

Sathya Sai Newsletter, USA

Dedicated with Love and Devotion to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba



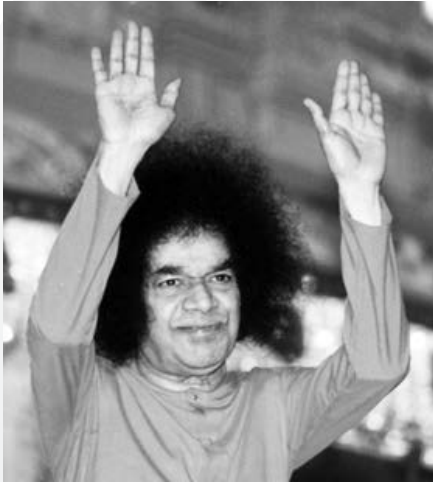
“Sai Community USA”

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SAI'S MESSAGE

KNOWLEDGE AND DISCIPLINE (VIDYA AND THAPAS)

What we call knowledge of God (*Brahma Vidya*) demonstrates the aspects of the Supreme Lord (*Para Brahma, the Absolute Truth*). *Brahma Vidya* teaches you about God, but **thapas** (concentrated spiritual exercises to attain God) takes you and merges you in the Godhead. . . .



Thapas does not mean running away from home and family and living in a forest eating leaves. This cannot be the true meaning of thapas. It also does not constitute thapas if you stand upside down like bats.

One aspect of real thapas refers to our ability to bring our thought, word, and action into harmony. You should be able to unify your work, mind, and talk. Thapas gives you the ability by which you can do this. **Knowledge** (*vidya*) – which we have identified with **knowledge of God** (*Brahma Vidya*)

– and **thapas** will enable one to experience God. . . . If we want to clean a cloth that has gathered dirt, we need clean water as well as soap. Similarly, if we want to get rid of the dirt that has gathered in our mind, we need knowledge of God as well as the disciplines (*thapas*) to attain that Supreme Goal.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (*Summer Showers in Brindavan 1978, ch 8*)

For more on the concept of **thapas**, please see pages 12-21.

Spiritual Treasures

Memories of Our Father and the Early Days of the Sai Movement in the U.S.

Walter and Elsie Cowan were among the earliest group of Sai Baba devotees from the U.S. Their legacy includes the establishment of the Sathya Sai Book Center of America in Tustin, California, which has served as a hub of the Sai community in the U.S. since 1983. As young children, the eight daughters of Joe and Carol Maniscalco were frequent visitors to the Cowans. The Maniscalcos were avid students of spiritual truths, and the girls grew up knowing of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and, through their parents and friends such as the Cowans, conditioned from an early age to deep spiritual inquiry. Memories of those “early days” are captured here, courtesy of the Maniscalco sisters: Jeanné Marie Seidman, Suzie Lynn Karman, Sherrilyn April Jones, Cathaleene Anne Maniscalco, Christine Michelle Tipton, Cynthia Michelle Edmonson, Jody Marie Morefield, and Jennifer Anne Maniscalco.

The “Early Days”

We met Elsie Cowan at a time when my sisters and I were very young. Some of us were babies – and some of our younger sisters were not yet even born, so most of our experiences with the Cowans were from the perspective of children.

Our involvement with Elsie derived from our late father’s friendship with her, which consisted mostly of personal spiritual conversations. But here is a little of what we recall: Elsie was an American lady who always wore beautiful, colorful silk and brocade saris; a shawl around her shoulders; pretty, silk embroidered shoes; lovely earrings; and sparkling rings that Sri Sathya Sai Baba had given her. She always smelled of nice perfume.

In the early days, her husband, Walter, was still on earth. Walter was an amazing character – tall and distinguished, and he

wore a white outfit any time we saw him. He was a very kind man. All of us, being so young, didn’t pay much attention to the adult interactions, concepts, or perspectives then, but we did hear and see enough to absorb the uniqueness of these two, whom our parents regarded as parents and mentors in their own way.

Dad and Walter would walk about the yard at the Cowan’s home and talk. Walter would point out the view from the top of the hill where they lived in Cowan Heights and explain how, from that vantage, it overlooked all the nearby cities. He enjoyed sharing that view and discussing the progressively changing landscape, as Walter was an architect and land developer.

As little kids, when we weren’t playing on the playground toys left in the yard from years before from Walter and Elsie’s kids, we were being fascinated with the stories they told, one in particular that Walter had told

about being brought back to life by Sai Baba. Imagine the questions we all bombarded our parents with. Walter had died – and more than once – and each time, Baba had brought him back to life?

While briefly not alive, Walter had learned of many of his previous lives' identities and that in some of them he had been very famous. He told us he had been many characters throughout time, and some were even in the history books, and that there were even statues of him still about the earth in honor of him, but that who he was from life to life was no longer important to him – fame was fleeting and but a burden to him. All that mattered was the present and who he was now – not even the architect, Walter Cowan, but the spiritual soul on his way to the ultimate goal.

Some of our favorite memories are of Elsie's stories about her childhood, but the mysterious ones about astral travel really got our attention, for it was through her astral travels that she and Walter had first encountered Sai Baba.

She and Walter had been gone long and far from their bodies at one point, and they had come to a subtle place from which they could not return. They were lost and could not get back, and if they could not navigate the way back soon, their bodies would perish. It was at this time, for the very first time, a small Indian man with a big crown of hair and wearing a bright orange robe, came to them and told them to follow him. He showed them the way out, but before they re-entered their bodies, he issued them a stern

warning: *"Never do this again. It's not safe!"* They were returned safely to their bodies, now intent to discover the identity of their mysterious savior.

In terms of other early Sai devotees in Southern California, there used to be a cross-over group from the followers of the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF, founded by Paramahansa Yogananda), where our father attended from 1960, to those just encountering the new awareness of Sathya Sai Baba in the U.S. A group of them met in Pacific Palisades in the home of a man named Bob Rymer, who was a pilot at the time, in 1963, and who had made many trips to India to see and speak with Sai Baba. Rymer was known by a friend of our father's, a fellow member of SRF and former Colombian matador turned woodcarver for the Hollywood celebrities, one Archimiro Bonella, whom we called Miro.

Miro had been born the day before Baba, so we always held that comparison, and it was then that my parents went for the first time to the meetings held in Pacific Palisades and met Bob Rymer. There was also a group in Hollywood at the time that met in a small storefront for devotional singing and discussions, run by a man and his wife, Dick and Janet Bock.

While attending SRF, our father spoke frequently with a woman known as Sister Daya Mata, who was middle-aged, and like Elsie, also American. He also conversed with a kindly monk by the appellation, Brother Mukananda, who was a constant support to our dad. But when knowledge of Baba came

to Dad's attention, all things SRF started to drift into the background, and all things Baba gradually became predominant. Still, Dad remained friends with Miro for a long time.

At that time, the crowds to Prasanthi were so small that whenever Miro and his wife, Rosalie, a beautiful young American stewardess (as they were called back then), went to visit, they had direct access and took videos that they brought back for us to see. All us girls would sit on the living room floor at home, where we usually watched the Flintstones, watching the home movies that Miro had taken of Sai Baba, and we would wait eagerly for the moment when Miro could be seen handing all our letters to Baba and getting *vibhuti* (holy ash) from him. The crowds were so small back then that one could count maybe 50 people. Then we would run outside and play, while Dad and Mom visited with their friends for a while longer.

Another woman of advancing years who was linked to the new Baba movement in the early '60s was Indra Devi. She later became friends of sorts for a while with Elsie,

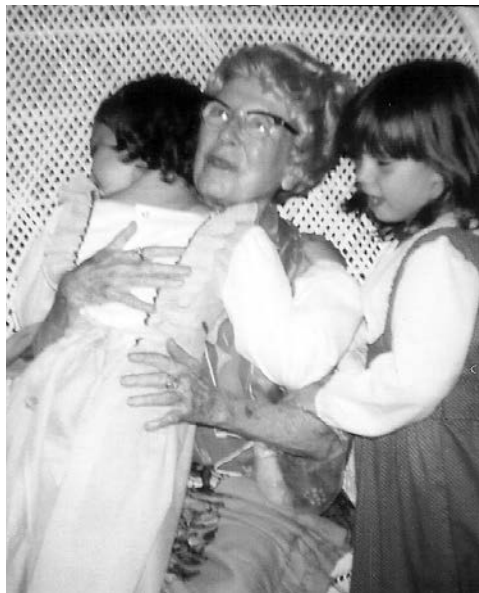
but somehow their association did not last. Though it would be a few years more before Elsie and Indra Devi would meet, it was through this original group that our father and Elsie first came to know one another. Then, when Elsie found herself on her first trip to India, she finally came face to face with

the strange figure who had previously saved her and her husband.

The trip to India back then was much more difficult than it is today. Elsie would tell us how endless and arduous it was, with long flights, strong heat, unfamiliar food, and long dirt roads. This was way before the airport and so on, and conditions would take adjusting to. But upon meeting Baba for the first time, he addressed her as *Rani* and told her she was his mother in a previous incarnation – Yashoda, mother to

Balarama and Krishna. So his appellation toward her now was *Rani*, or queen.

The years would come and go, with Elsie traveling back and forth, always with our letters and concerns, and bringing us messages in return. She brought each of us necklaces that had been blessed by Baba, which we all wore day and night, and which



Elsie Cowan, with two of the eight sisters

most of us still have. She brought us a big piece of orange silk cloth, which she called a *dhoti*, and told us these things had his divine current in them. We cherished that *dhoti* and still have it. Baba also materialized *vibhuti* and sent it to us. We had pictures of Baba up all over our home, and that kind of made us the different ones in the neighborhood. This brought us social struggles but also insight and character, so we were mostly good with it.

Elsie and Dad would always talk before and after every trip. Some trips were great and uplifting, and others left her wondering why she had gone. One time Baba would converse with her at length, and other times it seemed he didn't even notice she was there, and she would return home sad and disappointed, or even angry. It was always a learning experience, as she went through the gambit of responses and emotions. We always reveled in her stories. It seemed our hopes went up and down with hers, depending on her experiences.

Preparations for Baba

Before the bookstore we know today was built and after her husband Walter died in 1973, Elsie moved from her Cowan Heights home, where she had lived with Walter, to an apartment where we all used to go to visit Dr Gokak when he came in from India – whose visits were not meant to be in lieu of Baba, but to precede Baba's visit. We thought how funny it was that Dr Gokak wore a heavy woolen scarf when it was so warm here in Southern California.

Soon afterward, Elsie purchased a block of townhomes in Tustin, in the "Tennessean" complex on Tustin Avenue. This was also in preparation of Baba's expected visit. The unit for her was smaller than her ranch home on "Elsie's mountain," as we called it, but fine for her. It was connected to three other units she had also purchased, and the back yards were all joined to make one common garden. The unit directly adjacent to hers was a bookstore, and to get to the bookstore from her unit, we would walk up the semi-spiral staircase and through a door that connected to the other unit, wherein we would see all sorts of Baba books and pictures, and we got to choose any picture we wanted. The next unit over was also attached, and it was reserved for the entourage of Baba, or for his interviews, and the one on the end was kept especially for Baba himself, for when he might come to America.

