

SATHYA SAI
THE
ETERNAL
COMPANION



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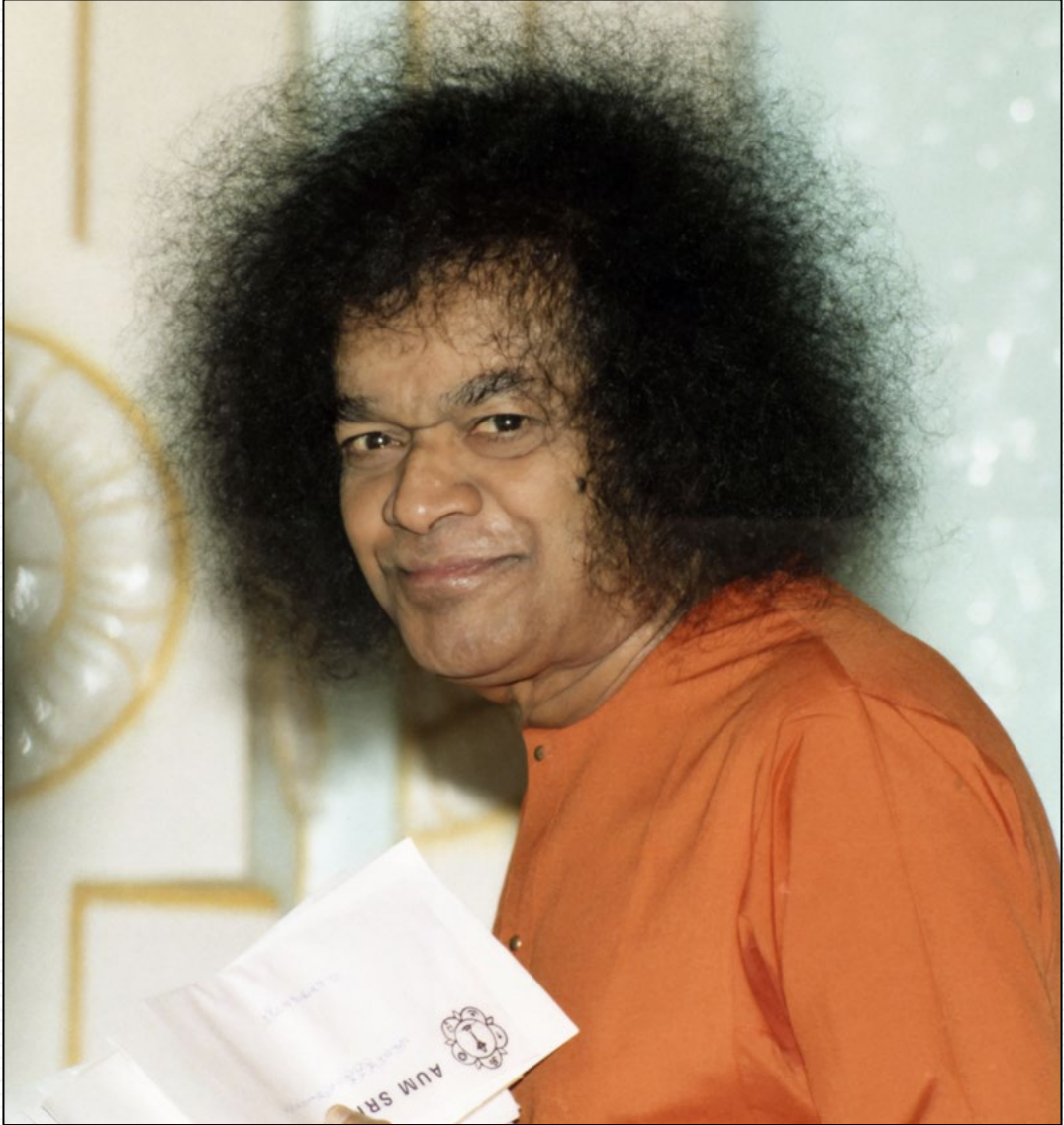


**DIVINE
GLORY &
MISSION OF**
SRI SATHYA SAI



Every moment is new. Every second is new, because it heralds the march of time. A year is in fact a succession of seconds turning into minutes, days and months. It is only when every moment is cherished as new, will the new year become new. The sacred way in which every moment is spent will determine the fruitfulness of the year. If you wish to lead a sacred life and have sacred experiences, you must engage yourself in sacred actions. The good and evil in the world can be changed only by the change in one's actions. Transformation of society must start with transformation of individuals.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba
January 1, 1998



DEDICATED WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE TO
BHAGAWAN SRI SATHYA SAI BABA





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THE LADDER TO LIBERATION

BHAJA GOVINDAM-PART 1

On behalf of the Sri Sathya Sai International Organization (SSSIO), we wish everyone a happy and holy holiday season and a blessed new year filled with love, peace, and bliss. Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba says that time is God, every second is new, and **the best way to sanctify time is by remembering God, chanting His name, contemplating His form, singing His glories, participating in His divine mission, and serving all, recognizing everything as a manifestation of divinity.**

In this issue of *Sathya Sai–The Eternal Companion*, Swami blesses us with the message (January 1, 1992 discourse) of how to sanctify one’s life. He mentions three important points and elaborates on them:

- The three sources of sorrow for everyone
- How to get rid of this sorrow and live in bliss
- The three things to be aware of to achieve bliss—giving up ignorance, acquiring knowledge of the Self, and attaining the Goal of life.

He exhorts us to realize *Tat Twam Asi* (That Thou Art), as mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda, repeated nine times by the father and Guru, Uddalaka to the son and disciple, Shwetaketu. To understand this, we need to be aware of three principles:

- What is it that goes but never comes?
- What is it that comes but never goes?
- What is it that neither comes nor goes?

This issue also contains a letter by Bhagawan emphasizing the importance of *Tat Twam Asi* to live in God-Consciousness.

To realize this truth, one must live in love. Swami says, **“God is Love. Live in Love.”** The best way to practice this is to put love into action through selfless service and by remembering the omnipresence of God. In this issue, a young lady beautifully narrates how the service of a domestic help changed her life and assured her of Swami’s constant, compassionate presence. SSSIO members around the world engage in selfless service, serving food, providing clothes to the needy, and planting trees, glimpses of which



have been captured in this issue. **Spreading the message of human values itself is an excellent service, and such service was rendered by the SSEHV Conference in Barbados**, where people from diverse backgrounds—educators, parents, teachers, government executives, and others were all inspired.

In the discourse delivered on December 24, 1972, Swami says, *“There is only one language; that of the heart. There is only one religion, that of love. There is only one caste, that of humanity. There is only one God who is omnipresent.”* This issue features the story of a devotee from the Netherlands who was dissatisfied in his quest for truth in following his Christian tradition. He came face to face with Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who transformed his life. This story shows how Swami makes a Christian a better Christian. The issue also contains the story of a young Muslim lady who became a better Muslim following Swami’s teachings and developed a better understanding of the Quran.

Divine Discourses on Bhaja Govindam

All these various activities, be they devotional, educational, or service-oriented, are based on love for God, detachment from sensory pursuits, and service to the Lord. On this subject, Swami gave a series of special discourses as part of the

summer course starting in May 1973. These discourses are based on Bhaja Govindam, a famous poetic composition of the great *Advaitic* teacher, Adi Shankaracharya. **The work is also called *Moha Mudgara* (destroyer of delusion)**. Swami spoke at length on these verses in this seminal work. Swami beautifully says that the first verse addresses all of us as *‘Moodhamathi,’* the foolish one or a mind that is ignorant of the truth. **After contemplating on these verses and putting them into practice, one gets transformed into *‘Mukthimathi,’* one ready for liberation or enlightenment.**

Such is the importance Swami gave to the Bhaja Govindam that He had His students perform a drama about it on two occasions. The first time was on May 13, 1975, and the second time was in March 1988 at the Shanmukhananda Hall in Bombay (Mumbai today). Swami personally supervised the preparation of the script, production, and direction of the drama, including giving guidance on dialogue delivery and acting. Swami also wrote a Telugu version of the Bhaja Govindam verses, translating not just the words but also conveying the true import and the real essence of the verses.

