He mentioned that Bhagavan had arranged speakers and topics for our pilgrimage group. He also suggested that we make a card for Bhagavan from the Sri Sathya Sai University alumni from the U.S. and come to the Yajur Mandir (Bhagavan's residence) the next evening.

The following day at noon, we met as anticipated with Chakravarthy *garu*, who inquired about our welfare and our families, and listened very patiently to each of us. We then talked about the second annual Sai-NAAM (Sai North American Alumni Meet), planned to take place September 18-19, 2010, in Boston, Massachusetts. He showed great interest and gave us a few pointers on what we could discuss at the meet. Finally, we talked about the USA group numbers. Apparently there had been some confusion about the numbers given to him. We were able to explain the cause for the confusion and give him the correct numbers. Chakravarthy *garu* spent almost an hour of his valuable time with us.

That evening, at Arati time, we went to the Yajur Mandir and, while waiting for brother Satya, had darshan of Bhagavan coming into the Yajur Mandir from Sai Kulwant Hall. After Bhagavan went inside, Satya came to meet us. He told us to wait and went inside to tell Bhagavan that we were there. After about five minutes, he came back and took the old students' card from us for Bhagavan. He then mentioned to us

that we should let our USA group organizers know that they should approach Chakravarthy *garu* or Sri S V Giri, Vice Chancellor of SSSU, about the speeches arranged by Bhagavan, as soon as possible. We went back very excited and thankful that Bhagavan had so graciously accepted the card from us.

Bhagavan's Darshan, the Speakers, and Our Practices

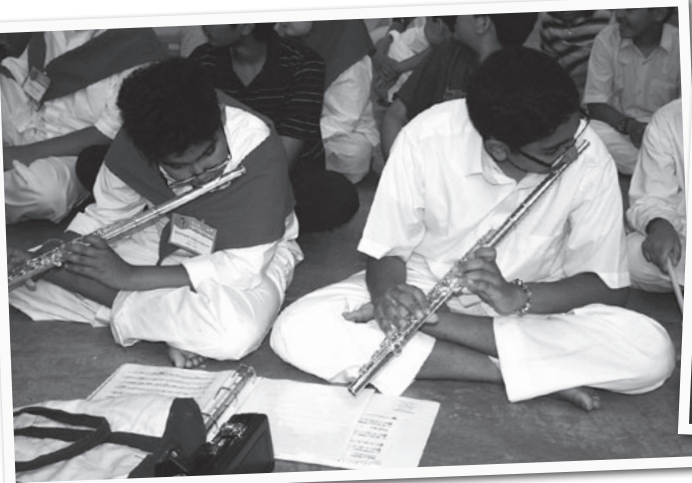
As the scheduled speeches by Bhagavan's designated speakers unfolded day by day, it seemed that Bhagavan seemed to give more and more attention to the USA group. Every morning and evening, he looked at us as he passed by. On one of the days, he beckoned to me and took a letter from me. Each and every darshan gave me more motivation and energy for the program.

Since the speeches were held in the morning after darshan, our practice sessions were moved to the evening, and with each practice we gained more confidence. We had

about 500 singers and 18-plus instruments accompanying each song. Anticipating that we might be invited to lead bhajans after the unison singing program, one night we set the keys for a program of bhajans and practiced them.

On the day before the program, we made a second trip to the Yajur Mandir to meet with brother Satyajit. Just like the first time, I immediately felt transported back to our Old Brindavan. The environment felt the same; only the place and time were different. Satyajit told us that Bhagavan had blessed the program and that it was to be held the next day in the evening.

That evening after darshan, we attended practice, and Mr. Harish Naidu, head of the USA cultural committee and in charge of the cultural programs being offered by the USA pilgrimage groups, announced that Bhagavan had blessed the program for the next day.





The Program Day

Bhagavan's darshans were becoming more and more beautiful. During the morning darshan, from the old students' block we noticed Bhagavan speaking to Alejandro "Alex" Grana, music program coordinator and conductor of the unison singing, and Mr. Mukesh Solanki (Region 10 president) from our group. Later we learned that Bhagavan had asked about the program, and Mukesh had told him that it would be at 6:30 that evening.

After darshan that morning we had time for one last practice, after which we began winding up. We left all the instruments in the exhibition hall, with a decision to return there at 2:30 p.m. to pick them up.

At 2:30, we transported the instruments to Sai Kulwant Hall via the ashram's tractor—a timely and fun ride. At around 3:10, Mr. Harshad Patel and I met with Reddy *garu* of the Sai Kulwant Hall, who gave his consent to move the musical instruments inside. By around 4:15, we were all set and ready.



The Vedam chanting began about 4:30, ending around 5:30, and Bhagavan entered the hall at about 6:30. As he came toward where I sat with the instrumentalists, he said something to me. Later someone told me that he had asked me if we were ready to begin. Alex then stepped up to present a big card, and the program began, with Bhagavan's consent.

I was watching Bhagavan's expression as we sang. He seemed to be listening lovingly to each song. At the end of our eleven songs, Alex asked Bhagavan if we could sing three more songs. We then continued with "*Un Solo Dios*" and two more songs. At the end, upon Alex's request, we were allowed to start bhajans. I sang the first bhajan with Pavan; Bhavadhaarini, also from Region 1, sang the second; Siddharth Krishnan from Region 3 and Srikanth Bharatan of Region 10 sang the third; and finally, Sudha Balan and Arathi of Region 3 sang the fourth bhajan.

The closure of the program came with the Arati, after which Bhagavan gave his blessings to us all. Some of us cried, as this had indeed been a great journey—a journey of love and grace, a journey where we had won the heart of our Lord.

The Last Few Days

The next day, Bhagavan came by the old students' block and looked at me holding a letter. He told one of the gentlemen walking with him, "*Teesuko*." ("Take it.") The gentleman took the letter from my hand and

gave it to Bhagavan. In the letter I had mentioned that I would be leaving Parthi on July 2.

The following day, Mr. Harish Naidu came by in the morning and gave me an album containing photos of our preparations for the trip. He explained each and every page of the album and asked me to give it to Bhagavan. Per his directive, that morning, I sat with Bala and Siddharth, waiting for Bhagavan. As soon as Bhagavan came to the old students' block, I knelt and held up the album for him to see. Bhagavan called me, and I moved forward with the album. Bala and Siddharth followed. Chakravarthy *garu* then told us to show the album quickly to Bhagavan, who lovingly went through each and every page.

For the most part, I was able to narrate to Bhagavan in Telugu everything that Mr. Harish Naidu had told me. At the end of the album, I closed the album and said, "Swami, *idi meeke arpitham*." ("We offer this to you.") Bhagavan took the album and gave us *padnamaskar*.