Back then, Elsie and all the Sai leaders here in the U.S. were always attempting to persuade Baba to come and visit. We naturally thought he would stay there with her, but we also found out that many leaders had arranged places for him to stay with them, as well. We wondered how it would all turn out when Baba did finally come. Everyone was eager, and there was almost always this underlying anxiety about it. It would be, after all, a very big event.

We would hear from our father one day that it seemed Baba had promised Elsie he was coming. We would get so excited; then, inevitably, our Dad would call her and tell her he could feel from Baba that He had

changed his mind. Invariably, she would then receive a telegram from Baba telling her the same. Sometimes, when we would visit, we would see the yellow-colored Western Union telegram still sitting on her counter. It would say: "NOT COMING TO AMERICA. STOP. BABA. STOP." – amazing to read. Elsie and we girls were always so disappointed when this happened. Over the years it continued like that, with the same rise and fall of hopes of his visit, and our dad always seemed to know when Baba had changed his mind.

Lessons for All

Over the years, we learned a great many lessons through this process. Going to India to see the Avatar of the Age became the dream of every devotee, and for many it was possible, but for some it was not as easy, so the idea of Baba traveling to America offered hopes of their dream of seeing Baba to come true. When Baba would give the word to Elsie, all our hopes would be raised, and when the visiting time came and went, naturally our hopes plummeted. So we learned first not to keep getting our hopes up, and next, that the Divine Will was not always easy to understand.



Dr Gokak

We learned to remember that Baba is omnipresent, and therefore to count on that, as well as to understand that his physical presence in India was well-rooted in a tradition that spanned many incarnations, back to a time before many historians are even aware of, and Baba seemed loyal to that – not

necessarily implying a disapproval of the West. Baba *was* Mother India, and the best example to all seemed to be for him to remain where he was most needed. He always told all the students this.

And, being omnipresent, where was – or *is* – his limitation? Not everyone who yearned for *darshan* (sight) of Baba could go see him physically, but on the other hand, there was the blessing of learning about counting on the

ever-present. Many of those who would try without end to persuade Baba to come to America could themselves go to India anytime they wanted to. So what was the real need? Was it for the blessing? For the approval?

Of course, it didn't take long to understand that most of the time when Baba granted an interview to someone, they really needed help on certain levels, mostly consisting of guidance. But for those who

already knew the way, where was the need? As for blessings, does anyone ever really need permission to do good or to do the right thing? Do we now? Did we ever?

But until Baba left his body on Easter Sunday in 2011, our dad still held on to the idea that Baba might still come here one day. It was a long-standing habit of hope, and it was nice to indulge in the fantasy thought. We had known since we were young of the year Baba had been born and of the age he had said he would live to be. Naturally, as we grew older, we calculated the years to figure out how old we would be when the Avatar would leave the earth. Would we be okay? We had only ever known life with him here in physical form, and we dreaded the moment of his departure, even at a young age. Still, we knew the plan would be whatever it would be and that we would be okay. The divine plan is what it is, and who can change it?

Still, all of us always knew that when the time came, our father wouldn't be long behind Baba in leaving. That time for Baba came much sooner than we had always thought, and, sure to our intuition, our father was not able to endure without the Avatar. Six months later, he reunited – Baba took him back home. October 18 is our new holiday: our father's liberation day, the attainment of the goal of all lives, at last, which was all he lived for.

Elsie's Companionship

It was Elsie who helped in part to convey to our Dad some of the knowledge and techniques from Baba that would help him

endure this worldly life and navigate safely toward the goal of liberation. He often spoke with Elsie by phone, because, with such a large family, it was a lot to pile us all in the car and head out to see her, and our mom never liked being left behind or left out. Her world was by necessity centered mostly around us kids, and the chance for a little grown-up interaction with matters related to Baba was not something she wanted to miss out on. So when we did get the chance to visit Elsie from time to time, it was some to-do. We were all over her little place.

By then, Walter Neubauer was by her side. Though he had a family of his own, he was so devoted to Elsie – always kind and always caring. As we got a little older, some of us would stop to sit down to hear a little of what the grown-ups were talking about. We would sit in Elsie's living room with the pretty mural of a forest setting and listen to the dialogue. We recall her always calling us her "little quails" and wondering what that meant.

She would tell us stories of how Baba would come and play tricks on her. She often mentioned that he would come and visit her; the two of them would sit and talk together, right there where we were – and sometimes he would hide from her. Whenever she said this, some of us would go looking throughout the house to try and find him. When he played tricks on her, it was usually silly things like moving her glasses or her false teeth and making her search for them, until finally she would find them in some strange or odd place.

We visited her just before the current bookstore was built in the early 1980s, and she brought us to the site where it now stands. Only the concrete had been poured, and she explained the layout of the blueprints and told us all she wanted and hoped it would be. Baba had blessed the venture and had given her many articles to install therein. This book center would stand as a constant representation of Baba's presence here, and all American devotees and seekers would have their own local place now, to which they could turn to interact and learn.

We recall it was hard for our father and all of us when Elsie left the earth in 1988. We were so sad. Dad had counted on her a great deal, and now he felt so much more alone in a world that didn't seem to care about truth. Elsie had always been something of a mother to him, and he would sorely miss her.

The Lasting Treasures

But what lived on in him were the various treasures she offered from Baba – those treasures being the knowledge and discussions on the Atma, which he passed to us. Elsie was an amazing presence, so few the likes of whom grace the earth at any given time, and it took a rare soul like hers to bring comfort, joy, and solace to a dynamic soul such as our dad, who always felt as if he were born into a time and place where he never quite belonged.

To give you an idea of our father's input to our lives, the following are examples of the type of rigorous inquiry he constantly

posed, to us and to himself, as we were growing up:

How do we measure love? How do we count goodness? How do we weigh that hallmark quality of humanity, compassion? Can these be quantified? If so, how? If not, why not? And, how can we be certain?

We measure our temperature, weight, assets, debts, and figure out our net worth, but what is our true value? We have assessed and measured everything in creation in this "stable" dream, but what of the constituents of absolute reality? What is the true measure of intelligence? How is it defined?

It is apparent to all, as self-evident, that each one's presence on this earth is but a brief interlude. We have an entry point and an exit point in time. This is apodictic – beyond dispute. But, this being so, have we, as humanity, made and agreed upon an accurate standard measure for the weight of goodness, the depth of compassion, or the width and breadth of kindness or of beauty and charm?

We have accurately calculated the distance to the moon and back, the diameter of the earth's core, the melting point of gold, and the sum of all possessions and power belonging to the kings and rulers of the world. And yet, while knowing that neither we nor any soul have ever attained a way to take our possessions with us to our final calling, but only our qualities, why has every form of measurement been devised only to calculate the evolvatic (that

which is apt to fly away), the evanescent, and none to measure our truest and lasting possessions, which alone travel with us beyond this life?

The challenge is to discover and know what is of permanent value, each one for himself. Otherwise, how do we know our life is worthwhile, worth all we do in it? If all we do that can be measured must be left behind, then what have we really accomplished? What of the lasting?

Naturally, none of these inquiries are meant to imply that the attempts in the world to know about the world and all the names and forms that sprout upon it are completely useless. Rather, they are meant to ask: ***should we not pay at least as much attention to the permanent as to the ephemeral, if not more so?***

So why do we invest so much effort into gathering and quantifying all that we cannot ultimately retain, and so little in whatever we do retain? If one wishes to argue arrogantly that he pays just as much attention to the *permanent intangibles* as to the *impermanent tangibles*, then how is it that one may measure those permanent intangibles? What is the process, what is one's time invested, and what outcomes does one have as evidence?

We can measure the smallest of the microcosms so far discovered and the distance to far-off stars in far-off galaxies, but what of the nature, the scope, the width and breadth of each our own innate and retainable aspects? How do we know in what measure

we have them? How do we count the coins of our merits? How do we determine the length in time to our freedom?

We can measure the lumens of a candle flicker, the heat of the flame, the plasma of which it is comprised, the size, weight, and splendor of a diamond, but what of the splendor and light that we are?

How exactly are any of the intangibles to be esteemed? Can they be? We all can attest to their very existence, isn't it so? They are felt and experienced by all, or at least they can be: they are there, and there are many intangibles, even worldly information, secular knowledge – the knowing of facts stacked up in the mind and intellect, which were originally lessons passed from person to person and eventually quantified in books, then by tests and the ability to put such knowledge into action. But all of this must also be left behind for the passage to the next life, if not for liberation.

Whoever you may believe yourself to be in this world, or however you or others define you – be it average Joe or Jane, above- or below-average doctor, lawyer, chief cook and bottle washer, business person, teacher, painter, author, baker, house builder, Indian chief, dressmaker, captain, colonel, engineer, winner or loser, success story or failure, famous or infamous, and so on – all that you think you are, all that you've attained and garnered in this life as a result of all that knowledge, including the very knowledge itself – as in all lives before and all to come – will be left behind, along with your body and the name that

went with it, the very instant you exit this world. And the memory of you and all you did will one day too vanish, as memories at best, playing only fleeting roles in the minds of those left behind – and so on, in a seemingly endless cycle.

So again, what will you take with you? Is this not of the greatest importance to know, to seek out, *now*, this very moment, while time still permits? Or shall you leave this life as ignorant as when you entered, not really knowing for sure, with at best a mere glimmer of a guess, flickering somewhere unknown in the caverns of your consciousness?

These questions and more made up the constant flow of queries our father posed to us eight sisters as we were growing up. Questions such as these made up the warp and woof of the fabric of our lives.

“Probe and inquire” were among his favorite directives. Delving deep and deeper still was always encouraged: question and re-think everything we think we know, and seek to find what is lasting and true. Discover which thoughts, ideas, and beliefs may be misshapen or false. Don’t be afraid of the crucible of *thapas* (self-mastery, spiritual dedication), because when you emerge, you are of pure and sterling character. And how is it that sterling character is gauged?

Our Father’s Path

The greatest desire of our parents, as parents, was for a safe and happy life for all of us. Except for them, both of whom were born and grew up in Massachusetts, all of us girls were born in Southern California,

in the 1960s through the 1980s. Though we never fully believed it, people made sure we knew that, unlike them, we were not a “normal” American family, due to our upbringing in the beliefs in “Eastern” concepts at a time before it was acceptable to be different – even though we did go to American public schools, have American relatives, and live in American society.

But since before our births, our father had been compelled on a relentless spiritual search. It all started around 1960 when he was 20 years old, a relative newcomer to California, when he was suddenly overcome with an experience of ineffable light and accompanying joy that he had never before known or imagined. The experience lasted for three full months before fading out as inexplicably as it had appeared. That single luculent experience launched him on a journey that would last his entire life; like a brilliant starburst, it lit up a direction that would send him on a lifelong quest of self-discovery and began his introduction to Sri Sathya Sai Baba – whom he simply called *Baba*, the Avatar of the Age – and we were all brought along for the mostly peaceful but sometimes tumultuous ride, as de facto beneficiaries of all he knew and would come to know – the treasures truly worth having, the only ones that anyone can take with them from this world. If our gauges were correct, they could, in great, great measure, help lead us to the ultimate goal.