In these 31 verses, Adi Shankaracharya imparts practical Vedantic philosophy, which is the essence of the Vedas and Upanishads. Adi Shankara was a

great teacher of *Advaitic* philosophy who composed many spiritual texts, including devotional works (Bhaja Govindam, Soundarya Lahiri, Shivananda Lahiri) and *Advaitic* texts (commentaries on the *Prasthanas Traya*, foundational texts of Vedanta–Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and Brahma Sutras). These treatises serve as guidebooks and guideposts even today to pilgrims on the spiritual path seeking enlightenment.

Birth of Bhaja Govindam

Once, Adi Shankara was at Kashi (Varanasi today), the holy pilgrimage center for Lord Shiva. There, he saw a Brahmin reciting the rules of grammar. He was indulging in grammatical jugglery and memorizing the term ‘*dukrnkarane*’ to earn a living and support his family. Spontaneously, Adi Shankara burst forth with the poem:

భజ గోవిందం - భజ గోవిందం
 భజ గోవిందం - మోక్షమతే,
 సంప్రాప్తే సన్నిహితే కాలే
 నా నా రాక్షతి దుక్రకరణే.

*bhaja govindam bhaja govindam
 govindam bhaja mudhamate |
 samprapte sannihite kale
 nahi nahi raksati dukrnkarane ||*

(Worship Govinda, Worship Govinda, Worship Govinda. Oh, fool (deluded mind)! Rules of grammar will not save you at the time of your death.)

This poem is considered a masterpiece of Sanskrit literature and a summary of the

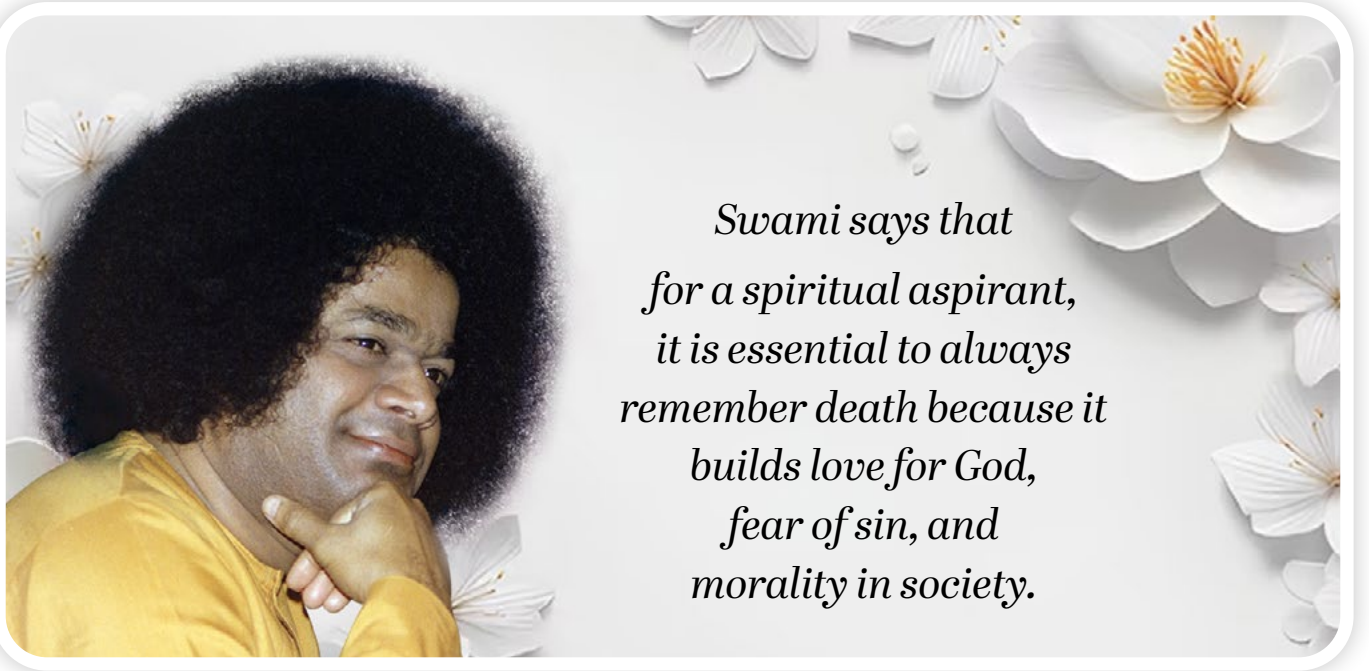
Vedanta. The poem consisting of 31 verses is widely recited and sung by Hindus of all sects and traditions as it conveys the universal message of spiritual wisdom and devotion.

In-Depth Meaning

Bhaja Govindam exhorts one to worship the Lord. Swami adds that real ‘*Bhaja*’ goes beyond mere worship. It means to love God so intensely that you no longer see ‘*Vi-bhaja*’ or separation from Him. You exist in oneness with God. ‘Govinda’ is commonly understood as ‘the controller of cows,’ which refers to the divine cowherd, Lord Krishna. The real meaning of ‘Go’ is cow. Thus, ‘Govinda’ is the one who controls our animal qualities and base nature, making us realize that we are divine. That is why Swami says that we should begin our spiritual journey by asserting, “I am not an animal. I am a human.”

‘Go’ also stands for the Vedas, the ultimate repository of supreme knowledge. In that sense, ‘Govinda’ confers this ultimate knowledge or wisdom. ‘Go’ also means earth and heaven. So, ‘Govinda’ translates into one who gives us happiness in this world and the next.

‘*Moodhamathi*’ means a fool or an ignorant one. Anyone who does not have knowledge of the Atma is considered a fool or ignorant. One may have many academic qualifications, but they are helpful only to earn a livelihood. That is why Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, “*Vidyanam Adhyatma Vidya*” (Of all forms of knowledge, I am the Spiritual Knowledge). In the Mundaka Upanishad, the teacher says there are two kinds of knowledge–*Para Vidya* (Knowledge of Atman) and *Apara Vidya* (secular knowledge of material sciences, etc.). The former leads to liberation, while the latter leads to bondage. Keeping this in view, Swami integrates spiritual and secular



*Swami says that
for a spiritual aspirant,
it is essential to always
remember death because it
builds love for God,
fear of sin, and
morality in society.*

education in His educational institutions. He calls them the two wings of the bird—both are necessary for flying. **He says that the purpose of human life is not about getting worldly degrees but achieving the highest ‘degree’ of being the ‘Amrutasya Putra’ (child of immortality).**

We see great saints like Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Adbhutananda, and Avatars like Shirdi Baba and Sathya Sai Baba, who are sources of all wisdom and enlightenment despite not having formal education by attending colleges! They possess the highest wisdom. That is the knowledge one should aspire to have. Till we achieve that, we are all ‘Moodhamathis.’