Bhagavan then looked at me again, and I remembered that my mother had given me a letter to give to him, given the chance. I took the letter out and said, "Swami, *amma e letter rasindi. Meeku ivvamandi*," ("My mother wrote this letter and asked me to give it to you."). Bhagavan kindly accepted the letter.

On our final day, Bhagavan again looked at us lovingly in the morning, and that was our last darshan.

Conclusion

Personally, this trip was like revisiting my hostel days in Parthi. I was able to have Bhagavan's *darshan*, *sparshan*, and *sambhashan* (blessing of seeing, touching, and hearing him). I got all that I asked for and much more. Bhagavan's love and grace for his students is immense. He always reminds us that we are his property. I wish I could thank him more for all he has given me. As Chakravarty *garu* implied in his conversation with us, the way to thank Bhagavan is to carry out his mission—to look beyond the Sarva Dharma symbol and spread the essence behind it to one and all.

—Vidyanand Desibhatla
Boston, Massachusetts





Pilgrimage Group 1 - Unison Singing Program

On June 29, 2010, a group of 690 men, women, and children from the U.S. sat preciously close to the divine form of our beloved Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, ready to sing their hearts out. Here was that golden moment for which they had longed, and as Bhagavan's white chariot approached, their feelings could not be described. Only later can one look back at such a unique journey and start to put into words its countless blessings.

In the past, numerous pilgrimages have been made to Prasanthi Nilayam by

USA centers and regions, but this was the first collective USA trip, undertaken in two groups. Ours was Group 1. The cultural program for Group 1 was a Unison Singing presentation, aptly entitled, "Our Journey Back to You." The program consisted of three parts: "Love All, Serve All," "God Is," and "I am I,"—echoing the year-long study of these maxims by members of the Sai organization in honor of Bhagavan's 85th birthday—and featuring songs of many faiths, in many languages, punctuated with narration.



The first part, “Love All, Serve All,” presented a collection of songs in English, Latin, and Indian languages, highlighting the oneness that unites and strengthens us all. As Sai’s children, we must perfectly follow this core message of the Avatar—to “love all, serve all.” As one individual pointed out, a pilgrimage group is not a random assortment of souls but rather of spiritual seekers that have voyaged together in lifetimes before. The songs presented included “*Adoramus Te*,” “Everyone Is My Brother,” “Family Feeling,” and the high-tempo “Love All, Serve All.”

The second part of the singing program, “God Is,” represented the ultimate understanding that may be achieved through studying and putting into practice Bhagavan’s teachings. In the beginning we say, “God is good,” “God is love,” etc., until we exhaust all the befitting descriptions. Then, all that remains is “God is.” Here, the

group presented songs in English, Spanish, and Hebrew, including “*Se Me Caigo*,” “Stand Together,” and “*Hine Ma Tov*.”

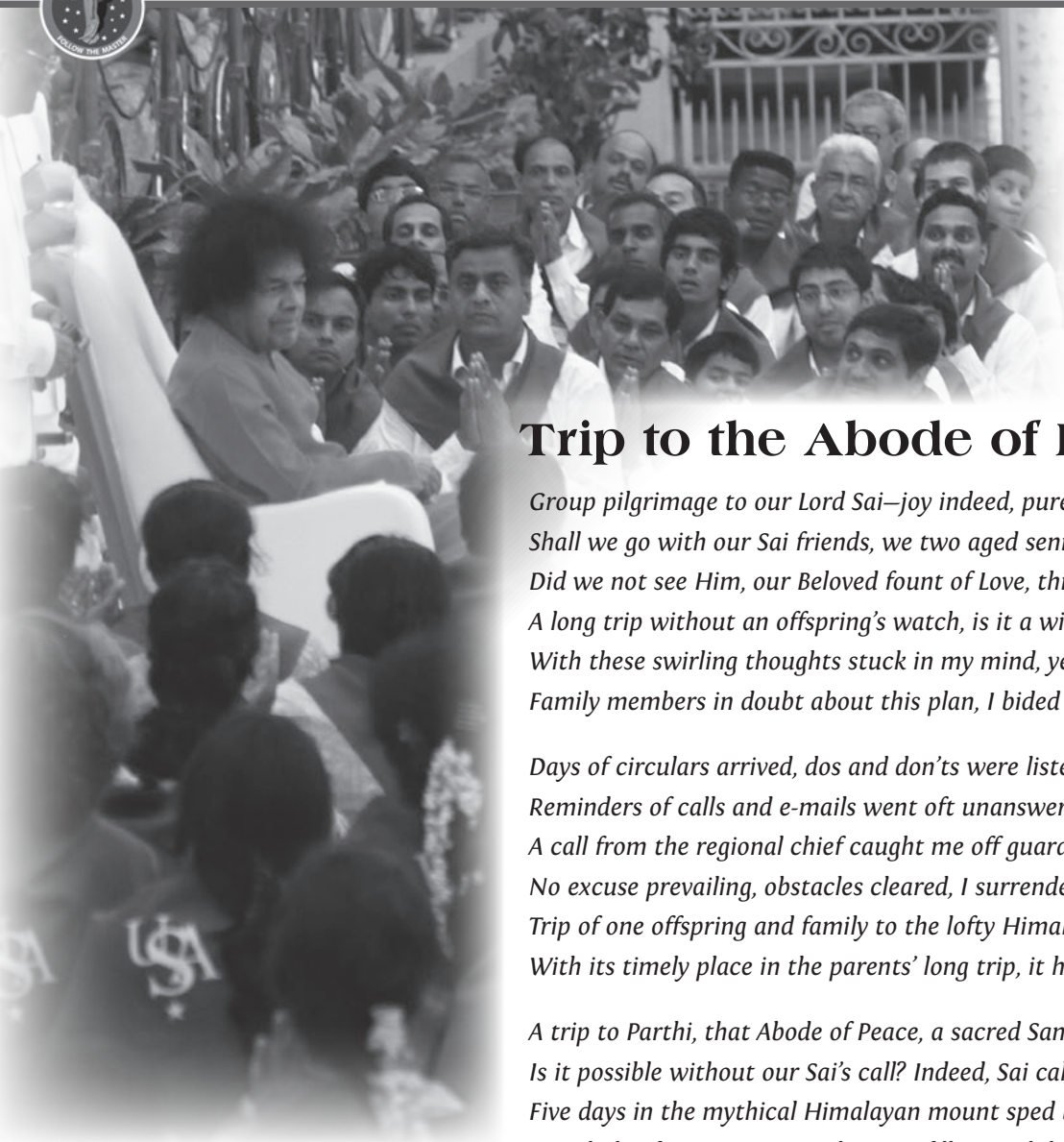
The third part, “I Am I,” stood for “knowing thyself.” The external search for divinity concludes within. Here the group sang such songs as “Awesome God,” “You Are the Rhythm,” “Surrender to the Feet of the Lord,” and “*Un Solo Dios*.” The program ended with the soulful “Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai.”