—Suzie Lynn Karman
Temecula, California

Renunciation: After Fifty Years of *Thapas*

Introduction: *Thapas*, for my father, Joe Maniscalco, was what he would call an “encyclopedia word,” which meant that it had such a deep and broad definition that it could fill an encyclopedia volume, but in essence, it had to do with knowledge gained from many years of practice and experience. In brief, *thapas* meant “purification.” Throughout his life, he had many opportunities to walk and live on the path of fame and riches, but he willingly turned away from those chances in order to pursue the lasting. Along the way, as we, his eight daughters, grew older and more aware, he would involve us more with the choices and invite us all to vote on the decisions that would inevitably impact all of us, himself taking care to explain all the implications and possible outcomes.

As we did not become famous or wealthy in this world as we know it, our choices were obvious. Instead, the concept of *thapas* became familiar to all of us but was not always a welcome friend, as it often meant for us suffering of one kind or another. That suffering, however, meant purity and a lasting outcome. It was a good pain, leading us out of the true pain of future lives and toward the reliability of experience in the *nirguna* (formless). We all knew, too well, the prospect of reincarnation and the uncertainty of where it would bring us next.

So, *thapas* was the obvious cure. *Thapas* was a crucible: it held many lessons. Whatever the prevalent circumstances or conditions and resulting situations, we found ourselves encumbered to face the factors, identify the impurity, accept the lesson, and find the quality to live through and enhance our understanding. Simple enough to state, but not so easy to actuate! Still, whatever we were able to achieve with it, for whatever appears better or worse – what we are today is a direct reflection of the percentage of our success or failure in doing so, which is not always so easy to gauge.

Our father reached his goal of liberation with great determination and adherence to all the principles of *thapas* he came to know would deliver him to that freedom. It was never easy for him but always clear, so he never strayed, in spite of grueling pain, trouble, and temptations to quit.

Without *nishkama karma* (renunciation, actions made without attachment to their results) and *thapas*, where and when would the end ever come into view? For him, it wouldn’t, without *thapas*, so he took the lumps till the end and left with total faith and courage that what Sri Sathya Sai Baba had revealed to him about the necessity for purification would result in his final release.

So he adhered and persevered till his last breath, still discussing and explaining, as part of all that the Divine is, the beauty of the “perfect soul.” “Know it, and always remember it,” he told us.

Our father was a true renunciant, living in a modern world while walking an ancient path, the path of Self-realization, and he did so with a one-track mind toward a single goal, the goal of liberation. He wrote the following just weeks before he finally gained that merger in the light of the Atma, attaining the final freedom, the goal of all his lives’ struggles and efforts. We hope you benefit by his writing, as we have.

—Suzie Karman

Temecula, California

THERE COMES A TIME when you have compiled so much knowledge and have learned by it so much that there is very little left to learn, except perhaps learning the lessons in a different form. There further comes a time when you accumulate more than enough of this knowledge, which by the process of “learning for the sake of learning” becomes redundant. And what is the general purpose of learning or acquiring knowledge, just to learn or compile understanding? When everything worth knowing and understanding has been achieved (at least as far as you are concerned), what then? Do you not transform knowledge into wisdom, and then transform wisdom into realization?

And further, what does one transform realization into? One transforms realization into spiritual freedom or liberation, doesn’t one? What is wisdom worth, if you cannot use it to become free from suffering and from all that causes suffering and bondage? What purpose does wisdom hold, what role

does it play, if it has no power to remove ignorance?

Why seek wisdom, if it has no power to release one from the grips of reincarnation? Why cherish wisdom, if it cannot clear the path for merging with God from the ignorance that reduces life to a meaningless “act of life”? The highest faith, it is said, manifests as the realization that Sai is God in human form. That faith transforms into the highest wisdom – that Sai has the power to liberate one’s soul from the endless rounds of comings and goings, and where the goal of all goals finally comes into view – the merger of the Atma into the Paramatma, or the Soul into the Super-Soul.

However, not all will be blessed with the highest yearning – to be liberated – will they? This yearning occurs only when the devotee has earned the merit to be granted His grace. Those who have lived countless lives after lives doing *nishkama-karma* – consciously foregoing the rewards or benefits of their actions, surrendering their all to God’s will –

begin to feel the pangs of yearning. Otherwise, desire will remain as desire, meaning that they will endlessly crave for the benefits of what they do. The craving of benefiting from their own actions, to get what they want from life or in life, will persist.

Desire is an irresistible force that many devotees are not able to fully overcome as yet. Why not? Because the depth of sincere devotion hasn't reached full-realization in a person's heart as yet. Latent desires from past lifetimes are still active in their hearts, and those desires are the seeds that cause rebirth.

Nonetheless, for the souls who have lived endless lives of learning from spiritual lessons, there comes a time when the lessons start subsiding and karma begins to recede. Karma is results from millions of past lives, and as we undergo past karma, we are generally creating more that will have to be endured in future lives. It is an endless, uninterrupted cycle of create and undergo, with each lifetime bringing into view and experience what we once did, while compiling more karma onto the already mountainous load we carry.

As we gain merit by doing good deeds, that good merit slowly transforms into spiritual knowledge, which in turn transforms into realized understandings or wisdom, which transforms our outlook from ignorance to deep wisdom, which confers to us, in deserving moments, profound secrets underlying the many mysteries of human existence. It is these *insights* that lift us from a gross interpretation of life,

into the subtleties of comprehension of the purpose and meaning of life – which not all can perceive – where the hairsbreadth of difference between truth and untruth may be split a billionth of a billionth thin.

Can the human intelligence discriminate between opposites that finely – say, between what is good and what appears as good? The answer is *no*, on one end of the spectrum, and *yes*, on the other – meaning that if one's mind stays infatuated with pleasure and body-consciousness, then, *no*, fine discrimination cannot be comprehended. But if one has become attuned within one's soul in a deep and expanded way, then, *yes*.

Discrimination is needed to be able to determine which desires will produce rebirth and which ones will not. This task is not a one-lifetime achievement. To master and develop spiritual discrimination to this degree – of being able to “split hairs” this thin – takes untold lifetimes. Being born in the very years when Sathya Sai has become our contemporary is a blessing that is incomprehensible for the average mind or intellect. It is graspable only if we have done extraordinary deeds in the past. The only way one can get blessed by such a realization is to meditate on it ceaselessly, or to contemplate on it until the realization of what we concentrate on finally dawns as an insight.

Of course, an advantage here is that Sai has the power to confer that realization on us, and this is why it is so vital to please Him in our thoughts, words, actions, and deeds.

Many devotees believe it is their right or privilege to live in the world, living partly for desires and partly for devotion. But how can half devotion grant full liberation? How can halfway detachment and renunciation grant complete freedom from karma? The more you want from [worldly] life, the more lifetimes you will have to live to secure them. And because of the nature of each life wiping out the last lifetimes' memories, we never recall what the nature of our desires were that brought us back into this cycle of suffering. Ignorance keeps piling desires upon desires, until there seems to be no end to our sufferings.

Only the wisdom that collects from the compilation of our good deeds gives us a merciful insight into our plight. If we listen to the voice that tells us *enough is enough*, we might stand a chance of truly learning from our experiences. That very inner voice has been ringing in my consciousness for a long time now. It has conveyed to me that pursuing desire endlessly is not only the mark of serious ignorance, but of serious suffering.

Old age is an inescapable, telling teacher. It teaches you that you don't have endless years to accomplish everything you would like to do. And even if you were lucky enough to achieve an enormous amount while incarnated, as some people have, nothing is sustainable; the

death of the body cuts short one's enjoyment of past achievements and attainments.

Everything in this life is filled with evanescence; material things and places to own – castles and gardens and architectural achievements such as pyramids may last hundreds of years, even thousands, but these merely give a false sense of permanency.

Downtowns and cities still exist from olden or ancient times, but the original people who once populated them are long gone. This fact gives evidence that human life itself is the most evanescent thing afloat in the universe. The body is born, and its life moves on with greater speed (it seems) as one

gets older – and if not speed, then certainly with a deeper sense of limitation. Even the mightiest conquerors of all time did not have the power to extend their lives so they could rule indefinitely.

Limitation is a rule that points to something necessary to learn. The question should arise as to what in this life is worth accomplishing that has true permanency as its characteristic? What should be achieved that can be considered truly permanent, as the body itself is not permanent?

The only answer – *liberation!*

—Joe Maniscalco (1940–2011)



Joe Maniscalco

The Crucible of Single-Pointed Spiritual Discipline

The Secret to Revealing the Self

In this excerpt from the *Bhagavatha Vahini* (Sri Sathya Sai Baba's recounting of the epic Bhagavatha, or story of the Krishna Avatar), King Parikshit, knowing he has only days to live after having been mortally bitten by a poisonous serpent, has just peppered Sage Shuka with a long list of questions related to Parikshit's spiritual doubts – about creation, incarnation, the form of man, and many others, including, "What are the disciplines that one must practice in order to merge in the inner Soul, which is the Oversoul, the Universal Soul?" Sage Shuka is about to reply . . .

With an affectionate smile, the sage said, "Rise up, O King. If you pile up these many questions all in a heap, how can you understand the answers? Moreover, you have not slaked your thirst or eaten any food, since long. Come, eat some fruits and drink a little milk, at least. These are the privileges, the rights of the physical body. With a famished body, you may pass away in the middle [of listening to the answers], with your doubts unresolved. So, take some food," he ordered.

The king replied, "Master! Those whose last days have come should not prefer the food that nourishes falsehood to the food that grants immortality. How can I pass away in the middle, though the body may be famished, when I am imbibing the nectar of immortality and when you are filling me with the exhilaration of tasting the sweet panacea for the illness of death?

"No, it will not happen! Even if the angry sage, Sringeri, had not cursed me [to be bitten by a snake and die], and even if the snake Thakshaka had not been deputed to kill me after seven days, I would not pass away in the middle while listening to the stories of the Lord. I listen to them without thought of food and drink. My food, my drink, are the nectarean stories of Krishna.

"So, do not think of my food and drink. Make me fit for the Highest Bliss, the Supreme Stage of Realization. Save me from downfall. I am prostrating at your feet."

The king shed tears of contrition and sat praying to the preceptor.

The sage said, "Listen, then. In the beginning, Brahma shed light on the world manifested by *maya*, or delusion. Brahma willed that creation might proliferate. But a voice from the void above (the *akasha*) warned, '*Thapas* is the essential base for

everything.’ Through *thapas*, delusion will disappear!”

At this, Parikshit intervened. He asked, “What is the meaning and value of *thapas*? Please enlighten me.”

Sage Shuka took this interruption kindly. He said, “Son, *thapas* means *sadhana* – discipline, spiritual exercise. It is through *thapas* that the great processes of creation, preservation, and destruction are happening. *Thapas* is the cause for the realization of the Self. That is to say, when the mind, the intellect, and the senses are subjected to *thapas*, or the crucible of disciplinary exercise, the Self will stand revealed.

“I shall tell you about this technique of *thapas*; listen. The mind, intellect, and senses are ever bent toward exterior objects. They are perpetually turned outward. When some sound from the external world strikes it, the ear hears it. As soon as the ear hears it, the eye attempts to see it. When the eye sees it, the mind desires it. Immediately, the intellect approves the idea and sets about to acquire it, as quickly as possible. Thus, every sense runs after external objects, one after the other, one supporting the other, restless and miserable.