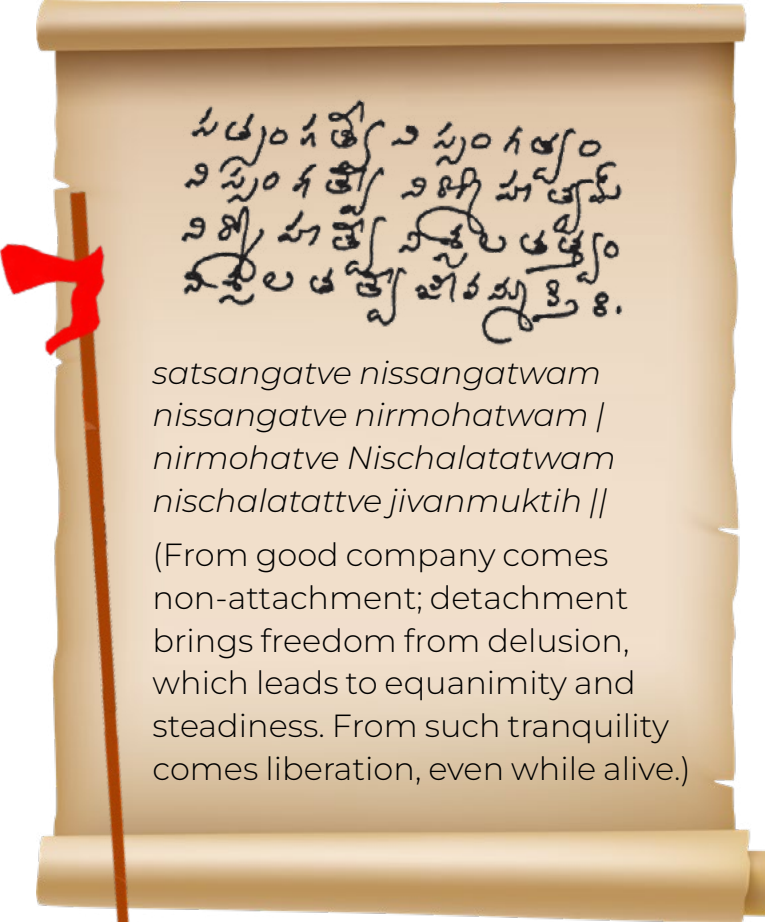
The second part of the verse emphasizes the important message that death is always drawing near, and worldly knowledge will not protect one from it. **Swami says that for a spiritual aspirant, it is essential to always remember death because it fosters love for God, fear of sin, and morality in society.** Though man thinks he will live for a hundred years, one can die anytime—in childhood, youth, middle age, or old age. Death does not give a warn-

ing. Swami says that when a photographer wants to take a photograph, he alerts us to ‘be ready’ before clicking. However, the Lord of Death will not give a warning, and death can come to us at any time. The duty of a sincere spiritual seeker is always to be alert and ready. For that, we need to think of God constantly. **Lord Krishna promises that thinking of Him always and at the time of death ensures that we become one with Him.**

In spirituality, the rules of grammar or scholarship will be of no avail. It is wonderful to know and quote the scriptures. But it is most important to live by the scriptures. That is why Lord Jesus came to teach the spirit of the scriptures when the Pharisees and Jews were following it only in word! So, too, Lord Buddha incarnated when people were caught up in Vedic rituals without understanding the spirit behind them. In the present age, our **Lord Sai has come to teach human values that transcend and unite all religious traditions. His teachings are relevant for people of all faiths, cultures, ages, and nationalities to sanctify and redeem lives.**

Climbing the Ladder of Liberation

One of the important verses that we shall elaborate is:



సత్యం న త్యం న సుం న త్యం
న సుం న త్యం న త్యం న త్యం
న త్యం న త్యం న త్యం న త్యం
న త్యం న త్యం న త్యం న త్యం.

satsangatve nissangatwam
nissangatve nirmohatwam |
nirmohatve Nischalatatwam
nischalatatattve jivanmuktih ||

(From good company comes non-attachment; detachment brings freedom from delusion, which leads to equanimity and steadiness. From such tranquility comes liberation, even while alive.)

The stepwise process to liberation is given here. Swami says that ‘**Sat**’ is the truth. Though, generally, ‘*Satsang*’ is translated as holy company, it really means to be in the company of truth. Truth is God. **Whenever we are associated with God, it becomes Satsang.** One could be in the company of devotees who love God and do His work, or one could be in the company of holy saints, or one may be in the company of the holy scriptures, or, the best, one can be in the company of the Avatar. All these give us a distaste or aversion for the world. As we move toward the North Pole, we move away from the South Pole. Similarly, as we move towards God and the godly, we move away from the world and the worldly.

When we speak of company, it is not only people but objects as well. When one is in

the company of a rosary or surrounded by pictures of God, one gets divine thoughts. If one has a gun or a sword in his hand, he will be tempted to use it for violence. Another important aspect is the association with places. Each place has its own unique subtle energy and vibrations. That is why, when we go to a place of pilgrimage, we find it easier to be attuned to God, though God is omnipresent. Even at home, setting aside a specific space for daily worship fills that place with holy vibrations.

Similarly, places with bad vibrations of sensory indulgences constitute bad company. Swami gives the example of Lakshmana, the exemplary brother of Lord Sri Rama, who left the family, and gave up royal comforts, and even sleep to serve the Lord. At one point, he becomes critical of Lord Rama and bemoans his fate for following Him. The all-knowing Lord says that Lakshmana’s unusual behavior at that time was due to the influence of the place they were passing through, which had been inhabited by demons. **So also, the thoughts in our mind are formed by the company we keep.** That is why Swami recommends continuous *Namasmarana* (repetition of the holy name) to keep God as our constant companion.

It is worthwhile even to pay money to get good company, and avoid bad company because of their influence. **Swami says, “Tell me your company; I shall tell you who you are.”** Swami explains this with an example—dust in the company of water sinks, but in the company of wind, it goes up! When jasmine flowers are wrapped in paper, the paper also acquires the fragrance. If the same paper is used to wrap a fish, the stench is transferred to the paper. The paper has no smell by itself, but the smell comes from what it associates with.

The dispassion and detachment from worldly objects that arise from funda-

mental discrimination (Viveka) come from good company. In the early stages of spiritual practice, good company is critical. It is like the fence around a tender growing plant that protects it from grazing animals. But once the sapling grows into a big tree, it gives even shade and refuge to the same grazing animals! Till we are strong in our spiritual growth and can identify with our divine nature, we must be careful of the company we keep.

Good company strengthens our spiritual journey. The flame of a matchstick can be extinguished by the wind. But the same wind increases it to the size of a conflagration! That is the power of *Satsang*. Until we become blazing fires of spirituality, we must keep good company. **Avatars are like these blazing fires that can transform even sinners into saints.**

On one occasion, I asked Swami, “When in Your presence, we feel in tune with You and enjoy divine bliss. But when we return to our homes, the intensity lessens, and we get caught up in worldly things. Why?”



Swami responded with a beautiful example that He also explained during the Summer Course on May 24, 1973.

“We fill a mud pot with water up to its brim. We keep this mud pot very carefully in a place to which even an ant cannot have access. The next day, we find that the surface level of water has been reduced by an inch or two. The reason is that the external environment around this pot is heating it to some extent, and a small quantity of water oozes out. If the same pot is filled to the brim and kept in a place where it is surrounded by water, we will find that the surface level of water is not reduced at all. While you are staying here, you will be filling your heart to the brim with the essence of spiritual learning. When you go back to your places, because the external environment is not the same as what exists here, there is a possibility of the level of spiritual learning in the vessel of your heart becoming lower and lower by oozing out slowly. So you must make an attempt to join satsang when you go back, and you must see that the external environment is as good as the internal feeling. Then, the good in your heart does not ooze out.”

Once we develop detachment, we can get freedom from delusion and infatuation. The entire delusion arises from wrong identification with the body-mind complex. **We overcome delusion once we develop intense dispassion due to fundamental discrimination by practicing the Lord’s teachings. Then we will know our real nature, Atma.** That is why Swami says, “*Moksha* (liberation) is *Moha* (delusion) *Kshaya* (destruction of).”