Throughout the performance, beloved Bhagavan gazed at the group while gracefully swaying to the music. Mother Sai’s love encompassed the entire hall, as his twinkling eyes lit the lamp of love in every heart. Our *sadguru* left each individual with a deeper understanding that He is not only always with them but one with them.

—**Ravindran Iyengar**

Sugarland, Texas

(on behalf of 2010 USA Pilgrimage Group 1)

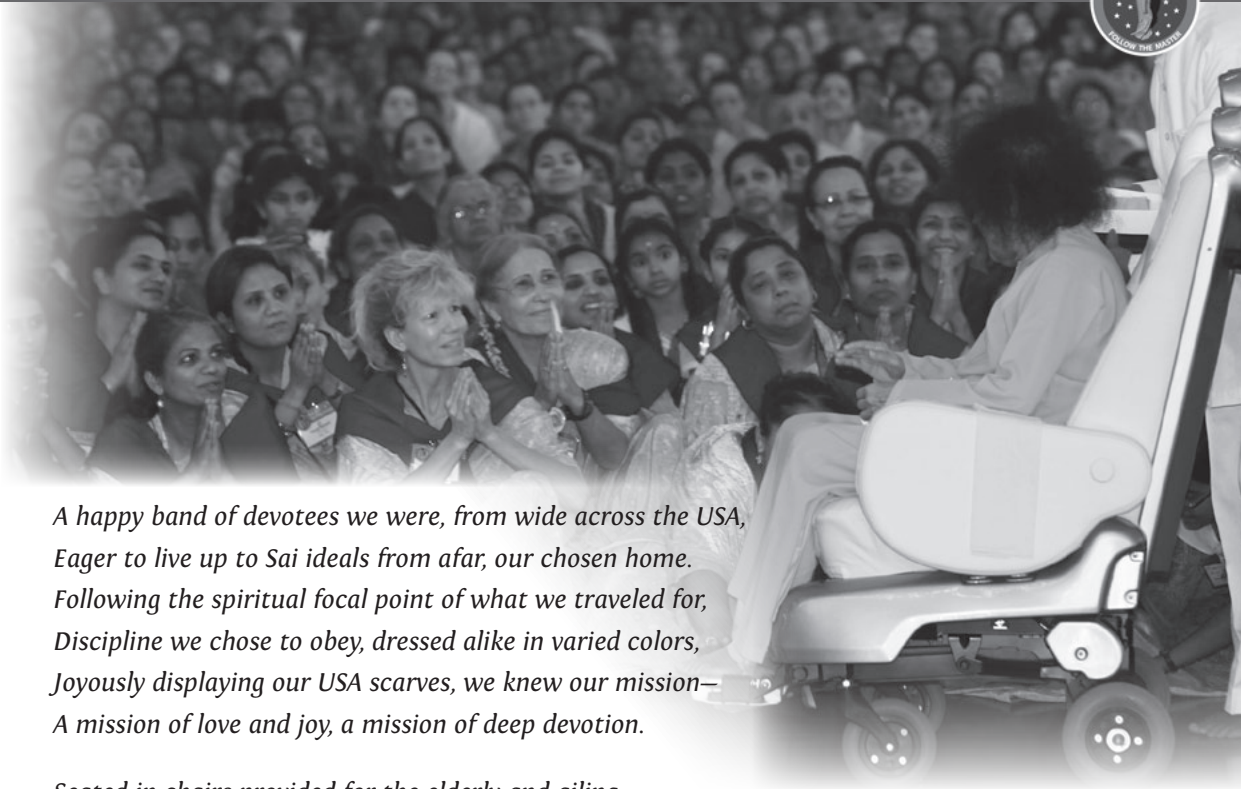


Trip to the Abode of Peace

*Group pilgrimage to our Lord Sai—joy indeed, pure bliss—
Shall we go with our Sai friends, we two aged senior citizens?
Did we not see Him, our Beloved fount of Love, this January?
A long trip without an offspring's watch, is it a wise venture?
With these swirling thoughts stuck in my mind, yet I signed.
Family members in doubt about this plan, I bided for time.*

*Days of circulars arrived, dos and don'ts were listed,
Reminders of calls and e-mails went oft unanswered.
A call from the regional chief caught me off guard;
No excuse prevailing, obstacles cleared, I surrendered.
Trip of one offspring and family to the lofty Himalayas,
With its timely place in the parents' long trip, it helped.*

*A trip to Parthi, that Abode of Peace, a sacred Sanctuary,
Is it possible without our Sai's call? Indeed, Sai called us.
Five days in the mythical Himalayan mount sped by quick,
A prelude of awesome sacredness to fill us with longing.
Yes, longing to be with our Lord of Lords, our eternal Sai,
We went, a part of the U.S. group, to bask in His presence.*



*A happy band of devotees we were, from wide across the USA,
Eager to live up to Sai ideals from afar, our chosen home.
Following the spiritual focal point of what we traveled for,
Discipline we chose to obey, dressed alike in varied colors,
Joyously displaying our USA scarves, we knew our mission—
A mission of love and joy, a mission of deep devotion.*

*Seated in chairs provided for the elderly and ailing,
Seated at a distance yet in the direct vision of our Lord,
Seated in chairs, oft in front, chosen by drawn numbers,
I sat, sat in silence and stillness, divinely drawn to the Lord.
Eyes riveted to the enchanting form in orange hues-robe,
I gazed and gazed at the radiant Lord encased in pure Love.*

*Our Beloved Lord gave darshans; He came almost every day,
Morn and eve. He was wheeled to that spot of direct vision,
Sitting there, glancing through letters, producing miracles,
Looking at devotees, making those mystical hand signs,
Delightfully listening to the unison songs of our group entire.
He gave us joy, pure bliss, every darshan a sacred interview.*

—Kanaga Ranganathan
Bethesda, Maryland



Our “Sai Ideal” Journey to Sai Baba

USA Pilgrimage Group 2, July 5-14, 2010

My last trip to India to see Sai Baba was to Brindavan 16 years ago. When the announcement came by e-mail that a Sai pilgrimage was forming for the summer of 2010, Felicia Gironda and myself both strongly felt that Swami was calling us.