“One must bring under control the mind, the reasoning faculty (*buddhi*), and the senses (*indriyas*), which roam aimlessly after objective pleasures. One must train them to take on the task of concentrating all attention on the glory and majesty of God, to follow one systematic course of one-pointed discipline.

“Bring them all and lead them toward the higher path. Their unlicensed behavior has to be curbed. They must be educated by means of *japa* (mantra repetition), *dhyana* (meditation), good works, or some other dedicatory and elevating activity that purifies.

“This process of purifying the inner equipment of man in the crucible of single-pointed speech, feeling, and activity, directed toward God, is called *thapas*. The inner consciousness will be rid of all blemishes and defects. When the inner consciousness has been rendered pure and unsullied, God will reside therein. Finally, one will experience the vision of the Lord Himself, within him.

“O King, what can one picture, grander than this? The great sages, the Mahatmas, all engaged themselves in *thapas* and as a result gained continuous and rare spiritual splendor. Why, even the wicked demons, Ravana and Hiranyakasipu, won mastery over the material world and acquired their tremendous powers of destruction through the arduous discipline of *thapas*, [though it was] directed along aggressive channels. If only their efforts had been directed along *satwic* (pure, balanced) paths, instead of the *rajasic* (passionate, excessive) path they preferred, they could have attained the peace and joy of Self-realization.

On the basis of the underlying urge, *thapas* is classified into three groups: *tamasic* (dull or deficient), *rajasic*, and *satwic*. Of these, for the visualizing of God, the *satwic* is the most effective.

“Sage Vashista, Sage Viswamitra, and other sages acquired amazing powers through their *satwic thapas*, performed with pure unselfish motives. They rose at last to the status of Brahmarishis, too.

“*Thapas* is classified into another series of three: mental, physical, and vocal. You may ask which is the most important of these three; I must tell you that all three are important. Yet, if mental *thapas* is attended to, the other two follow.

“The person bound by objective desires will try in various ways to fulfill them. He is a slave to his senses and their pursuits. But if

he withdraws the senses from the world and gains control over their master, the mind, and engages that mind in *thapas*, then, he can establish *swa-rajya* – self-mastery or “independence” over himself.

To allow the senses to attach themselves to objects – that is bondage. When the mind that flows through the senses toward the outer world is turned inward and made to contemplate on the Atma, it attains liberation or *moksha*.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
Bhagavatha Vahini, ch 31



Thapas: The Purification Process

Excerpted From Prasnotara Vahini (Stream of Spiritual Questions and Answers)

Q. Can one realize the Atma and merge, as you say, in the *Pranava (Om)*, with this material body [that is] composed of the five elements? Can the Atma be isolated from the body? How is that done?

A. Man can, by meditation (*dhyana*) and other disciplines, by recital of the *Pranava (Om)* mantra, discover the Atma and isolate it from the body.

It is something like getting butter from curds, oil from sesame seeds, water from the subsoil, or fire from wood. Churning, squeezing, crushing, boring, turning – these processes are needed, that is all. What happens is the separation of the Atma from

the body, the disappearance of the belief that the body is the Atma or the Self.

Q. Swami! Many elders and sages say that we should visualize the *Jivatma* (individual soul) as *Paramatma* (God/Oversoul), that we should cultivate that feeling, that conviction. How is that possible?

A. Why do you think it is difficult? Is it not easier to speak the truth than to speak falsehood? You are now declaring falsehood as true, so all kinds of difficulties arise; accept the truth that the *Jivatma* and *Paramatma* are the same; then things become easy.

First, recognize the Atma as the *Jivatma*, unrelated to the body; you can do this by *dhyana* and so on. Just as scent may be separated from flowers, sugar from cane, and gold from rock, thus separate the Atma from the physical body. Then, by means of single-pointed reflection and meditation (*nidhi-dhyasana*), you can visualize the *Jivatma* as one with *Paramatma*. That is the consummation of *thapas*, the final *nirvana*.

Q. What exactly is *thapas*, Swami?

A. It means the end of the activities of the senses; one must be the master of all of them. There must be no trace of craving or appetite. *Thapas* involves effort to attain Brahman, incessant yearning for that end; it must be expressed through moderate food and sleep; it means [the] agony [one has] for realizing the [Brahman] Principle. Such *thapas* is called *satwic* (pure, balanced).

Q. What, then, is *rajasic thapas*?

A. Those who simply starve the body and make it weak, without curbing the senses and controlling the emotions, are doing only *rajasic thapas*. They do not study or meditate upon the *Atma-tatwa* (the Atmic principle); they lay emphasis on physical asceticism.

Q. There must be *thamasic thapas* also.

A. There is. To propitiate the gods for favors and then, with those favors as instruments, to desire the exploitation of the world – that is *thamasic thapas*. Proper *thapas* is only that which has as its aim the attainment of God, the realization of Brahman, the achievement of the highest wisdom. That type of *thapas* alone is approved by the *shastras* (scriptures and esteemed commentaries on the scriptures). All the rest will lead you astray, away from the goal. Only the *thapas* approved by the *shastras* deserves to be called *thapas*. The others are *thamas*, not *thapas*. *Thapas* means “heat”; the heat burns out sin and reduces all *karma* (results of activity) to ashes.



Q. The *shastras* say that the *rishis* (sages) had in their ashrams things like the Chinthamani (wish-fulfilling jewel), the Kalpavriksha (wish-fulfilling tree), and also the Kamadhenu (wish-fulfilling cow), which gave them whatever they wished for. I cannot understand why they should do *thapas* at all. Please make this clear to me.

A. Think about it well. Then you will know that the Chinthamani is not a jewel, nor the Kalpavriksha, a tree; nor the Kamadhenu, a

cow. These are all names for the fruits of *thapas*. They are powers (*siddhis*) that automatically accrue to a person, as a result of *thapas*.

When a person realizes all that he wishes for, it is called *Kalpavriksha-siddhi*. When he subdues all desire, it is called *Kamadhenu-siddhi*. What is *Chinthamani-siddhi*? It is the stage when one has no *chinthā* – no worry or mental agitation, a stage when all sorrow is kept afar. When *chinthā* ends and supreme bliss (*ananda*) is won, it is *Chinthamani-siddhi*. *Chinthā* must disappear from thought, word, and deed.

Q. They also speak of mental *thapas*. What does that mean?

A. Observe control of speech; cultivate purity of feeling; practice humility. Let your thoughts be always on the God principle (*Brahma-tatwam*). Then you can be said to be in mental *thapas*.

Q. And physical *thapas*?

A. That too is good, in its own way. Revering elders, spiritual teachers, saints and sages, and God, make for purity. Nonviolence, sympathy with all beings, straightforwardness – all these contribute to physical well-being, health, and wholesomeness.

Mental *thapas* leads to purity of the mind. Verbal control or *thapas* leads to purity of speech. By these three, the precious possessions of Kamadhenu, Kalpavriksha, and Chinthamani may be attained. They are attainments, not just cows, trees, or jewels.

Q. Are there any who have attained *Brahma-tatwa* (the God principle) and *Dharma-tatwa* (the principle of right conduct) with the help of their success in *thapas*? Who are they? Please tell me.

A. Kapilamaha-muni attained *Brahma-tatwam*; Jaiminimaha-muni attained *Dharma-tatwam*; Narada became a Brahmarishi; Bhagiratha brought the Ganga down; Gouthama persuaded the Godavari to flow on earth; Valmiki realized the force of Rama-mantram and was enabled to compose the Ramayana; Gargi was established in Brahmacharya, and Sulabha in spiritual wisdom – all through *thapas* alone. Why go on quoting one example after another? Through *thapas*, even Brahma and Rudra (Shiva) become one's collaborators.

Q. Swami! In order to reach this high stage, do you say that birth in a high caste is necessary? Or is *sadhana* of a high order enough?

A. Caste without character is meaningless; it is just an empty label. *Sadhana*, without the basis of character, is like the journey of a blind man. Morality, virtue, character – these are vital. On the basis of these, if *sadhana* is done according to the scheme laid down for the path one has selected, then there is no doubt of success.

But you must take note of a caution that is essential. You must not give place to sloth, simply because *jati* or birth is not important. *Neeti* or moral standards accrue according to birth also, and so, to foster

them, the consciousness of birth is helpful and important.

But, if through the accumulated merit of past births, one has the treasure of goodness and virtue, then one need not attach much importance to birth. Only those who practiced yoga in previous births and who could not complete the process will have that type of excellence. The main thing is to acquire the moral standard that is prescribed for the birth, foster the birth with moral excellence, and make oneself fit and full, with a high status in life. For some distance on the path of *sadhana* and spirituality, both *jati* (birth) and *neeti* (morality) will help. The *gunas* (qualities of *satwa*, *raja*, and *thamas*) will be sublimated through these two.

Q. Therefore, there must be some who, through the merit of previous lives, have attained Godhead. Give some instances please.

A. My dear man! You should not seek to discover the source of a river or the ancestry of a *rishi* (sage), for they may be quite unimpressive. You should be satisfied with their services. Their experience is what is most valuable. Be inspired by them; be led by them to similar efforts. If you go in search of their beginnings, you lose the vital core.

Still, since you have raised the question, I shall tell you: Vyasa was born of the fisherman caste; Sounaka was of the Sunaka clan; Agastya was born in a pot; Viswamitra was a Kshatriya; Soota was born in the fourth caste.

In addition, we have among those who were virtuous and good, who had their eyes always on the moral standards of their *jati* and *neeti*, who renounced all and stuck to the ideal of liberating themselves from the bondage of birth and death and the illusion of physical values: Sanjaya, Sathyakama, and many more.

My dear man! Self-effort, *viveka* (discrimination), *thapas* – these qualify man to attain the highest status. Without purity of the inner instruments, no man, however high his caste, can reach the Highest.

If inferior copper is added to gold, the alloy declines in value. Just as pure gold becomes an alloy through contact with copper, the Universal, the *Virat-rupa*, gets the inferior ego added to it in this worldly illusion (*samsara*). The *Virat-rupa* becomes transformed into the *jivi*.

Now, what has to be done to get back the true gold-principle? Through *thapas* and *vrata*, through polishing and cleansing the *buddhi* (reasoning faculty, intellect), the original stage has to be regained. You wash your feet after walking through the mire; the mind too has to be washed of the mire of attachment to objects. *Jnana* (wisdom, knowledge) alone can burn the seeds of attachment so that they may not sprout again. So, if a person has the treasure of *jnana*, he gets liberated easily.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba
Prasnottara Vahini, ch 14

Legacy of Bhagavan

(On Baba's Physical Departure)

I n Canada it finally sank into me,
That Baba had ceased to be
Living physically in Puttaparthi.
I felt as if broken into pieces,
Or of the lowering of a boom
Suddenly drowning me in gloom!

Soon, though, emotion yielded to reason:
I recalled Baba visiting us subtly and really
In Canada. Per His promise, in career or property,
In disease or accident, we do receive His protection.