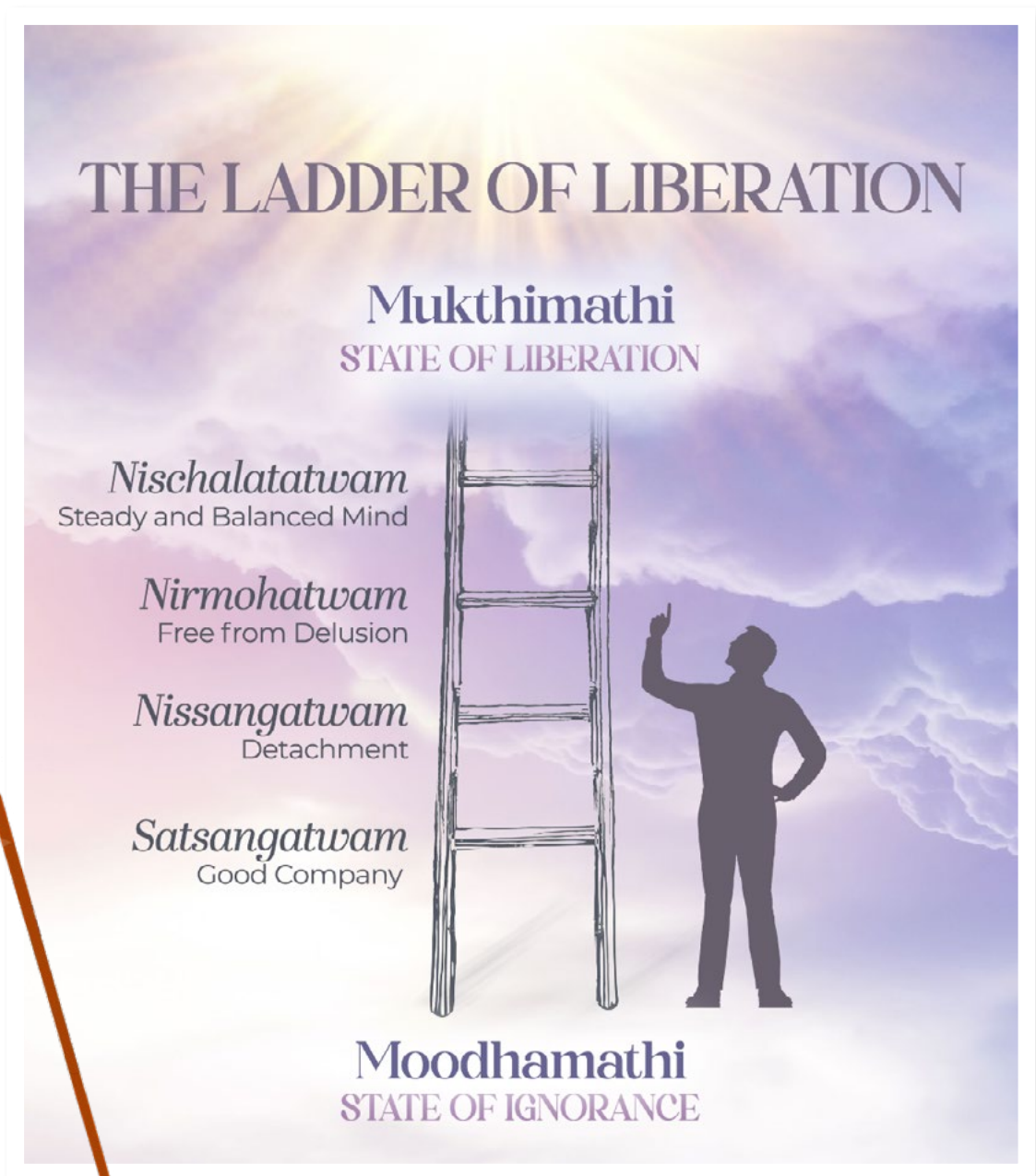
The greatest *Moha* arises from *Ahamkara* (ego) and *Mamakara* (attachment). Once we get rid of *Moha*, we become equal-minded. That is why Lord Krishna says,

“*Samatvam Yogam Uchyate* (True union with God is to be equanimous.)” **Maintaining this steadiness wherein we are the same in the pairs of opposites, viz., praise and blame, profit and loss, joy and sorrow, honor and dishonor—that is the state of Brahman.** This state of *Nischalatatwa* is

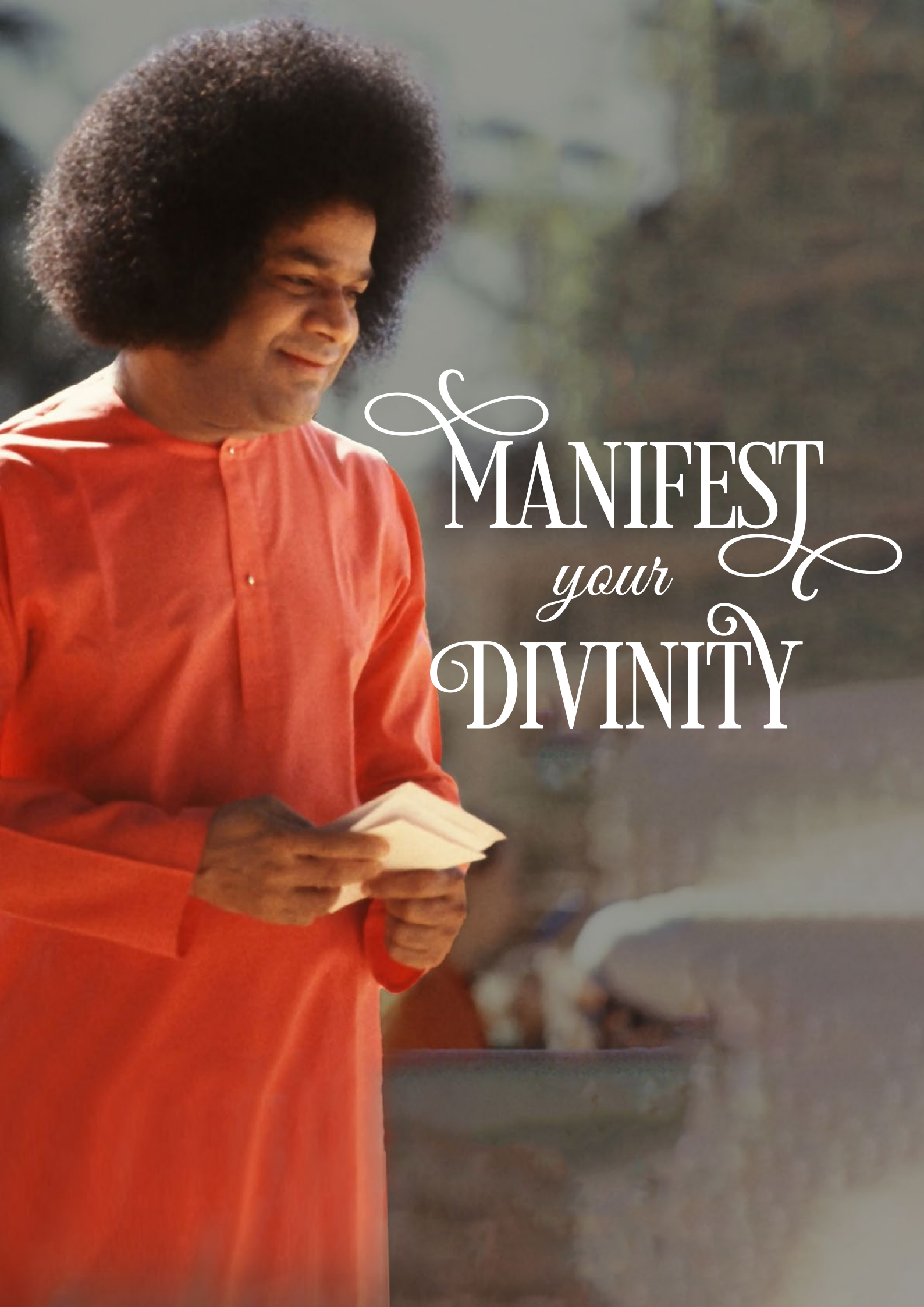
the state of *Jeevanmukti* (liberation when alive).