Everything went smoothly in terms of booking a flight, obtaining a visa, etc. Felicia and I traveled together and arrived in Prasanthi Nilayam early in the morning on July 4, so we were able to go to morning darshan. Swami came out very early that morning, at 7:55 a.m. It was a real joy to see him in person after so many years.

We enjoyed being part of the group. We had to line up early and remain silent while in line and during darshan. Swami was teaching us discipline, sacrifice, and surrender. We were told by our team leaders that each member of the group was a reflection of the whole. Since we wanted Swami to think favorably of our group, we all tried hard to maintain this *sadhana* (spiritual practice).

Swami gave us so many blessings in his presence. First of all, we were given the best block in the darshan hall—front center. Even the back rows were close to the front. We received *prasada* (blessed food) after several of the performances. Swami also blessed

our group on several occasions by raising both his hands in our direction. On two occasions he manifested two necklaces and a ring on stage for all to behold. He took our letters every day and looked intently at our group every time he came for darshan the entire ten days.

Swami truly enjoyed both the USA choir and the children's Native American play, "All Our Relations." We were told Swami was happy with our group.

It was a hectic schedule, often running from darshan to change, eat, shop, and attend service activities. Our team leaders told us that when one of the members of the group was given *padnanamaskar* (blessing of touching Swami's feet), it was for the entire group. This promoted a noncompetitive atmosphere.

The Sai Ideal—to live in love—to promote world harmony and peace—is what we all strive for. The past year has been difficult for me in terms of my work environment.

Swami sets the bar very high for us to live up to. We may find it easy to be loving around other Sai devotees, but in our everyday lives, can we interact with equanimity?

I am trying to view my situation with new eyes and learn not to react to every little bump in the road. I feel Swami holding me up and giving me strength to remain calm. With Swami's grace, I will finish my karma with this job and be able to move on.

I am certain the effects of seeing Swami will have ramification for many lifetimes to come. I feel very blessed once again to have been in his presence and to have had the opportunity to share this experience with such a wonderful group of Sai devotees. I am truly thankful to all the leaders who worked selflessly and endlessly to make this incredible experience possible.

—Chana Benjamin
Manhattan Center, New York

Pilgrimage Dream

I had an opportunity to participate in the *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) activities undertaken by the Sai centers of Region 5 in preparation for the Parthi pilgrimage planned for the summer of 2009. Due to pressing circumstances, however, I could not be part of the group that left for Parthi. During the time when the group was at Parthi, I had a dream wherein I found myself with the group sitting in the darshan lines, and Swami graciously came over to where I was sitting and blessed me. The lesson for me from this experience is that we must do our duty as best as we can and leave it completely to Swami to decide how and in what manner he wants to reward our efforts.

—A Devotee from Indiana



Pilgrimage Group 2: USA Sai Choir and Orchestra

“National Choir” Performance, July 20, 2010

The journey to Sai is ever-filled with opportunities (some would say challenges) to practice his teachings. For the USA pilgrimages the watchword was UNITY above all, and we had many, many chances to examine how we personally implement and amplify this quality in ourselves and as we work with others. Such large-scale projects as a national pilgrimage bring up many uncertainties and hurdles to navigate, but with faith, love, and confidence, these melt away.

The USA Sai Choir and Orchestra (aka “national choir”) was an unforgettable experience and included members from every region of the country—“from sea to shining sea”—and from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, truly a representation of American culture. Throughout the months

of preparations and the time in Prasanthi Nilayam, tremendous help and dedication, both from the visible membership and the invisible divine hand, were evident all along.

The USA choir began as an outgrowth of the Southern California Sai Choir, which is directed by Ms. Maryalice Jessup and has served as a performance group regularly in USA Region 8 (Pacific South) for over a decade.

When planning for the pilgrimage cultural programs began last fall, the choir was asked to participate in Group 2 and expand into a national group. Soon the idea grew to include an orchestra as well. Applicants for the choir were screened and music selected. Sheet music was ordered and distributed, and recordings made during the first few



months of 2010. The recording project was huge, because some of the pieces had up to eight vocal parts, and all the major parts had to be recorded, as well as the ensemble recording with voices and accompaniment (i.e., “all parts”), plus a track of accompaniment alone. So there were a minimum of six tracks to record, for each of the nine or so songs planned. These were posted as MP3 files online on the already-existing choir website and extensive lyric sheets with notes on the director’s interpretations were also prepared. CDs were mailed out to those who requested them.

A Pre-Performance in Orlando

The Zone 1 Pre-World Conference in Orlando gave the newly-formed USA Sai Choir a unique chance for more than a quarter of the membership to get together and try their wings. Only five were from the Southern California portion of the choir, so all the rest were brand new to rehearsing together. Plus, we were asked to sing a few numbers from the July pilgrimage program, on Saturday evening.

With Swami’s grace, enough of the choir members had been studying the music, and all the individual preparations paid off. We had come prepared to sing only one or two numbers, or even none—and also had brought a CD with the “all parts” arrangements in case needed to fill in the sound during the performance. There was great uncertainty as to how much, if any, practice space and time would be possible.

Once we arrived in Orlando, however, everything fell into place and went smoothly. We were very cared for by the hosting Region 3 coordinators, who helped us with practice rooms, equipment, and even brought us meals during our rehearsals. And our singers did so well. The feeling of Sai’s invisible support and encouragement came through constantly and in a big way. We performed all four songs and used the “music only” background. The sound system also was very professionally arranged, to the best advantage with many microphones (the best set-up our choir has ever enjoyed). Truly it was all Swami’s doing and his blessing to lift us up in this way. A proof of him working





through us was the number of people who came up afterward expressing how uplifting, touching, and moving the choir singing was, even at this early point in rehearsing—truly inspiring to the audience—their hearts were touched. We felt that no one else but Swami could have done this. The choir members left feeling greatly encouraged.

Regional Rehearsals

After Orlando, some regional practices outside Southern California were able to get into gear. Members from Regions 1 and 2 met for four Saturday afternoon practices between late April and early June. With the assistance of Region 1 and 2 Sai organization officers, Bitsy Noel, Fran Kesselman, and Ella Gurevich worked together to coordinate, host, and lead the practice sessions. Over 20 choir members commuted to the Gurevich home in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, from as far away as Boston and Washington DC/Maryland/Virginia. Choir members from New York traveled together by train.

Small groups in St. Louis, Missouri, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were also able to meet regularly. Region 6 held several regional practices, led by Sunil Kasturi (who was also highly involved with the other cultural program group, the children's skit preparations), with Pacific-Northwest members of the choir coming from as far away as Oregon to rehearse with the group.