And in interview room, He tapped my shoulder,
Gave me a watch and a family photo to treasure.
By no means is our example solitary,
His bounty is bestowed universally.
So, to please Him, the littlest I must do:
Be morally upright and flat of ego,
In temper even; see in all divinity,
In man, beast, and in *prakriti**!

Let's not become arm-chair dons,
Splitting hairs on spiritual issues
Or causing confusion where none exists.
Let scholarly tomes collected by the pound
Await, while we do selfless deeds by the ounce,
Always sustained by deep faith and ardent love.

—Prem Kumar
Edmonton, Canada

* nature

REGION 1: CONNECTICUT ■ MAINE ■ MASSACHUSETTS ■ NEW HAMPSHIRE
NEW YORK ■ RHODE ISLAND ■ VERMONT

“Love Is My Form”

Upstate New York Annual Mini-Retreat, Sept 17, 2011



The Buffalo (New York) Sathya Sai Baba Center hosted a mini-retreat under the theme, “Love Is My Form,” on Saturday, September 17, 2011. Participating in the retreat were members of the Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Ithaca (New York) Sai Centers, as well as the Niagara Falls Sai Center (Ontario, Canada).

Guest speaker Dr Ronne Marantz, a member of the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation (International Education Committee) and an Associate of the Institute of Sathya Sai Education (ISSE)-USA, delighted us with deep insights into Sri Sathya Sai’s divine message and core teachings.

The young adult group enacted skits of three case studies focusing on selfless service: “Love in Action,” “Sai Youth as Future Leaders in the Divine Mission,” and “Spiritual Practices vs. Practicing Spirituality.” The young adults also enchanted the Sai family with unison devotional singing.

The area Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) students were also a joy to watch in a play titled, “Bank Balance.”

The lesson of “Love Is My Form” was experienced throughout the day as the blissful feeling of being in the Divine Presence.

—USA Region 1

Walk for Values 2011:

A Day to Remember in Washington, D.C.

The day begins early with the morning sun washing gently over the Washington Monument. I stand at the base of the Sylvan Theatre as members of the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Sathya Sai Baba organization gather to walk in unity for the five human values: **peace, truth, love, right conduct, and nonviolence**. Each participant chooses one of the values to walk for, and we walk in hopes of learning to embody the value we have chosen so that it eventually becomes a permanent part of our own character. The energy has already begun to heighten, and a feeling that we associate with Sri Sathya Sai Baba's omnipresence can already be felt. The devotees at registration have begun to pass out name tags and orange bracelets lettered with the human values, and the stage is being set up with microphones, as anticipation for the walk fills the air.

As all the devotees greet one another with hugs and smiles, love and positive energy flows among our Sai family. "The



Star Spangled Banner"

is sung beautifully by Imani González. The Grand Marshal for the event, Doris Hampton, takes the stage and speaks eloquently on the five human values, reminding us of our inner divinity, encouraging the unity of the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity, and sweetly mentioning that love is a part of human nature. She reminds us all that elders serve as inspirational figures for the youth and that it is their duty to lead positive lives carrying out Sai Baba's message. She stresses that adults must not simply preach but act according to Swami's expressed code of conduct.

The walk begins soon, but first we warm-up and stretch briefly with Ms Booma Krishnan and then assemble in lines of three, holding banners and flags with great pride. Tourists and passers-by look on both with curiosity and admiration, asking questions about the purpose of our walk and even giving encouraging “thumbs-up” and “peace” signs. As we walk two miles around the monument in the humid D.C. heat, our spirits are lifted as we spread Swami’s universal message and light, which radiates through all of us, throughout the Capitol and White House area, where national decisions are made every day.

Since Swami has recently left his physical body, this walk carries more importance than ever in our hearts, as we now must learn to live our life as Sai Baba’s own message and keep his teachings and beliefs alive through our personal actions. We now walk through the nation’s capital as peace ambassadors carrying the spirit of the human values, which are the embodiments of God himself. This walk is a step closer to human excellence, a step closer to the awakening of moral conscience in the world, and a step closer to teaching others that divinity lies within us and not outside in the material world that surrounds us. But this walk also aids us in our own character transformation; it allows us to reflect on

ourselves and to remove all negativity that inhibits our capability to perfectly embody the human values.

As the walk comes to a close, we take a break in the shade and enjoy a brief rest to hydrate ourselves and eat a snack. Soon the guest speaker, Ms Audri Scott Williams, takes the stage and shares her wisdom with the

We walk in hopes of learning to embody the value we have chosen so that it eventually becomes a permanent part of our own character.

audience. She speaks of the balance of the world and how it is our duty to restore it, and she speaks on how it is also our duty to transform the world into a temple of sacred space. She speaks of how today we walked to raise all of humanity to a higher level of spirituality, or rather to bring all of humanity even closer to and more aware of God. Then musician Ojiji Baba joins her on stage and begins to sing,

playing a drum. Soon the entire audience is holding their peace fingers in the air, singing “Pass the PEACE!!” as passers-by join in and the sun beats down on us. A few uncles and young adults begin dancing and swaying, and their smiles and laughter become contagious.

Next, the group, Three Generationz, takes the stage, and their sweet voices and rhythmic drumming fill the air, as they use music and the energy of sound to nourish our souls and awaken the universal conscience. The performers are beautifully dressed, in vivid skirts, tops with bold prints, and colorful



beads. The crowd is clapping and swaying in no time. The Three Generationz ensemble seeks to keep African and Native American indigenous cultural traditions alive, and soon their tranquil and enlightened demeanor spreads over the crowd.

The day eventually comes to a close, as our Mid-Atlantic Regional President, Prity Bhatt, takes the stage and thanks all our performers and speakers for the day with flowers. All

the devotees from the region slowly begin to depart as we carry love in our hearts, truth in our words, peace in our souls, nonviolence in our minds, and right conduct in our actions. But moreover we are realizing that the five human values are one and the same, simple manifestations of one another, and ultimately, embodiments of Swami.

—**Ananda González**, SSE Group 4
SSSBC of South Bethesda, MD

“Center Meeting” Opportunities

Sathya Sai Baba West County Center, St Louis, Missouri

The St Louis Sathya Sai Baba West County Center (WCC) consists of a diverse group of vibrant devotees. The center has been home for more than 20 years to spiritual seekers inspired by the life and teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The center welcomes seekers of all faiths and backgrounds to come together for a balanced approach to spiritual growth through the avenues of devotion, study, and service.

Being a progressive group, many ideas arise during our regular meetings; a lot of feedback is generated about the activities, and ideas are exchanged about how to foster spiritual progress in small gatherings. Over a period of time, a need was felt to get feedback from all the devotees, both members and nonmembers alike, so a “Center Meeting” opportunity was planned.

The WCC Meeting is now conducted twice a year, April and September. This is one occasion on which attendees are asked not to maintain silence in the prayer hall but to speak up!

In the semi-annual meeting, the officers present and seek feedback on:

- activities the center has been involved in.
- actions that the officers have taken, based on ideas and points of view expressed by individuals or small groups.



- issues for which the officers need devotees’ opinions regarding making the center a better venue for spiritual progress.

Proposals are set forth by the center’s officers for all wings of center activities – devotion, spiritual study/education, and service – and then the devotees express opinions on the proposals’ feasibility. During the conversation on an issue, the corresponding officer will answer or seek further guidance.

The Center Meeting is conducted using a study circle format, which is familiar to all and makes for a very comfortable atmosphere, so everyone gets a chance to speak without contradicting the opinion of another. This is how the center has moved forward in harmony all these years; introduction of new ideas never comes as a surprise to the devotees.

Examples of programs and practices that have been initiated in this way include:

- Hosting of a “first Friday” devotional singing (*bhajan*) meeting that is completely dedicated to the Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) children and young adults, wherein a student is invited to speak about what he or she has learned in the SSE class and how the learning has been applied in his or her life.
- Use of the English *Arati* for the SSE *bhajan* meetings, which was introduced some time later.
- Hosting of a monthly morning *Suprabatam* and meditation.

- A decision not to project the words of *bhajans* on a screen during regular devotional meetings.

We feel our center has benefited greatly from our Center Meetings, which reflect the following attitudes:

- Members and nonmembers alike are invited and encouraged to attend and participate, because although Sai Baba is at the heart of the center, the devotees are the units of the center, which together make for a beautiful and complete Sai family.
- Center Meetings help make our center more like an extended family, as we give respect to every opinion that is aired.
- The WCC is very sensitive to everyone’s needs and quest in coming to a Sai Baba Center. We demonstrate that we are always open to new ideas and members. This is, after all, Swami’s Center, and we wish all who come here to find happiness and bliss.

—Sathya Sai Baba West County Center
St Louis, Missouri

Be fixed in the consciousness that you yourself are the immortal “Atma,” which is indestructible, which is holy, pure, and divine. That will give you unshakable courage and strength. Then, you must develop mutual love and respect. Tolerate all kinds of persons and opinions, all attitudes and peculiarities. The school, the home, the workplace, and the society are all the training grounds of tolerance. The relationship with each other must be based on love, not fear. Only the atmosphere of love can guarantee happy cooperation and concord.

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 1:6, Feb 2, 1958)

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

Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) Training

September 17–18, 2011, West Allis, Wisconsin



Approximately 38 members of Sai Centers from Region 5 (North Central USA), gathered to receive instruction in Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) from the National Education Coordinator, Berniece Mead.

The program began with individual introductions by everyone present, including what city they came from: Iowa, Indiana, Chicago area, Michigan, and Milwaukee. It was a nice group, and it was interesting to hear a

bit about the attendees' life, work, and so on, at the outset.

The SSE training was done utilizing the principles developed and taught by Berniece over the last dozen years or more; everyone present took in her teachings with gusto and a strong desire to learn her proven methods for teaching “value-based methods” for living spiritual lives, including but not limited to the core human values of truth, love, right conduct, nonviolence, and peace.



The text (*Sai Spiritual Education Teachers Manual*, rev. 2011, available through the Sathya Sai Book Center of America) contained a detailed list and explanations of the sub-values for each of the five values listed above. It also set forth the four teaching groups as corresponding to grades 1–3 (Group 1), 4–6 (Group 2), 7–9 (Group 3), and 10–12 (Group 4).

Berniece did a wonderful job of explaining the information in the text and broke our large group into several smaller groups for the purpose of putting together a Group 2 lesson plan (4–6 grade level). Each group then presented their lesson plan to the entire group for review as an example of how to teach these values. It was interesting to see how each group

prepared their teaching charts and presented their plan to the entire group.

On Saturday, we gathered between 8.00 and 9.00 am and concluded about 5.00 pm; on Sunday, we gathered again between 8.00 and 9.00 am and concluded around 1.00 pm. Snacks, water, and lunch were made available on Saturday; refreshments and snacks were provided on Sunday. Everyone seemed content with the text, teachings, facility, and snacks.

It was a great weekend training session, where everyone had an opportunity to expand their understanding of Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) and how to teach its values.

—Walt Henry
West Allis, Wisconsin

“Prayers for the World” in a Seattle Interfaith Service

September 11, 2011, fell on a Sunday. While this day was commonly known as the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in New York, to Sai devotees in the Seattle, Washington, area it marked the first time we joined with our brothers and sisters in the community from all different faith traditions to participate in a “Prayers for the World” service.