In this journey from *Moodhamathi* to *Mukthimathi*, ignorance to wisdom, there are several other aspects that we shall dwell on in future issues.

Jai Sai Ram.







MANIFEST
your
DIVINITY

The Lord of the cosmos permeates the entire universe, remaining invisible in the visible universe.

The cosmic consciousness illumines as Self in everything like the thread that runs through a necklace of gems.

All things, good and bad, happen according to the dictates of time.

Time is the cause of all that transpires in wealth and poverty.

Realize that time is the cause of all happenings in the world.

There is none on this earth who is beyond the control of time.

(Telugu Poem)

Embodiments of Divine Love! Time flies fast, like a whirlwind. Each one's lifespan is getting reduced every moment, like a block of melting ice. Time passes even before one realizes one's duties in life. The human body is not easy to attain. But one's life ends before one realizes one's primary purpose. **Human birth is very difficult to attain. Having acquired the sacred human body, one should not misuse one's time and life without realizing the purpose of this human birth. It is one's bounden duty to realize the purpose of life and utilize time in performing duties to sanctify one's existence.** With determination, there is nothing that one cannot achieve in this world. But before embarking on any task, one should recognize one's abilities and nature and act accordingly.

Today, an individual who claims to know everything and engages in exploring space is unable to experience bliss. What is the reason? One who has the ability to explore the stars or walk on the moon, is unable to comprehend one's own real nature, and

the awareness of integral consciousness declines. This consciousness is not related to knowledge of the external world. It can be experienced only by turning one's vision inward. Only the one who has integral awareness (*samagratha bhavam*) will have the right vision. Only a person with such an integral vision will experience bliss.

The greatest cause of bondage

When people speak about bondage, what is it that binds them? One can liberate oneself only when one recognizes what it is that binds. Are wife and children the causes of bondage? No. Is it property or wealth? No. Are they sensual desires? No. **The greatest cause of bondage is the failure to know oneself. An individual who is not aware of one's true Self cannot escape sorrow.** As long as there is sorrow, bliss cannot be experienced. What is the sorrow that envelops a person? Sorrow engulfs people in three ways and afflicts them in many ways. One source of sorrow is *Asath* (the unreal). The second



THE GREATEST CAUSE OF BONDAGE IS

FAILURE TO KNOW

ONESELF

cause is *Thamas* (the darkness of ignorance). The third is death. In this context, the Vedanta mentions three categories: *Prakriti* (nature), *Jivatma* (the individual soul), and *Paramatma* (the supreme soul or Brahman).

As long as one does not give up what one should renounce, one will not experience bliss. As long as one is unaware of what one should know, one cannot get bliss. Bliss will elude a person until the person reaches the goal.

Give Up The Fascination For The World

What should one give up? What should one ought to know? What is his goal? These should be the subjects of Self-enquiry. What has to be given up is *Jagath-bhavam* (fascination for the world). The reason is the world is not different from God. "*Eashavasyam idam jagath*" (God dwells in the entire universe). "*Viswam Vishnu-swaroopam.*" (The entire cosmos is the embodiment of the Supreme). Disregarding this profound and sacred truth, man is becoming prey to grief from worldly attachments. The world should not be treated as a mere physical entity but should be looked upon verily as a Divine manifestation. Only when man is filled with

godly thoughts will he be free of sorrow. Hence, what should be given up is worldliness. Then alone can *Atmananda* (Spiritual bliss) be attained.

The second thing that has to be given up is *Jiva-Bhava* (the feeling of separate individual self). Who is a *Jiva* (individual)? *Jiva* is God. If we want to realize the individual self, realize that the *Jiva* resides in the body and God dwells in the heart. They come together and engage in mutual sport, and then they separate. There is a director who directs the play of the puppets. The puppets are both good and bad. The *Jivatma* (the individual self) and the Divine principle are not two distinct and separate entities. Out of ignorance, man forgets the basic reality and cherishes delusions that lead to sorrow. It is like a man seized with fear who mistakes a rope for a snake. The fear vanishes when one realizes it is merely a rope, not a snake. Neither was the snake there and nor was it replaced by the rope. The truth is that the rope existed before, and it exists now. Likewise, looking at the world, man considers it a separate entity, *Jiva-Thatwa*. But nature is a manifestation of the divine. **When the divine nature of the cosmos is understood, man becomes free from the delusion of separateness. Therefore, upon realizing**

“*One should strive to experience the divine with firm faith through weal and woe. This is true human nature. One who does not have faith in oneself will not have faith in God.*”

the truth that he is God, man becomes free from sorrow.

The Divine Master illumines the entire cosmos and the cosmos shines in the Divine.

God and the cosmos are inseparable friends. This is the precious declaration of Sai.

(Telugu poem)

Human Destiny is the Realization of His Divinity

It is a mistake to think that sorrows are the result of nature and bliss is the gift of divinity.

Happiness and sorrow exist together; no one can separate them.

Happiness cannot be found separately; when sorrow vanishes, happiness is gained.

(Telugu Poem)

Sorrows and happiness are not separate. Threads are part of a garment. When the threads are removed, the garment disappears. Likewise, individuals cannot exist without divinity. There is no life without the individual self. Therefore, it is important to realize that an individual is none other than God. Only then can man escape from sorrow. What is the destination that man should reach? It is the original home from where he came (*Swasthanam*). What is this original home? It is the awareness of one's true self. It is for the realization of this truth that the divine gave this body to man. Where can one search for one's Self? Can the search be made outside of you? No.

Similarly, the search for God on the outside is futile. "His hands and feet are everywhere. His eyes, head, and mouth are everywhere. He stands forth encompassing everything in the cosmos" (*sarvatah pani-padam tat saravatokshi-shiro-mukham sarvatah shrutimalloke sarvamavritya tishthati*—Bhagavad Gita, 13:14). When the Divine is omnipresent, it is foolish for man to search for God elsewhere.

Hence, man's destination is the realization of his divinity (the source). This realization must come through the Vedantic process of exclusion called "neti, neti" ("not this, not this"). "I am not the body. I am not the mind (*manas*). I am not the intellect (*buddhi*). I am not the *chitta* (mind-stuff). I am not the *antahkarana* (the inner instruments)." All these are only instruments of the mind. You are the master of all these. Man should realize: "I am the Master of all of them, and I am the embodiment of all forms."

When, by this process of elimination, man realizes his true Self, he is freed from sorrow. Man's most precious and sacred gift from God is sacred intelligence. The intelligence that should be used for seeking the Atma (Self) is being used by man today to seek *Annam* (food). When you are given a mirror to look at your face, and if you face it toward others, how can you see your face? Use the mirror of *Buddhi* to recognize and witness your true Self. That is known as *Sakshat-karam*—direct vision of one's true Self. **Unfortunately, today, man searches for**

everything, forgetting himself and his true nature. He questions everyone he meets, “Who are you? Who are you?” but does not question himself, “Who am I?” One who does not know himself has no right to question others. Such an inquiry comes out of ignorance. As long as man is engulfed by ignorance, he cannot recognize his real Self. Without the awareness of his true Self, man cannot attain bliss or escape sorrow.