In Southern California, we were blessed to have the Anaheim Desert Palms Hotel meeting rooms as a Saturday practice venue from March-June. Not only was this a very

central location, for people coming in from Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties, but with at least 30 people attending, we simply were too large a group to fit easily into the available homes in central Orange County.

Fifteen or so Sai Anantam Ashram members (an ashram founded by Sai devotee Swamini Turiyasangitananda, located near Agoura, California) rehearsed together regularly and also joined us two Saturdays a month in Anaheim, and they added a wonderful dimension and depth to our group. One of the Sai Anantam Ashram members, from the San Francisco Bay area, flew to Los Angeles on several weekends to participate in the Saturday practices, and one choir member from Hawaii came also to one of those practices. On Saturday, May 22, we rehearsed in the morning and performed that afternoon for the Region 8 USA Pilgrimage meeting.

In addition to these regional groups, perhaps 20 or so additional members lived in far-flung areas, without other choir members nearby. But one thing that bound everyone together was the beautiful, uplifting, and inspiring experience of practicing the music itself. Our beloved Sai always tells us that group devotional singing is healing and brings joy to the very atmosphere as well as to our hearts.

Many members of the choir expressed their joy at being able to be a part of this project and sing these beautiful inspiring songs. Some played the CD while driving to and from work, and sang along to practice.

Others used their MP3 players and practiced while gardening or cooking. Others shared that practicing these songs helped them bring wayward moods of the mind back to uplifting thoughts and feelings.

The pilgrimage cultural committee also began coordinating the production of printed programs for the presentations, to be shown or handed to Swami in India. And a number of instrumentalists stepped forward to participate in the orchestra. Some of the people working behind the scenes in the choir and other performances did not even go to India—so the scope of the project was aided by a lot of people through many ways of contributing.

In Prasanthi Nilayam

The coordinators of the USA choir and orchestra had felt all along that Swami was guiding everything to do with “his choir”—and helping, uplifting, and smoothing the path at all times. So much had been done, but other than the brief preview in Orlando, we had never yet sung and played all together.

At last, in early July, after six months of preparations, the USA Sai Choir and Orchestra members were about to meet face-to-face for the first time upon arriving at Prasanthi Nilayam. Over 850 American pilgrims, including 95 choir and orchestra members, converged by July 5 as the USA Pilgrimage Group 2, with the prospect of daily darshans of our beloved Bhagavan and many rehearsals to polish the program.



The choir was able to begin practicing on the first official day of the pilgrimage, July 5, after morning darshan, from 10:30 to noon. The USA pilgrimage leaders had arranged for the choir to use the space above the North Indian Canteen for morning and afternoon rehearsals. Evening rehearsals were held in the Exhibition Hall (aka “double-decker building”), either upstairs or downstairs, depending on where the children’s skit and orchestra rehearsals, or other pilgrimage groups, were meeting.

The feeling of invisible divine support was again strongly evident. Our activities were blessed when Swami recognized and interacted with the choir leaders during darshan, starting from our first days there. The first two days of rehearsing were spent holding whole group and men’s and women’s sectionals, focusing on the “tricky sections” of the pieces. The blending of the diverse yet well-prepared group was amazingly beauti-



ful, from the very first rehearsal onward. All the support, from posting of audio files and lyrics online, to making sure everyone had the sheet music and CDs if requested, to the individual and regional practices that were held during the prior months, paid off. At last we could hear the songs, 80 voices strong. The sound, sustained by the love in our hearts, was sublime.

One of the big challenges at the ashram for a rehearsing group is getting meals after darshan and making it to practices on time. One of our choir members, MaryAnn Lee, had been a consistent volunteer at the Western canteen, during her previous visits to Prasanthi, so she knew the coordinators of the Western canteen, and also the staff members at the North Indian canteen. Working with the pilgrimage group leaders, she was able to arrange permission for choir members to go to the head of the line at both these canteens, upon showing their pilgrimage badge marked “Choir.” This helped us tremendously in getting to rehearsals on time.

We had hoped to be able to use a full-size 88-key electronic piano courtesy of a resident but those plans had fallen through. Some of the accompaniments to the pieces required a fuller range of notes than most portable keyboards have, so we didn’t know what we would do about that. Imagine our delight when one of our choir members, Lee Praphai Boonsermsuwong, of Pittsburgh, spontaneously showed up carting a 76-key keyboard—with pedal, which she had been inspired to bring from home. Our accompanist and assistant director, Mr. Bill

Bailey, was overjoyed and relieved at this beautiful *leela*.

The “Rain of His Presence”

Quite late, in May or June, we had added a very simple yet beautiful and prayerful song, “Let the Rain of Your Presence Fall on Me,” to include as our final number. Because the weather in southern India had turned to monsoon just before we arrived, rain and thunderstorms took place almost every day, and we felt that Swami, through the weather itself, was singing our prayer back to us. The rain also helped to cool the temperatures a bit, which we all appreciated. Sometimes intense showers would blow through during afternoon darshan, pounding percussively on the retractable translucent panels of the arched portion of the roof of Sai Kulwant Hall, yet nature’s concert-downpour would inevitably wind up by the time the thousands of devotees left the hall.

Another verse of one of our songs, “How Beautiful Your Songs of Praise,” has a line, “In the movement of a breeze, I can hear you speak.” Whenever a soft breeze would waft gently through the hall while we waited for darshan, it seemed as if Bhagavan were again whispering back the sentiment of the song to us, through nature.

Several groups from around India were already scheduled to perform in the afternoon almost every day, so we hoped to have as many as six or seven days to practice. We still had to bring the orchestra into the mix, and after a few days spent rehearsing just with the choir alone, Bill began meeting

with the orchestra while Maryalice went on working with the choir.

On Friday, July 9, Maryalice and myself, along with Mrs. Shalini Naidu, were asked to sit in the front row and present to Swami, if we got the chance, a description page of the two American cultural programs our pilgrimage group hoped to present—the choir/orchestra program of western choral devotional music and the children’s skit on Native American spirituality. That morning, Swami did not come out, but in the afternoon he gave us a huge smile and allowed us to approach and explain the program. By that time, we knew that the performance had been scheduled for July 10, the next day, and the children’s performance for the following day, July 11. So we didn’t need to ask what day Swami would like us to perform. Shalini explained the two programs in Telugu, however, as Bhagavan so sweetly read every line and looked at a page of photos of a Region 8 (Southern California) choir rehearsal plus photos of the fledgling USA choir taken during the performance at the Pre-World Conference in Orlando in May 2010. Swami looked with interest at each person in the photos.