Representatives from the Seattle area Sathya Sai Baba Centers and devotional groups, Good Samaritan Episcopal Church of Sammamish, Bet Alef Meditative Synagogue of Seattle, and Sammamish Muslim Association came together in a blissful service that rang throughout with unifying music from both children’s and adult choirs. Sacred passages and prayers from various religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism were read aloud and chanted.

The service started at 10.00 am with representatives from the various faiths carrying torches, symbolizing the light within each of us. Many representatives took turns offering unifying words and highlighting how all religions give us the same message of unity and peace. The talks were inspiring, uplifting, and insightful, highlighting the universal message of all religions. It was a truly unifying moment as everyone at the event joined hands, filled with love, compassion, and faith. It was a treasure to feel the peace in the air and see it in the faces of everyone present.

Our sincerest gratitude to our Dear Bhagavan for this opportunity to be a part of his work. We, as his devotees, aspire to live our lives as his message.

—USA Region 6



Bi-monthly Regional Devotional Meetings

Meeting Series Inaugurated in September 2011

On Saturday, September 24, 2011, USA Region 8 held an inaugural bi-monthly Sri Sathya Sai Baba devotional meeting in Lakewood, California, from 3.00 to 6.00 pm. About 200 devotees gathered in the auditorium of Herbert C Hoover Middle School for a program that included group devotional singing, reports, videos, and an address by guest speaker Dr Narendranath Reddy. Dr Reddy serves currently as Chairman of the International Medical Committee of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization, member of the Prasanthi Council, President of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Society of America, and Director of the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation. National President Dr Mike Congleton and National Education Coordinator Mrs Bernice Mead were also in attendance.

The meeting began with a half hour of English and Sanskrit *bhajans* (group devotional songs). Dr Chandradas, the Region 8 President, welcomed the audience and guest speakers, introducing the program to follow. Regional officers M Srinivas, Eric Wing, and Sri Jeevapakash presented three inspiring reports on events taking place within the devotional, educational, and service wings of Region 8, respectively.

Mr Sri Ram Bhatt and Ms Rachana Desai, Young Adult Representatives for the region,

described activities and objectives transpiring within the Sai Young Adult community. These reports provided ample testimony that Sai's work continues as ever.

Two videos produced by Gene Massey were shown at this meeting. The first featured Sri Sathya Sai Ideal Health Care. The second, a heart-stirring sequence of images from Bhagavan's 76th birthday put to music taken from the *Embodiment of Love* CD, brought to mind poignant memories of encounters with Swami. Members of the audience shed tears.

Dr Narendranath Reddy then gave an uplifting talk, narrating personal stories of Swami's omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and divine love. "Let us open our hearts, feel His presence, and fill our hearts with love," he began. His stories demonstrated that even after the Mahasmadhi (leaving of the physical form), Swami is actively with us, protecting us, healing us, providing for us, and directing us.

Dr Reddy emphasized that "to communicate with God, to realize the highest, you need both faith and love." These two are essential on the path. The absolute faith we must aim for is equivalent to enlightenment. The pure love we must aim for gives highest priority to God, burns with intensity, and loves only for love's sake.

Dr Reddy reminded the audience of a technique Swami taught for increasing love. It consists of remembering two things and forgetting two things. **Remember to repeat the Name of God (Namasmarana), and remember to do His work. Also, forget the good you have done to others, and forget the bad others have done to you.** If we remember these two and forget these two, our love will increase. We know we have this love if God acknowledges our love, if we have peace, and if we have equanimity. These three are the marks of pure love.

Afterward, Rohan Balasuriya, Regional Vice President, offered a vote of thanks to Swami, to the speakers, to center officers everywhere, to those rendering service to help the regional event take place, and to the audience. He narrated the following recent occurrence to illustrate that Swami is with us even after leaving the physical form.

The Sri Sathya Sai International Center for Medical Services ships much-needed medical supplies from the USA to India for use in the Sri Sathya Sai hospitals. These items are shipped under an Indo-USA agreement that is currently being re-ratified.

During the ratification process, items cannot be shipped duty-free. The Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospital was in urgent need of expensive spinal equipment, which the Sai organization in the USA had secured.

The need for this equipment was so great that the organization in India had opted to pay one-half million rupees in duty tax to receive

it. But, as it turned out, the entire shipment of spinal equipment cleared customs and passed into the country duty-free! Only with divine grace could a shipment clear India Customs without tax.

The program closed with Arati, after which light refreshments were served.

Future bimonthly devotional meetings are planned for the third Sundays of every other month. Future plans include having the officers of two or three selected Sai Centers from Region 8, on a rotating basis, present reports on activities current in their centers. The objective of these meetings is to foster unity, to inspire devotion, to encourage individual and community spiritual practice, and to support the heart-to-heart relationship that each individual has uniquely with Swami.

—USA Region 8 Online Newsletter



“Land of Enchantment” Retreat/Conference 2011

Jemez Springs, New Mexico, September 2–5



Sai friends traveled from as far away as Florida, California, Arizona, Colorado, Mexico, and the Midwest, to join with brothers and sisters in New Mexico for a blessed, three-day Labor Day weekend conference. The conference site is unique in that this Buddhist monastery, the Bodhi Manda Zen Center, has been the location for the Sathya Sai “Land of Enchantment” Retreat for 28 of its past 35 years of history. Prior to serving as a Buddhist monastery, the facility housed a Catholic monastery, and so it was always dedicated as a site for prayer.

Retreat Highlights

Srinivas and Vijaya Raghavan started the bliss flowing on Friday evening with songs, stories, and slides. The sweetness was palpable, and everyone felt Sai’s love flowing. Srinivas and Vijaya peppered their talks during the weekend with exquisite multimedia slides and video, bringing love to our eyes and ears as well as to our hearts. They spoke twice more during the weekend, presenting a beautiful review of Swami’s life in song and an exploration of one’s Inner View of Sai. Their work with the children

and high-tech retreat recap using video and slides brought tears of joy to our eyes!

Saturday and Sunday mornings were dedicated to serving the Buddhist center and its residents. Everyone pitched in to clean, organize, build, mow, weed, sew, and work, to make the facility spic-and-span and more functional. The monastery staff, headed by the Abbess Hosen, numbers only three to five people to serve our group of 80 to 100 guests.

The Sai Organization has done major projects for the Bodhi through the years, including excavating the septic system, digging trenches for the water pipes, expanding the geothermal hot water delivery system, painting the entire complex, and sealing the wood verandas. The children also participate in the service activities, this time pursuing and capturing six young chickens that had escaped from their pen, and weeding the garden.

Abbess Hosen made a special appearance on Friday evening, attending our introductory meeting wearing her ceremonial formal robes. She honors and respects Sathya Sai Baba and his followers and made a ritual statement of condolence, honoring his passing from the physical and wishing us all peace in our hearts.

Three times during the weekend, we gathered to hear the inimitable messages of Arthur and Poppy Hillcoat. Arthur (Swami's

nickname for him was "the Lion") focused particularly on the omnipresence of Sai.

Poppy and Arthur both shared some of their many experiences with Swami over the past 30 years. They spoke extensively on the theme of "Who am I?" and "inner-standing" as a more useful concept than "understanding."

Arthur stressed that (according to Swami) what we see and live in is not a creation, but a projection of the One on the screen of consciousness called *maya* (illusion).

They spoke extensively on the theme of "Who am I?" and "inner-standing" as a more useful concept than "understanding."

A Surprise Visitor

On Sunday, the last evening of the conference, just before the dinner hour, a visitor arrived at the site. Erwin Rivera, an elder in the Tewa tradition, arrived unexpectedly for a ceremony of gratitude. He said that he had come at the request of the "Grandmothers" (female tribal elders), who had heard our prayers, seen the lightning, heard the thunder, and felt the rain we had generated. They wished to join our prayers with theirs, and Erwin was to take back to them information about the power and love we had transmitted.

Arthur and Poppy were introduced to Erwin and were able to spend a little time getting to know him before the evening talk. (They had previously expressed an interest in meeting a Native American elder while visiting the USA on their trip from Australia.)

No one knew what was in store for the evening; it was strictly by divine orchestration. We gathered in the hall and watched the program that Srinivas and Vijaya had put together with the children. As is customary with Sai's children, it was inspiring, creative, and a sweet sample of Sai's teachings and love. Arthur and Poppy then spoke about the importance of realizing that we are God, and that all are equally God in reality. Then their chairs were set aside to let Erwin speak about his "mission."

(A side note here: we all knew that Erwin was not representing Sai Baba or the Sai Organization's viewpoint and was speaking from his own viewpoint. Normally, all conference speakers must be approved by Sai Organization officers, and we by-passed this formality in this case, adapting to the spontaneous nature of the event. We hope no one took it amiss.)

Erwin Rivera reiterated his mission of love and prayers, in being sent by the Grandmothers. He expressed particular amazement at the purity of the message the children had presented. He then told us about a "Gathering of Eagles," where waters had been brought from all parts of the earth, along with four colors of sand from the four directions, representing the white, black,

red, and yellow races. We joined water from the Bodhi Manda hot springs to his; then he had us all "anointed" with the water using an eagle feather, by a female devotee, to represent the feminine energies of the universe.

Meanwhile, Erwin took out a bowl of the combined sands, explained what it signified, and joined it with Sai's *vibhuti* (sacred ash) to represent unity or "one nation." He asked each male present in the hall to say a prayer and add his breath to the bowl. All were touched by the reverence and sharing this involved.

As Erwin concluded the prayer and blessing ceremony, our surprise guest was deeply moved by the devotion, reverence, and joy exhibited by the Sai devotees. A beautiful relationship had been forged between two spiritual communities, which will continue to grow stronger.

Swami had given us a sweet and unexpected treat to conclude our blessed weekend of sharing His love and teachings. The retreat concluded in gratitude on Monday, with morning *Omkar* (chanting of 21 *Oms*), prayers, chanting, and appreciation of the many gifts we had received individually and collectively during the retreat.

—Elaine Hausman

When those who are fanatical in their beliefs about God approach us, we must welcome them with a smile and be eager to listen to them with a heart filled with devotion to God. When those who are passionate about their work approaches us, we must share with them our skill and strength and toil together. By this means it is possible to bring harmony between followers of various faiths and cultures. It will bring together various schools of thought and belief. How wonderful it would be if this kind of harmony and friendly cooperation became more prevalent! How happy the world would be if everyone comprehended that their viewpoint can at best be only the partial truth and that it requires the harmonious commingling of many other facets to arrive at the whole truth! —Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Sathya Sai Vahini, ch 10)

SaiLoveinAction.org:

Documenting Transformation Through Service

Idea for Service Project Website Evolves into International Project

No matter where you go, always do your duty as you see it, and know that I will be there inside you, guiding every step of the way. . . . Whatever is experienced, whatever happens, know that this Avatar willed it so.

—Sathya Sai Baba, 23 Nov 1994

Those words, spoken by Sri Sathya Sai Baba during his birthday discourse in 1994, can describe the journey of the Sai Love In Action (SLIA) website (*SaiLoveinAction.org*), which was recently launched in February 2012. It is increasingly clear that He arranged the circumstances over the past almost three years and guided the growing SLIA team to make this website happen – a vehicle to share not only descriptions of Sai selfless service projects from around the world but also the transformational changes and insights experienced by those who provide the service.