Everything is Contained Within God

It is to teach about the divine path and the nature of oneness and to alert man that we celebrate the New Year. God, the embodiment of time (*Kalaswarupa*), is worshipped by the name *Samvatsara*



(year-symbolic of time and universe). This name also means that God contains everything within Himself. God is also known as *Kalatmaka* (the embodiment of time). God incarnates on earth to reveal to man His divine essence. Who is called *Dheemanta* (the one endowed with intelligence)? He is not someone who merely utilizes his thinking power, intellectual power, intelligence, and enquires into various intellectual information. He is not someone who

uses his intelligence to undertake investigations to increase knowledge. He is not someone who uses intelligence (*Buddhi*) for scientific inquiry and acquires material objects. Someone who totally concentrates his mind and thoughts for divine realization is the *Dheemanta* or the person of real intelligence. **When one realizes God, he will know all. Unfortunately, today, man ignores the creator and pursues the creation by conducting various experiments. When we understand the creator, we will be able to understand the secrets of creation.**

The name *Samvathsara* represents the cosmic manifestation of the divine. The divine displays four types of glorious potencies (*Vibhutis*) as the supreme omni-Self. As such, He is called *Chathuratma* (embodiment of four potencies). This means He is the Self (Atma) that first embodies three potencies. These three are *Vasudeva* (presiding deity of consciousness), *Sankarshana* (presiding deity of false ego), and *Aniruddha* (presiding deity of the mind). When these three *Vibhutis* are understood, the fourth one, *Pradyumna* (presiding deity of intelligence), becomes intelligible. **The meaning of the first one, Vasudeva, indicates that the entire cosmos is the Lord’s dwelling place.** It also means that He is the supreme master of the universe. This means that the Divine resides in all beings as the Indwelling Spirit. Moreover, He pervades the entire universe. The Upanishad describes Him as “Narayana who is inside and outside and pervades everything (*antar bahischa tat sarvam, vyapya narayana sthitah*).”

The second name, Sankarshana, refers to the divine’s capacity to attract and transform all beings. All beings, moreover, have emerged from Him. The name is also associated with His power to transfer any object from one place to another. The child in the womb of Devaki was trans-

ferred to the womb of Rohini (another wife of Vasudeva). For this mission, the child got the name *Sankarshana* (another name for Balarama, the elder brother of Sri Krishna). The “Sa” is being close to divinity, nearness, and union with divinity. *Sankarshana* also means one who attracts what is pure. *Sam* (pure) *Karshana* (attracts). **Anirudha is beyond the control of anyone.** He can be swayed only by His grace and not by any other means. This term applies to one who is all-pervading, all-powerful, and all-knowing. The fourth one, *Pradyumna*, refers to one who possesses *Aiswarya* (infinite wealth). He confers by His grace, all prosperity and happiness on those who adore, worship, and love the Lord. *Aiswarya* includes not only material wealth (money, gold, materials, and vehicles) but every other kind of wealth, such as health, knowledge, intelligence, and virtue. **Another name of the divine is “Bhagawan.” “Bhaga” represents six attributes: divine wealth, righteousness, power, fame, detachment, and supreme wisdom.** The Lord is called “*Bhagawan*” because He has these six attributes. Thus, every name of the Lord is related to specific attributes, not an expression of the devotee’s feelings or fancies. Because of the divine’s myriad attributes, the sages hailed Him as “*Om Samvathsaraya Namah.*”

As the creator of the universe and as the One from whom everything emerged, God is also called *Yugadi* (The initiator of every Yuga or Aeon). He is the One who willed to become the Many.

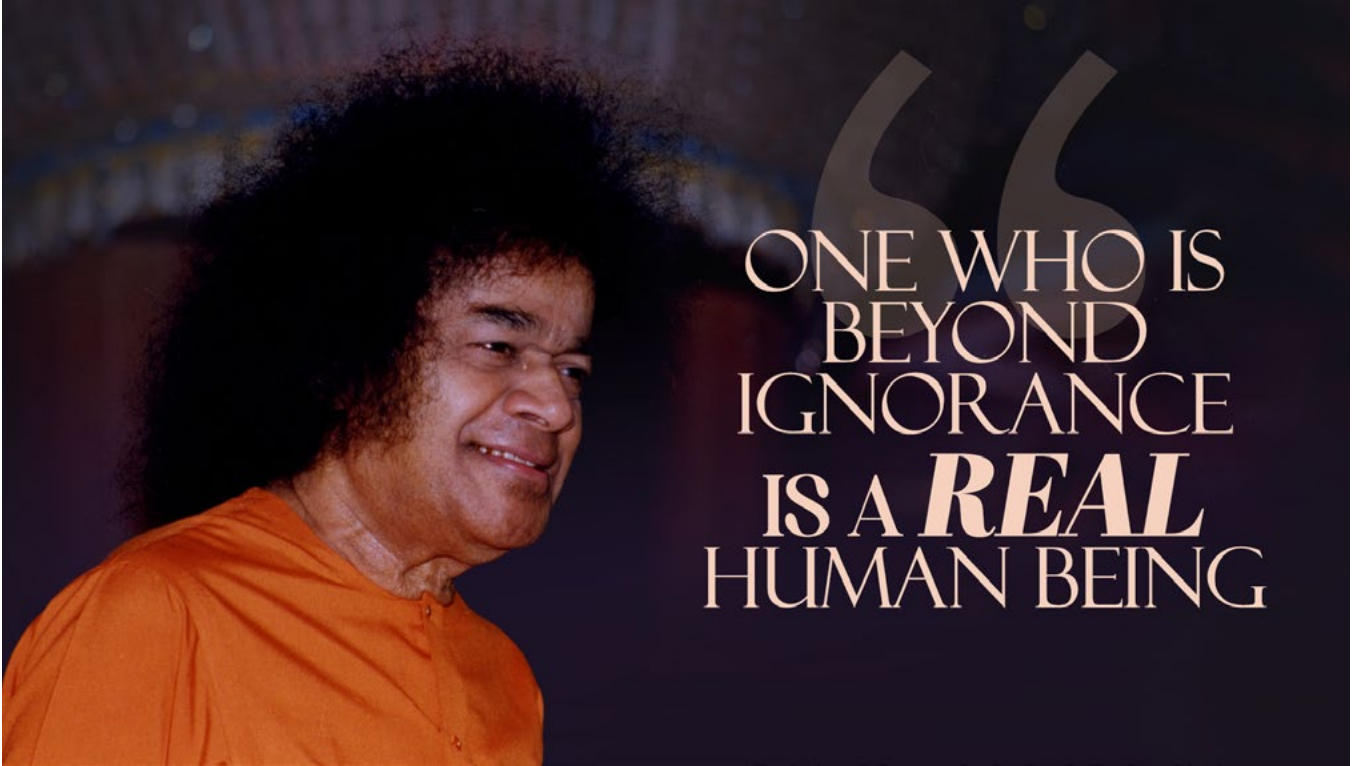
The One Atma with Different Names and Forms

What is the unity that exists in multiplicity? This is illustrated by the example of a vast mansion with rooms and halls for different purposes, like kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms. When all the dividing walls are removed, it becomes one, and only one entity remains. All beings in the world have different names and forms as embodied

beings. When the names and forms are taken away, only one Atma remains, uniting all of them. The sense of separateness is a creation of the mind. When this feeling, born of ignorance, goes away, the Godliness in man will shine. Every man has within him a *Kalpatharu* (wish fulfilling tree). But around it, there is a wild growth of bushes. When you clear away the bushes, the tree becomes visible. That tree is the Self within each one. When a creeper with flowers is covered with thorny bushes, it cannot be seen. **Similarly, the Self is covered by man’s sensory desires. When the desires are removed, the Self is revealed.**

Although the Self is in man, no attempt is made to realize it. Just as fruit does not know its sweetness, the creeper cannot taste the nectar of the flowers; how can man, who is involved in external pursuits, realize his inner reality? One should have firm faith in God. Without firm faith in God, the feeble and turbulent mind will lead you away from experiencing the divine. The first requisite for this purpose is faith. There must be an unshakeable faith in God. For example, consider a ball of steel and some dry leaves. Even with a slight wind, the dry leaves fly away, but the ball of steel does not move even with strong winds. One’s beliefs today are liable to be blown away like dried leaves. People are running after external matter and not realizing the divinity inside the matter. If desires are not fulfilled, people run away because they do not have strong faith.