We had anticipated that the children’s performance would take place on the 11th, a Sunday, as this would be one of the days when all the school children from Swami’s various local schools would attend darshan (Thursdays and Sundays, usually). Also, we had hoped for a few more days of choir and orchestra practice. But a large group of Russians had just arrived, and their perfor-



mances were scheduled for the 12th and 13th, so our only possible slot was on July 10. The Lord’s will be done.

Swami definitely sped things up for us, because the choir had not rehearsed even once yet with the orchestra. That evening we held our first joint rehearsal and had time for only one more on the morning of the 10th. We had nine numbers in the program, with CD accompaniments as backup for all the pieces—“just in case.” Yet even in such a short time, we were able to convert seven out of the nine songs to live accompaniment with the orchestra. Our orchestra consisted of fifteen instruments, including violins, violas, cellos, snare drum, keyboard, guitar, flute, and tabla. The two remaining songs had extensive brass sections in them, and since we had no brass instruments at all, we kept the CD accompaniments for those pieces.



Performance Time

On the 10th, just before the program started and as the large invitation program was being brought to Swami, he said, “Very happy,” and Maryalice said to him, “Thank you for allowing your choir to come here again and sing.” Bhagavan said something else while looking at the program, but his voice was so soft that we could not make out his words.

During the 45-minute performance, Mr. Jeremy Hoffer served as emcee, giving brief introductions for the program. We also had a sign language interpreter for the deaf, Ms. Sindhu Sadhaka, who stood forward of the choir on the ladies’ side of the hall, facing the audience.

The program started off with a lively arrangement of a traditional Shaker song, “Simple Gifts,” which has the theme of “work as worship” and living simply, echoing Swami’s teachings of placing a ceiling on desires.

The next number was a contemporary Christian praise song, “The Potter’s Hand,” a prayer to be molded and guided by the Lord and used as his instrument—with a vocal solo by Bill Bailey and accompanied by a multicultural jazz-flavored ensemble of keyboard, tabla, guitar, and violin.

The next section of the program moved into African American spirituals—“Deep River/Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,” both of which bring out the spiritual seekers’ yearning to reach “home.” This was followed by a longer medley of American patriotic songs: “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing”

(the African-American national hymn), “America the Beautiful,” “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” and “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah.”

The next three songs focused on spiritual joy and devotion: “There’ll Be Joy in the Morning,” “How Beautiful Your Songs of Praise,” and “The Majesty and Glory of Your Name,” which is based on verses from the Holy Bible, Book of Psalms.

The climax piece of the set was the “Hallelujah” chorus from G F Handel’s “Messiah” oratorio—European in origin but well-loved and often performed in Christian churches and communities across the United States.

The encore piece and denouement was the heartfelt prayer, “Let the Rain of Your Presence Fall on Me.”

Swami listened attentively and referred to the printed program often during the performance. He also looked intently, sometimes more than once, at each member of the orchestra, choir, and the bhajan leaders who led singing for 40 minutes following the choir performance. Swami created a beautiful gold necklace and pendant for one of the female bhajan leaders; she was entirely humbled, surprised, and overwhelmed.

The combination of the music, the sweetness and dedication of the musicians, the wonderful hours spent working and singing together with devotion, and the time spent in Swami’s physical presence made for an unforgettable experience for the Sai choir representing the USA.

—**Corinn Codye**

Wrightwood, California
Member of the USA Sai Choir
& Orchestra Coordinating Team

Amogh's Journey to the Beloved

This is a very personal experience and quite an emotional one for our family. The experience cited here was not just an hour, or a day, or a week long. It was a full five years long, and it seemed to culminate at the end of this year's USA Sai Pilgrimage. Though the experience was enormous, I will keep it short due to the space restrictions of the magazine.

Amogh's journey began on June 28, 2005, when he was born, in Mesa, Arizona. He was a very sweet child who looked perfectly normal and thrived just great after coming home from the hospital. Little did we know that our child was not developing like a typical child. It was not until about eight months later that we realized our child was not normal, and he was going to have a lot of challenges in life. I could see that Amogh had cognitive problems—in lay terms, mental challenges. No mother likes to hear that about her child.

Although Amogh was cognitively delayed, or at least appeared to be, he showed affection. His cognition level was also related to his two senses—he was legally blind and profoundly deaf. Due to this dual sensory impairment, he seemed very slow at everything. But all in all, he was becoming a smart boy as he was growing up.

When Amogh was about two-and-a-half years old, we decided to move to Boston in hopes of providing a better education for Amogh. Previously, when I tried to talk to

other parents with special needs children, I felt quite lost, and could find no suitable parent support group in Arizona. We felt a sense of isolation and that there was a general lack of awareness regarding our situation. We had good friends among the Sai family in Mesa, Arizona, however, and an excellent set of therapists through the Arizona Early Intervention and Prevention Program.

The Perkins School

One of the deaf-blind educators in Arizona mentioned Perkins School for the Blind, in Boston. This person felt that Amogh might benefit greatly from this school, since it specialized in deaf-blind education. So, gradually we started thinking about a possible move. My husband, Sushil, got the idea first, and I agreed with minimum hesitation. I felt very strongly that the divine hand was behind all this, and in four months' time we were in Boston.

We arrived in Boston on April 20, 2008, and soon Amogh was accepted at the Perkins School for the Blind, but it was uncertain whether the local school district (Arlington School District) would be willing to pay for his transportation to Perkins. Usually when a school district has to send a child with special needs to an out-of-district school, there are reservations and a lot of opposition. But again, Swami's invisible hand was behind us. He helped us get

through this hurdle without any problems. The school district suggested on their own to send Amogh to Perkins School for the Blind. This started a very beautiful phase of Amogh's life.

Amogh began attending Perkins School for the Blind in September 2008. He was a champ in his classroom, since he was the only child at that point who actually ate real food. His classmates could not eat by mouth and had feeding tubes. Amogh blossomed unbelievably in the next two years. We enjoyed each moment with him. His school staff was so dedicated and enthusiastic that they celebrated every success. I got daily notes of his activities while at school, and regular progress reports.

Amogh was a very curious and determined child. He always wanted to explore new things. He was extremely interested in walking. He couldn't walk on his own but used a walker as well as a gait trainer at home. Perkins school brought out the best in him. Amogh was the happiest student in his class. He was blessed with a wonderful smile. He caught everyone's attention. And he touched numerous lives. Amogh was well respected and loved at the Perkins campus.