Divine Chain of Events

One afternoon at Prasanthi Nilayam in July 2009, a devotee from the USA walked up to another devotee who had just received a cell phone call. Dr Narendranath Reddy, Chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai World Council International Medical Committee, had called from California to check on materials needed for an International Sai Medical Conference slated to take place in Anaheim, California,

three months later. The person on the call responded that everything was being taken care of and that the person who had just walked up was helping to arrange transport of all the necessary materials in many devotees' luggage as they returned to the USA.

Dr Reddy asked to speak to that person and inquired if he were a doctor and whether he were planning to attend the medical conference in Anaheim. The person replied, "No, I am not an MD but a PhD, and I was not planning to attend." Dr Reddy said, "I want you to attend." So, the devotee, since he was a national officer and had been urged to attend by Dr Reddy, began making plans to be at the conference.

Thus, in October 2009, that devotee attended the International Sai Medical Conference in Anaheim. One evening at dinner, he began sharing about the difficulties he was having motivating devotees to write and share service articles. As a national officer, he knew that many wonderful Sai selfless service activities were taking place around the country, and he felt that sharing them could encourage more people to join or start service projects.

Another person at the table, experienced in information technology, appeared moved by the conversation and volunteered to help develop a way to organize and publish articles online, including a way for people to easily insert descriptive service content onto a template. It

was felt that such a website might motivate more people to share their service experiences.

“That might work,” replied the officer, “but I would need help in editing articles.” Another party at the table, a physician from Maryland, promptly volunteered his wife, an experienced editor. “Well, that’s great. I want to meet her,” replied the officer, “but I also want you to be on the team of editors.” The doctor kindly agreed, as a curious and growing excitement was felt around the table.

Back at home, shortly after the conference, the national officer received a call from a devotee in New York. Though they had never met, that caller had persistently phoned every couple months, offering to help with Sai service in any way, on any level. “Well, it’s amazing that you are calling again now. I just returned from the Sai Medical Conference in California and will need help with a marvelous national service project.” That call began a partnership that kindled key energy for the “Sai Love in Action” project.

A “Sai Love in Action” Team Takes Shape

In the above-cited birthday discourse of 1994, Sathya Sai Baba also said, “*You are all sacred souls, and you will have your part to play in the unfolding drama of the new golden age that is coming.*” The parts were now coming clear in a remarkable drama leading these two devotees and soon others to join the Sai Love In Action project.

Over the next two years, the Sai Love In Action efforts developed and began to involve more and more dedicated devotees, who always

appeared as the need came clear. An initial need was for regional representatives to build and validate a database of ongoing service projects from centers around the country. Responding to a request for help, the ten USA regional service coordinators solicited volunteers from their respective regions, and those volunteers formed a team of ten Regional Service Article Coordinators (RSACs).

The RSACs contacted every center in their regions and built a national database of over 900 service projects, including contact information. Then they began reaching out to the local Sai Center service coordinators, or the leaders of particular service projects, requesting articles about the projects. But the goal was to go beyond just a factual description of the project. Facts were important, but the focus was to be the spiritual experiences and transformation of the volunteers involved in rendering service.

You are doing service for your own sake. You are engaged in service in order to become aware of the Divine Spirit in you, in order that you may discard the allurements of your ego, in order to know yourself and to get the answer to the question that torments you, namely, ‘Who am I?’ You do not serve others; you serve yourself. You do not serve the world; you serve your own interest.

—Sathya Sai Baba, 3 June 1977

Encouraging the authors to reflect on their own changes as a result of engaging in service, the RSACs began building one-to-one and heart-to-heart relationships with those involved in rendering service. Each article held

the potential of deepening the spiritual reflections of both the author and the regional coordinator as they worked together.

As service articles emerged, the next need was for editors to help refine the writing and presentation. A team of editors working with RSACs soon formed and grew to include five individuals. Then, the project needed someone to review the articles before publication and to mentor the other editors and RSACs. That person also appeared at the appropriate time: the editor of *Sathya Sai Newsletter USA* joined the SLIA team.

Personal Blessings from Swami

During the USA national pilgrimage to Prasanthi Nilayam in the summer of 2010, Swami blessed the Sai Love in Action work in a very personal way. The SLIA team wrote letters to Swami, to be taken along by the national officer, in hopes that he might have close enough proximity to deliver those letters personally. On July 5, Swami did take those letters.

Two days later, on July 7, the officer wrote a letter to Swami describing the SLIA work in detail – the work of the RSACs and editors, the database of service projects, the service articles that would share about the spiritual changes in those who served, how those articles might inspire others to take part in service projects, and how a website would eventually share those stories from the USA and later from around the world. Swami took that letter.



A view of the SaiLoveinAction.org home page – colored dots around the globe indicate Sai Centers with related stories based on Sai organization service projects.

The next day, on July 8, the officer rewrote the contents of that letter as a one-page report. During morning *darshan* he held up the report as Swami passed by, and Swami nodded for him to approach. Offering the document, the officer spoke in detail about each point. Swami seemed very interested in the SLIA work, but after a while, Swami's escort started pushing His chair forward along the path. Swami then pointed to one of the items in the report (the plan to develop inspirational articles), and the escort again stopped the chair.

The officer shared more details about the project, including the examples of prison service and medical camps for pets. Swami

spent additional time listening to these descriptions, and the officer asked Swami to bless the Sai Love in Action project. During *darshan* the following afternoon, Swami nodded to the officer again, who again approached Swami's chair and thanked Him for blessing the SLIA work.

Back home after the USA pilgrimage, the SLIA team became even more enthused upon hearing the wonderful blessing Swami had given. Several months later, some of the finished articles were printed and bound into a beautiful album, and devotees traveling to Prasanthi for Swami's 85th Birthday were able to present the album to Him.

Meanwhile, the team continued working on articles from Sai Centers around the country, and the time for publishing them online approached. At this point, a devotee holding a zone leadership position and another with vast experience in video work took active parts in the project and arranged for development of the SLIA website. The website design was beautiful beyond anything the team members had imagined. Much testing was required, and many bugs were worked out, as team members began uploading articles, photos, and videos.

Additional needs became clear, and two new teams of skilled young adults were formed – a website team to help organize and upload articles, and another team to help process photos and edit and post video clips to accompany the service articles. As needs arise, the Lord seems always to provide the resources in skilled and dedicated devotees.

Although only recently launched, the *SaiLoveinAction.org* website already features a number of service articles, along with photos, video, and pertinent quotes on selfless service, from projects around the USA, as well as articles from other parts of the world. The website's opening page features a globe, with orange dots indicating the locations of the service projects described in the accompanying articles. Hovering a cursor near a dot brings up a brief description of the project. Clicking on the dot leads one to the article associated with that dot. In time, we envision that the website globe will be speckled with countless orange dots, as more and more devotees share in written words, photos, and video clips of the wide-ranging transformational impact of Sai selfless service projects.

As visitors to the *SaiLoveinAction.org* website learn more about the numerous selfless service activities taking place, and the transformational changes taking place within those who serve, the meaning of Sathya Sai Baba's words will become even more apparent:

Do not believe that you can by means of selfless service reform or reshape the world. You may or may not. That does not matter. The real value of selfless service, its most visible result, is that it reforms you, reshapes you.

—Sathya Sai Baba, 29 Mar 1966

—Team Members, *SaiLoveinAction.org*

Announcements

SRI SATHYA SAI WORLD FOUNDATION

Michael G Goldstein MD
Chairman

Dear Brothers and Sisters, *Sai Ram!*
We are devotees of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. As such, we love him without reservation. We embrace his teachings and do our utmost to make them paramount in our own lives. He has taught us that our minds and bodies are transient instruments that belong to the omnipresent Divinity, while our eternal souls are one with Him. They are the source of divine love, of divine consciousness. This, he has taught and exemplified, is the nature of Divinity and the nature of man.

While we yearn for his Divine Presence, we take refuge in the knowledge that Divine Omnipresence is always and forever. The good in our plight, the “saving grace,” is that the light of His divine love within us and around us can never be extinguished. Sometimes, as a result of our doubts and foibles, we perceive only a glimmering of His divine light. This is not due to changes in the constancy or brilliance of the divine light of love. It is due to the wavering quality of our perception, reception, and conception. I refer to how we recognize selfless love, how we are inspired by selfless love, and how we spiritually progress and give life to the selfless love that abounds in the world.

We are instruments of divinity, each with unique architecture. Therefore, the light of divine consciousness, while one and universal for all, is perceived differently by all of us, within the capacity of our individual understanding and in the context of our unique outlook on life. Some of us have perceived our beloved Swami as an object in the world and not as the subject of our lives – as an object, not the subject. Now there is no object to perceive, no divine personage to see, hear, and touch. Consequently, we are experiencing many challenges to the spiritual purity and structural integrity of the organization that bears the divine name.

There is work to be done! First and foremost, we must meet the challenge. The competence and integrity of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization has been challenged, just as each of us has been challenged. Restoration of the competence and integrity of the organization is an essential prerequisite to the design and implementation of most of the World Conference IX resolutions blessed and approved by Swami. To implement

these new guidelines and programs in these tenuous times is imprudent. We are taking definitive measures to accomplish the needful. Work on the guidelines and programs has progressed substantially. With Swami's grace, we will cure whatever ails us and then move forward briskly.

There has been some confusion regarding the structure and function of the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation and the Prasanthi Council. For those who seek clarification, I sent a letter to the international office bearers to be circulated to all Sai Centers dated December 24, 2011 (see *Sathya Sai Newsletter USA*, January/February 2012, pp 42-44). In addition you can refer to the December 2011 letter sent by Sri Indulal Shah, also circulated to Sai Centers (see *Sathya Sai Newsletter USA*, January/February 2012, pp 38-41). Sri Indulal Shah is a senior member of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust of India and was, as most of you know, the first Chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai International Organization.

One of the resolutions approved by Swami, which is practical and applicable at this time, is the Young Adult Apprenticeship Program. The Young Adults are the least affected by the unsettlement in the organization. The youth have been very patient. They are bright, dedicated, and untainted by ulterior motives. They are young spiritual aspirants, sincere and determined. Therefore, there will be no further delay in the Young Adult Apprenticeship Program approved by our beloved Swami. The youth are ready and will be a source of inspiration for all of us.

The Young Adult Apprenticeship Program is a comprehensive initiative that will begin at the Zone Chairman level and eventually be activated at all levels of leadership in the organization. Let us launch these deserving young adults, our greatest treasure, in their new endeavor, with our wholehearted support and our prayers. I have attached to this letter the Terms of Reference for the Sai Young Adult Apprenticeship Program (see pages 40-43).

My dear brothers and sisters, let us be ever mindful that our spiritual organization, the Sri Sathya Sai Organization, bears the blessed name of our beloved Swami. Our beloved Swami always posed challenges for us so that we might confidently and competently rise to the occasion. His departure from physical presence poses the greatest challenge ever for each of us and for the Sai Organization. Let us all seek within ourselves the answers and strength to act effectively, selflessly, and lovingly.