One should strive to experience the divine with firm faith through weal and woe. This is true human nature. One who does not have faith in oneself will not have faith in God. One who does not have faith in oneself is not a human being. People believe in the world and becomes a slave to wants and desires. But one does not become a servant of God. Such a person cannot be called a human being. One who is beyond ignorance is a real human being (*manava*). “Ma” in the word *Manava* (human being)



means ignorance, and “Na” means one who does not possess it. So, *Manava* is one not possessed by ignorance. That is why humans are born as “Nara.” Who is *Nara*? He is the embodiment of *Atma*, the one who cannot be destroyed. Another meaning is *Naraha*; “*Raha*” means destruction, and “*Na*” means without. Therefore, the one who cannot be destroyed is *Naraha*. Only the body is impermanent, but the *Atma* is eternal.

Man is Inherently Divine

Man, who is the embodiment of the immortal spirit, identifies himself with his body and falls prey to worldly desires. How can such a person be a true devotee of God, even if he calls himself a devotee? Such a man is only a devotee of *Prakriti* (the phenomenal world of Nature). However, if you regard *Prakriti* as divine, then it is fine. But even here, man separates the *Paramatma* (divine) from *Prakriti* (Nature). As long as this sense of separation exists, all spiritual practices and worship performed over many lives are of no avail. Man tries to lead his life by depending on his intellect. But what is the use of his intellect?

Today's education only increases one's intelligence.

It does not improve character even a little bit.

ONE WHO IS
BEYOND
IGNORANCE
IS A **REAL**
HUMAN BEING

What is the use of acquiring a million types of skills and knowledge without character?

What is the value and benefit of such education?

(Telugu poem)

This is simply a life of no value. **Character is essential. We must acquire knowledge to improve and foster our character. What is character? Character is that which guides one to the knowledge of the supreme Self (Atma).** This Atmic principle is all pervasive. In the *Bhagavatha*, it is said:

*Chitrambulu Trilokya Pavithrambulu
Bhavalathalavithrambulu sanmith-
rambulu*

*Muni Jana Vana Chaitrambulu
Vishnu Devu Charithrambulu*

(Telugu Poem)

The stories of the Lord (Vishnu Charitra) are full of wonder (chitrambulu). They sanctify all three worlds (Trailokya Pavitra) and are the tools that cut the creepers of worldly bondage (bhavalatalavitra). They are like noble friends (sanmitra). For the gardens of sages and seers, they are like spring (munijanavanachaitra).

This is the essential nature of divinity. This is *sabdabrahmamayi* (manifesting as all-pervading cosmic sound); *Characharamayee* (pervading all moving and

unmoving objects); *jyotrimayee* (all-per-vading effulgence); *Vangmayee* (sacred speech); *Nityanandamayee* (eternal bliss); *Paratparamayee* (embodiment of the Omniwill); *Mayamayee* (manifestation of maya, the illusory aspect of the divine) and *Srimayee* (the embodiment of all prosperity). Divinity and this universe are manifestations of eight forms of wealth.

Creation is an Expression of God's Will

Embodiments of love! What is *Prakriti* (nature)? *Srishti* (creation) is an expression of the will of God. This is called Prakriti. Everyone who emanates from Prakriti should have divine qualities. Would an elephant give birth to a tiger? Would a tiger give birth to a deer?

Similarly, that which has emerged from the divine should have divine qualities and not the traits of an animal or a demon. **A human being without compassion or love is not human at all. Every human being should manifest one's inherent divinity.** Therefore, Jesus said, "I am the messenger of God." Man is also a messenger because he has come to spread his divine nature to the world. However, man is not trying to realize his true nature. By forgetting his true nature, man is diverting his life into worldly matters. When you believe that you are a messenger of God, you progress to becoming the "Son of God." When you can have the relationship as the Son of God, then only can you declare, "I and My father are one." This oneness with God is the concept of the Holy Ghost. This is called the transcendental (Turiya) state; a state beyond body consciousness and mind. It is beyond the states of wakefulness, dream, or deep sleep. Therefore, we must first realize the inner divinity.

Embodiments of Love! What do we understand by the term *Vyakti* (individual)? This term is applied to one who manifests the unmanifested (*Avyakta*) divine power

hidden within him. It is meaningless to apply it to anyone who does not manifest the divine within oneself. Those who manifest this divine power will be remembered in history. If one truly wants to become an individual, one has to develop and express this divine nature inherent in him.

The Cosmic Form of Divinity

Manifesting one's inner divinity does not mean producing something new. Divinity is inherent in human beings. It is called *Swabhava* (one's true nature)—the *Atmic* nature. It is the Atma that confers all powers on man. Some pray, "Swami, we don't have any energy. Provide (grace) us with new energy." What is the use of giving new energy to someone unaware of their inherent energy? Energy is there; it is not being used properly. So, how can you use this newfound energy? Once we can fully understand the concept of one's true nature and the energy inherent within, we can sanctify our lives.

First, one has to get rid of one's ego. We must understand the true meaning of ego. People generally use the word ego to describe someone who is evil, stubborn, or arrogant. But this is not the true meaning of ego. **Ego is the feeling that "I am this form." Thinking you are this body is ego; you must remove this feeling.** Ego is not when people act as they please. Hence, we must understand each word clearly. This is an object. The word silver plate describes this object. The meaning (*artha*) of the word (*pada*) is the object (*padartha*). Similarly, the word 'chair' represents the form of a chair. Therefore, the world is full of words that are associated with objects. There are no words that are meaningless in the world.

Some might say *Gagana Pushpamu* (flower from the sky). But it does not exist. So, where did this word come from? It is because two words were combined to make one word (sky and flower). This is

“How can we hear the voice of God when we are surrounded by noise? We need to develop one-pointedness toward the divine. Therefore, everyone must control their speech.

wrong. Such random combinations of words are not found in the world. Take the word *Bhagavanthudu* (God). A word cannot describe something that does not exist. Some might argue that we cannot see divinity, but divinity is evident. That is why the scripture declares, “*Pashyannapi cha na pashyathi mudho mudho mudho*” (You see and yet do not see, O foolish one.). Man is all the time seeing the universe around him and yet declares he has not seen God. Is this not ignorance?

What is the form of the cosmos? Is it not Divine? You are seeing the Divine in the form of the physical universe. In the Bhagavad Gita, this cosmic form of the Lord is described as *Viswa Virata Rupa*. What is *Viswa*? It is the whole cosmos. The *Viswa Virata Rupa* is the collective form of everything in the universe. No attempt is made to understand the inner meaning of such expressions as *Viswa Virata Rupa*. Intellect is used to misinterpret words and create confusion. Here, we cannot use our intelligence to understand the words. Purification of the heart is necessary. How much can your intelligence help you? “*munde munde matir bhinna*” (everyone has different thoughts). This mind is not steady. Then, how can the desires originating from this unsteady mind be permanent? Even Arjuna, a highly intelligent person working with detachment, confessed to Krishna that the mind is ever-wavering and fickle. Are the intellectuals of today, with all their degrees like M.B.A and Ph.D., greater than Arjuna? Not at all. **Above all degrees and intellectual attainments, one needs the grace of God. Krishna said to Arjuna,**

“*Amrutasya Putraha*” (you are the son of immortality). Krishna said, “You are my devotee.” That is the supreme accomplishment.