Our Trip to Puttaparthi

Amogh had made one trip to Parthi in January of 2009, and I wanted to make another trip to Parthi with a group. I had heard that when you are in a group, you may get to sing in front of Swami, and you may get assigned seating.

So, upon hearing about the USA Sai Pilgrimage of 2010, I considered it seriously. I

also thought that since Amogh would only get older and bigger in size as time goes by, while he was still little, I could make it to India with him by myself. I knew I could physically carry Amogh for short periods—he wasn't very heavy. I also thought, who knows when I would get another opportunity like this to go to Parthi. My husband, who did not have many days of vacation and did not wish to spend so many days on a pilgrimage, decided to send me with the two children, Anika and Amogh.

We left for India on June 9, 2010, and spent a few days with relatives in Mumbai. On June 22, we were scheduled to fly to Bangalore, and originally our flight was to leave at 10:30 a.m., but that flight had been cancelled before we left the U.S., and we had rescheduled another flight that was to leave Mumbai 90 minutes earlier, at 9:05 a.m. My husband, Sushil, was aware of this change in itinerary and had informed our friends from Boston about my flight and arrival details, while I was in Mumbai recovering from the jet lag. Three of our Boston friends would be waiting for us in Bangalore, and we had planned to share a private taxi to Parthi. But the change in itinerary had slipped my mind, and even when I printed my itinerary from the airline's website, it too still showed my flight as leaving at 10:35 a.m. With the wrong time in mind, I was all set to leave for the airport in Mumbai at 9:00.

At 7:00 that morning, I talked to my husband, and he asked me what time I was leaving for the airport. I answered, "Around 8:30 a.m., since it takes an hour to get to the airport."

My husband exclaimed, "What??? Your flight leaves at 9:05!"

I jumped out of the chair and rushed to get both the children. In just ten minutes we were out of the house. By the time we were ready with all our luggage and waiting for an auto rickshaw, it was about 7:30. With great difficulty, my father-in-law found an auto rickshaw, since there was a strike that day. The strike was due to a recent hike in fuel prices, and all of the taxi and auto rickshaw drivers were supposed to support the strike by not accepting any passengers for hire.

As we passed the Dharavi slum area of Mumbai, we were literally stopped by a mob. The mob threatened us all, especially the driver. They hit him on the head and tried to pull him out of the vehicle. My father-in-law kept pleading, "This child doesn't see, doesn't hear, and doesn't walk or talk; please let us go." And I kept saying, "We are going to see Bhagavan; we are going to see Bhagavan." And sure enough, they let us go. Less than 200 yards farther, the same scene repeated itself with a bigger and stronger mob; the same pleading continued, and finally we got out of that area.

We got to the airport on time and safely reached Bangalore. I really felt that Sai's invisible hand had pulled us to Puttaparthi, making sure that we got there on time.

Our stay at Parthi was very blessed. We had darshan every day, morning and evening, except on three occasions. I ended up getting a first row seat on many occasions. Some darshans, I was at a far distance, and I was very content even then.

Any darshan was good darshan for me. My daughter sat with our U.S. pilgrimage group; most of the time I sat in the patient section with my son.

We had two very remarkable darshans. One of them was June 23, the first day of the pilgrimage, when I sat with Amogh in the first row of the patient section. When Swami leaves, he passes by the ladies' section, and on that day he looked straight at us, with a very thoughtful look on his face. He nodded a little and also moved his hand, as if he had a plan in mind, or as if he were thinking about us, or telling me, I know about you.

The remaining darshans were good, too, since Swami would stop in front of the patient section, talking to his extended family. This was a great opportunity for all of us who sat in that area.

The darshan on Thursday, July 1 was the most amazing experience. There was a performance by the students that evening. Amogh was quite restless, and hence I took him to the water fountain area. He was also tired and played on the tiles. When it was time for Swami to leave, Amogh and I came back quickly to our seats. Then the challenge for me was to keep him quiet. He wanted to talk or make noises, and I tried to keep him quiet.

Swami spoke for an extended time with his family members, while every mom around me tried her best to keep her little one quiet. There was another child with a similar disability, and his mother was frantically trying to keep him calm. It got to a point where she couldn't control her son and had to leave the hall. I truly felt bad for her.

She had also waited for so long, and she had to leave just as Swami was about to pass.

Finally, Swami was ready to move toward the exit, and just as he started move, he looked up, straight at us. I was busy repeating *Om Sai Ram, Om Sai Ram*, while trying to control Amogh. Swami kept looking at us while he was moving. He had a brilliant smile on his face. Again, he raised his hand, not completely but indicating that he was blessing Amogh.

I couldn't believe my eyes. I have often thought that I am such an ordinary person, making ordinary mistakes, leading a mundane life, and that I am not worthy of close contact with Swami. But I saw with my own eyes that Swami was smiling at us, and I instantaneously smiled. I wished the best for Amogh as Swami left slowly.

As the darshan ended, a number of people came up and said, "Swami blessed your child." I tried to keep very quiet, for I wanted to keep that joy within me; I didn't want to waste the divine energy gathered in the divine presence, so I used minimum words.

Even the Western canteen cashier asked me after the darshan, "Swami blessed your child, right?" and I responded by asking, "Were you there, watching?" She said yes.

Anyway, the next day, Amogh had a fever; he got up late. But I didn't want to miss the last darshan, so we went, though late—Anika, Amogh, and I. Fortunately, we got there before Swami arrived, and Amogh slept in my lap through the darshan.

The last darshan was nice, and right afterward we packed quickly and left. Upon

arriving in Bangalore we saw a doctor who thought Amogh had a viral infection that might take from three to five days to clear up. Then we stayed the night at our dear friends' house in Bangalore, and reached Mumbai the next day. Amogh did well on the flight. The next two days, he did not seem to be doing well, but I did not realize what was going on with him. Then, suddenly, he left us, on Tuesday, July 6, 2010, during what appeared to me to be a cardiac arrest.

Amogh had celebrated his fifth birthday, June 28, in Puttaparthi. By coincidence, Swami had distributed sweets that day. Amogh sat through the unison singing at Parthi as part of the USA Pilgrimage group on Tuesday, June 29, in the divine presence. He celebrated his lunar birthday in Mumbai on July 4 and also his father's birthday on July 5. Then he left us on July 6.

Understandably, Sushil and I still feel the pain in our hearts. Some days are easier than others. We do not have a choice but to come to terms with these events. We also know that Amogh was a blessed soul. He gave us a lot of joy and love. They called him a gentle soul at his school. He was such a darling and spread good vibrations around him. May Swami be with him wherever he is. I always wished for Amogh to be under our beloved Swami's direct care, and I prefer to think that now this wish has come true.