Lovingly, in the service of Sai,

—**Michael Goldstein MD**

January 14, 2012

Sri Sathya Sai Young Adult Apprenticeship Program

Terms of Reference

Definition

The Young Adult Apprenticeship Program can be defined as “practical immersion in the management of the organization that results in spiritual benefits for the server and the served ones.” The Apprenticeship Program combines on-the-job practical training with spiritual instruction on the mission and teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. This is an ancient teaching method dating back many centuries; it teaches the student how to solve problems, understand tasks, and perform specific duties in accordance with guidelines and protocols.

Aim

With “heads in the forest and hands in society,” our Sai young adults “will strive to infuse the Sai Organization with an innocence and purity still unblemished from the worldly events and interactions that may transpire over the forthcoming years. This purity, love, and wisdom resulting from their stage in life and their *sadhana* (discipline) as Sai devotees will substantially accelerate the spiritual progress of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization.”

[By] identifying and developing Sai youth with the right potential to learn from and contribute to the effectiveness of senior office bearers (zonal chairs, central coordinators, and national presidents) within the Sai Organization, the Young Adult Apprenticeship Program will help increase the availability of experienced and capable Sai youth that are prepared to assume senior roles as they become available. *(continued on pages 44-46)*

There is no greater teacher than your heart. Time is a great preacher. The world is a scriptural text. God is the great friend. With full faith in these four entities, one should lead his life on this earth. Prema (love) is the natural possession of every human being; it is the fruit of the tree of life. But . . . before tasting a fruit, you have to remove the skin and rind covering the pulp inside and also cast off the seed. The fruit of love is covered by the thick skin of ego. You have to peel off this skin of “mine” and “thine.” Then only you can taste the sweet juice. That is why the Vedas describe God as Raso Vai Sah (Supreme sweet essence).

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 30:17, July 17, 1997)

Scope

International Level: Zonal youth representatives on the International Youth Council will be assigned to each of the zonal chairs or central coordinators. Depending on their skills and experience, they will also be given the opportunity to assist zonal chairs as deputies.

Central Coordinator Level: Senior youth are to be assigned as apprentices to each of the central coordinators.

National Level: Senior youth are to be assigned to each of the national presidents of every country.

Other Management Positions (Phase III): Regional or district-level apprenticeship appointments [are also expected to be assigned.]

Roles/Responsibilities

- Young Adult apprentices are to be included in all senior leadership day-to-day tasks and running of the Sai Organization.
- Young Adult apprentices are to attend meetings and be given the opportunity to provide input/ideas on Sai Organizational matters.
- Senior leadership are to mentor closely and nurture the young adult apprentices.
- Zonal chairs, central coordinators, and national presidents are to hold regular one-on-one progress meetings with their respective young adult apprentices (minimum quarterly) to discuss any specific issues requiring in-depth knowledge or understanding. These meetings can be conducted either in person or via conference call.
- Young adult apprentices are to be given projects, tasks, and responsibilities that are agreed upon in advance.
- Young adult apprentices are to be given access to all information that will help them learn and gain the appropriate knowledge. This will give them the insight and experience on how to deal with complex and sensitive Sai Organizational matters.
- Progress reports are to be sent to the international youth coordinator for review.
- All apprenticeship appointments are to be made in consultation and agreement with the chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation.

Minimum Requirements to Be Considered for the Young Adult Apprenticeship Program

The nominee:

- Is familiar with the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.
- Is familiar with the guidelines, aims, and objectives of the Sai Organization.
- Has held a position in the Sai Organization at either the center, regional, or national level.
- Has been actively involved in the Sai Organization at the center or regional level.
- Has managed or led projects or activities within the Sai Organization.
- Young adult apprentices are expected to make themselves available to attend an annual meeting with the chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation, in Prashanti Nilayam, during the annual Birthday celebrations (in November). However, if for any good reason young adult apprentices cannot attend, they may submit to the international youth coordinator for approval of a delegate to represent them.

Term of Office

The term of office for the Young Adult Apprentice at the national or central coordinator level is to last one year, extendable for an additional year (maximum two years), upon concurrence of the Prashanthi Council member responsible for the zone, the zonal chair, the central coordinator, and the international youth coordinator.

- All young adults who complete the Young Adult Apprenticeship Program may then be considered for senior level positions that may come up in the future.
- Exceptions can be made for senior youth who have already completed a term of office within the Sai Organization in a senior executive capacity, e.g., a national-level position. They may also be considered for higher positions without having been through the apprenticeship program. Any senior level appointments of such individuals will be assessed on level of experience, competency, and capability. Approval for such candidates is to be given by the chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation.

- Any young adult apprentice who fails to meet the minimum set of requirements can be asked to step down from the program and his or her term of office terminated upon the concurrence of the Prashanti Council member responsible for the zone, the zonal chair, the central coordinator, and the international youth coordinator.

Nominations

Nominations shall be discussed by the national central councils and sent by the national presidents – in conjunction with the Prashanti Council member responsible for the zone, the zonal chair, and the central coordinator – to the international youth coordinator for review. The international youth coordinator will then submit nominations for approval. If for any reason there is a lack of concurrence between any of the parties, the matter will be put before the chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation.

- Nominations are to take the form of a detailed bio-data (including work undertaken in the Sai Organization) and photo.
- Bio-data and photos of nominee apprentices are to be sent for approval no later than March 1, 2012.
- Nominations of candidates are to be put forward by the Prashanti Council member responsible for the zone, the zonal chair, the central coordinator, the deputy central coordinator, and the national president.

Timeframe

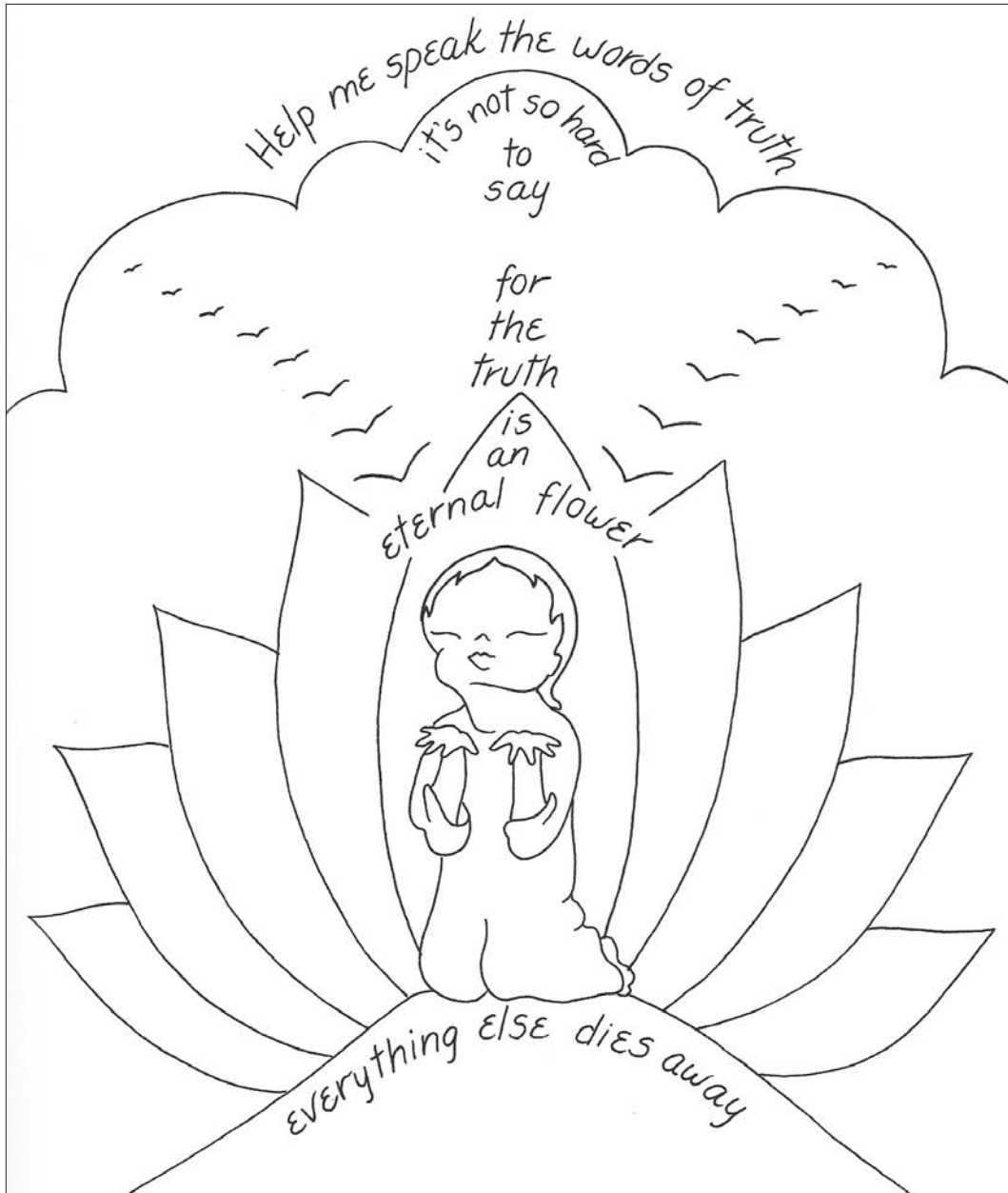
Phase I: International Youth Council members are expected to initiate apprenticeships with their respective zonal chairs by Mahashivaratri (February 2012).

Phase II: Central-coordinator-level and national-level appointments are expected to be finalized by Gurupurnima (July 2012).

Lovingly, in Sai service,

—**Shitu Chudasama**

Coordinator, International Young Adult Council
Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation
January 2012



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Recent Arrivals

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 42 Discourses of Bhagavan Baba given in 2009, featuring 18 invaluable discourses by Baba, emphasizing the importance of festivals, upholding morality at the individual and societal levels, the origin of the mind and its power, the misuse of cell phones, and many other topics. BA-042\$6.00

Beacons of Divine Wisdom, Part 1, originally published in Telugu as *Divya Jnana Deepikalu*, is a compilation of articles written by Bhagavan Baba about the lives of Avatars, Puranic characters, spiritual personalities, and exemplary devotees from the Indian panorama. BI-434\$6.00

Swami's Teachings about Virtuous Children, by Dr Charanjit Ghooi, is a compilation of Vedantic knowledge combined with Swami's teachings. It is designed to help parents live exemplary and virtuous lives as a demonstration to their children. Drawing upon her medical background, Dr Ghooi uses sketches and explanatory diagrams to further illustrate the concepts. BI-439\$4.00

Sai Baba My Pilot, by Capt V K Sharma, is an autobiography of the author's experiences as an airline pilot and his experiences with Sathya Sai Baba aboard the aircraft. Since 1973, he has been guided on his spiritual journey by Baba's grace. BI-501 \$15.00

Full Flame Infinite Scenario, compiled by Prof. Ranga Rao, head of the English department in the Sri Sathya Sai University, is a volume of selected articles written by Swami's ardent devotees around the world. The reader is presented with experiences and spiritual "gems" tracing Baba's life and mission from His earlier days to the present. BI-362 \$15.00