—Neeti Bharatan
Burlington, Massachusetts

Pilgrimage Blessings for USA Service Projects

During the USA Pilgrimage this summer, many devotees from both Groups 1 and 2 volunteered to do service during their stay at the ashram.



Those activities included working in the Western canteen, picking up trash, wrapping and transporting large numbers of *laddus* (a sweet made from flour and rolled into a ball) that Swami would bless and distribute after the USA cultural programs, donating blood at the hospital, working in registration and accommodations, organizing darshan lineup, plus countless other service needs that arose daily.

It was hoped that Swami would bless the service activities at the ashram, plus bless a major project that has been initiated in the USA, called *LoveInAction*. The project involves, in part, developing and publishing articles expressing the transformational effects of Sai selfless service projects—transformational on those serving—that would hopefully inspire more devotees to join in doing Sai service.

Various regional service article coordinators (RSACs) and editors from around the coun-

try are involved in the LoveInAction project, many of whom had forwarded me letters to take to Prasanthi during the pilgrimage. The fol-

lowing are some details on how Swami blessed the LoveInAction program during our time there:

July 5, 8:45 a.m.: During darshan, Swami accepted the letters that RSACs had mailed to be given to him.

July 7: This day, I wrote a letter to Swami describing the LoveInAction work we had been organizing for the past many months—including how the RSACs diligently collected pertinent information on Sai service projects from centers around the USA via personal contact with service leads, resulting in a database of over 800 current service projects; how inspirational articles will be developed from many of the service projects contained in the database, and that the articles may inspire other devotees to do more Sai selfless service; how a website will be developed to contain the articles for easy access and sharing; how

the website will begin as a USA effort but may eventually become a global tool; and how we hoped to have the website completed by Swami's Birthday, November 23, 2010. On July 7, at 5:00 p.m. during darshan, Swami accepted the letter. Later, I rewrote the contents of that letter as a one-page report.

July 8, morning: During morning darshan, as Swami passed by at 8:30, I held out to Swami the one-page report on the LoveInAction program. He looked at it and motioned for me to approach. I handed him the report and spoke in detail about every point in it. He seemed very interested in what I was saying about this work.

After a while, just as his chair was starting to be moved forward, Swami pointed to one of the items in the report (the inspirational articles we plan to develop), and his chair stopped as I explained in more detail about the articles. He wanted to know more about the service projects, including the prison *seva* (selfless service) and the medical camp for pets. He seemed very interested in the descriptions of the service projects, and spent a lot of time listening to what I said about our work. I asked him to bless the work being done on the LoveinAction project.

July 8, afternoon: During afternoon darshan the same day, when Swami passed, he looked at me and again motioned for me to approach. I thanked him again for having blessed the LoveInAction work during the previous darshan. As I repeated some of what I had described to him previously, he listened patiently.

In all these ways, Swami showed his interest and support in the LoveInAction project and the *seva* being done in the USA.

During the course of the service projects being carried out at the ashram during the pilgrimages, 115 devotees signed their names on some fine stationery. It was their way of expressing gratitude to Swami for allowing them to serve during their stay at the ashram. Several days after the last of the three cumulative USA cultural programs took place, as the second group was drawing to a close, all the signatures were presented to Swami with an explanation that they represented the gratitude of all the devotees who had served at the ashram, and by proxy, all the devotees in the USA who actively join Sai service projects.

Swami sweetly accepted the sheets of stationery containing the signatures and generously took the time to look at and read every signature on each page, both front and back.

I believe there is no mistake in concluding that Swami is fully aware of what is taking place in service efforts being carried out in his name in the USA, and that he is fully blessing them.

—Jack Feely
USA National Service Coordinator

“All Our Relations”

Native American Skit Presented in the Divine Presence by USA SSE Children



By Swami’s grace and ever-present guidance, Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) children from all over the USA performed and sang in a cultural program given in Swami’s presence as part of the USA Group 2 Pilgrimage to Sai this past July.

The auspicious date was July 11, a day all participants will no doubt cherish in their hearts throughout their lives. The program was titled *All Our Relations: Sacred Teachings of the American Indian Medicine Wheel*. It featured 46 SSE children in exquisitely designed Native American costumes as representatives of the indigenous people who inhabited this great land, as well as various animal totem characters. The play also included over 100 SSE children, from across the USA, singing and chanting in four-part harmonies to accompany the performers.

The play presented the story of a modern-day young Native American child whose family, especially Grandmother and Grandfather, still adhere closely to the ancient wisdom teachings of their people. The child and several of his friends come to Grandmother to learn the sacred teachings of the Red Road (dharmic) way of life. These include a deep and abiding respect and love for all of creation—the animals, plants, rivers and oceans, the sky and all its wondrous stars, and Father Sun itself.

But the children look around and see that man has turned his heart from the Creator and instead has exploited Mother Earth in highly destructive ways. Grandfather then tells the children not to be afraid, that Great Spirit will never abandon his children or creation. Grandfather then introduces

Sai Students

the children to a Great Spirit guide named Medicine Eagle, who leads the children through the sacred teachings of the medicine wheel and the four sacred directions, with each direction's animal spirit guides leading the way. These teachings align closely with Vedic wisdom and Sai's teachings of the five values, of love and peace among all people, and of respect for Mother Earth and all its sacred elements.

The program was the culmination of more than a year's efforts, and Swami's guiding hand was felt and seen in many areas of the planning. For example, Region

6 (Pacific Northwest) office bearers made a series of visits to different parts of the region to discuss the upcoming pilgrimage. At one of these meetings, in a remote area of southern Oregon, the office bearers were introduced to a Native American Sai devotee. This devotee said he had felt guided by the Great Spirit to bring copies of two books written by a Native American elder and teacher by name of George Walking Bear, also a Sai devotee. One of the books had a drawing of Swami in it, with reference to Swami's teachings as avatar of this age. Needless to say, all present were truly amazed and felt Swami's guidance



in helping the Sai organization be in contact with people of the Native American spiritual way of life.

The meeting that evening led to further contact with Brother George Walking Bear and many others from the area. George provided much valuable insight about the Medicine Wheel teachings, and his wife Marie provided recordings of Native American chants honoring Deer, Buffalo, Bear, and Eagle, which the SSE children learned and performed in the play. Also, by Sai's grace, George, Marie, and five other Native Americans participated in the pilgrimage and were present for the offering of the play at the divine lotus feet of our most beloved Lord Sai.

—John Kline
Region 6 SSE Coordinator



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