The Abode of The Lord is the Heart

When you earn the epithet of Bhakta (God’s devotee) from the Lord, you will be equal with Arjuna. God is not calling you as His devotee. If you are a true devotee, why wouldn’t God call you so? **It is not enough if you style yourself as a devotee of God. Only when the Lord acknowledges your devotion can you call yourself a devotee.** When you write a letter to a friend, you know that he received your letter only when you receive an acknowledgment from that friend. Similarly, when you send a letter of devotion to God, God must respond with the acknowledgment, “You are my devotee.” So long as you do not receive this acknowledgment from God, God did not receive your letter; therefore, you are not a devotee.

If you have not received the acknowledgment of God, it may mean that you gave the wrong address in your letter of devotion. In mythology, they address God as the one who dwells in Kailasa (abode of Lord Shiva), Vaikunta (abode of Lord Vishnu), or Swarga (heaven). These are not real addresses. **The correct address of the Lord is the heart. He is Hridayavasi—Indweller of the heart. This means you must continue your devotion to God until your conscience is satisfied.** Then, how can you know that God is satisfied with you? To achieve this, we must purify ourselves by getting rid of our bad qualities, bad thoughts, and bad actions.

The Body is an Instrument for the Realization of Dharma

Realize that the body has been given to you for the service of others. How is this service to be rendered? Through righteous and pure means. The body is an instrument for the realization of *Dharma* (righteousness). “*Sareeramaadhyam kalu dharmasaadhakam*” (Body is the instrument for practicing righteousness). Practice righteousness. This truth is allegorically conveyed by the example of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata. Uddhava was a great role model for the Pandavas. The eldest of the Pandavas and the embodiment of truth and righteousness is Dharmaraja. He is the Atma. Draupadi, who emerged out of the fire, represents *Prakriti* (nature). Bheema, the son of the wind God, represents life. Arjuna, the son of Indra (lord of heaven), represents the I principle. The last two brothers, Nakula

and Sahadeva, represent the *Karmendriyas* (organs of action) and *Jnanendriyas* (organs of perception). The Pandava brothers (Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva) and Draupadi followed Truth and Righteousness as represented by Dharmaraja (the eldest of the Pandavas). By following righteousness and truth, Pandavas became role models for ages. That means humans must use their sense organs to practice truth and righteousness. All worldly actions must follow truth and righteousness. Our lives and minds must follow these values.

There are the *Panchakosa* (five sheaths)—*Annamayakosa* (the food sheath), *Pranamayakosa* (the sheath of vital life force), *Manomayakosa* (mental sheath), *Vignanamaya kosa* (the intellectual sheath) and *Anandamayakosa* (bliss sheath). Atma (Self) is enveloped by these five sheaths. Atma can be visualized only by shedding these five sheaths. We cannot lead an unattached life if we, the Atma, are bound by these sheaths. If you want the food on the plate to enter your stomach, you need to use your hands to put the food in the mouth. **Perform good deeds with your hands and repeat the name of the Lord with your mouth. Only through the combination of these two actions will you achieve divinity. (*Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*—Knower of Brahman becomes Brahman).** It is not enough to just repeat the name like a gramophone or a tape recorder. You all are singing, too, but the sound has to emanate from your heart. That is where you can clearly understand the depth of divinity.

Students! You tape-record everything I say and sing. But are my words visible when you look at the tape? Or if you cut the tape into pieces, can you hear the voice? Just because you can't see or hear when you see the tape, you cannot dismiss that the



words and songs do not exist. That tape has the sounds. To hear what is on the tape, you need to connect it to a power source. Then only you can hear the sounds emanating from the tape. Therefore, connect the tape recorder of your heart to your Atma, and then you can always hear Om echoing throughout your being. That is the sound of Brahman. Not all sounds we make are Brahman. We make various sounds. **But the silence among the sounds is Brahman. When you sit in a quiet place, you can hear a sound—the sound that is in the silence.**

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a renowned divine incarnate, maintained silence, wondering when God would appear before him and grace him. So, once the queen, Rani Rasamani, questioned him, “Ramakrishna, why are you observing absolute silence?”

“God is subtlest. He is the greatest of the great and the smallest of the small (*anora-neeyan mahato maheeyan*). If we keep making noises, we will not hear His coming. We don’t know when God decides to appear. So, we have to be silent. Only when we are silent will we hear Him coming,” replied Sri Ramakrishna. He would listen for any slight sound in that silence as if it was God’s voice. **How can we hear the voice of God when we are surrounded by noise? We need to develop one-pointedness toward the divine. Therefore, everyone must control their speech.**

When speech is restrained, a type of sound starts emanating within oneself. It will be far subtler than taking inhalation and exhalation. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa called this *Parama Bhakti* (supreme state of devotion). In this universe, there are five elements. If you think there is one more element, that sixth element is Divinity. The christened name of this Divinity is *Prapatti* (a state of total surrender). We

must attain that supreme state of surrender (*Prapatti*). When we attain this state of supreme surrender, we can experience divinity every minute.

If we want to wait for New Year, we will need 12 months to elapse. If we want one month, 30 days have to come. For one day to come, 24 hours will need to elapse. If we want 24 hours, we have to experience a few 60-minute hours. For one minute, we have to experience 60 seconds. Therefore, we should consider every second as new. Without seconds, there cannot be minutes. Without minutes, there cannot be hours. Without hours, there cannot be days. Without days, there cannot be months. Without months, there cannot be years. Therefore, waiting for the arrival of the New Year will be laziness. If the New Year has come, is this the new year? Every second should be considered new; it should be made new and sacred.

Therefore. *Tat Twam Asi*. That is *Tat*. That becomes *Asi* for us. It becomes unified. *Tat-Twam*, that I am. However, if we just think ‘That I Am,’ it will not become One. We have to unify these two. Sugar by itself is sugar. Water by itself is water. When we combine them, it becomes the syrup of bliss. We should strive towards the oneness of these two. This is the task we should strive towards. We should consider every second as a form of God.

This New Year is as per the Christian era. Every second should be considered as a form of God. December and January may come and go. There is something that doesn’t come and go. **In this, we should try to clearly recognize three principles. Something does not come back after it is gone. Something does not go once it comes. There is yet another thing which neither comes nor goes.** What is it that once comes, will never go? It is wisdom (*jnana*). Truly, once wisdom comes to us,



SOMETHING DOES NOT GO
ONCE IT COMES
WISDOM

SOMETHING WHICH DOES NOT
COME BACK AFTER IT IS GONE
IGNORANCE

THAT WHICH NEITHER
COMES NOR GOES
ATMA

it should never leave us. That which comes and goes is not wisdom.

Something which does not come back after it is gone is ignorance. Ignorance in illusion—this is called illusion (*mithya*) in illusion. **That which neither comes nor goes is the principle of Atma (Atma Tatwa).** That which pervades everywhere, where will it go? Where is the separate place for it to go? Now, we place a door here. We placed the door here because there is a verandah outside. As there is a place outside, a door becomes necessary to go to this place (outside). A door separates the space inside from the verandah outside. If there is no verandah outside, we don't place a door. Likewise, there will need to be a different place outside for God to come or go. There is no place where God is not present. Where to go to? Where to come from? All these are simply ideas arising from bookish knowledge and create confusion. So, we must increase our practical knowledge.

Therefore, for the year to come and go, we are bidding farewell to one year and

welcoming another. Based on the almanac, one year has passed, and the following year has come. We have been giving this type of answer. These are all artificial. They are not permanent or true. The Sun and the moon are not going anywhere. When the Sun rises, we call it a day. When the Sun sets, we call it night. There is no night or day. There is no East or West. Where did 'coming' and 'going' come from? These are all the illusions of people. Thus, there is no coming and leaving for God. God is the emperor who does not come and go. **We should earn qualifications to enter the kingdom of God. Not everyone is qualified to enter the kingdom of God. Every human being should strive to earn this qualification. It is for this reason that we have taken human birth.** We have to perform the required activity. Human beings are bound by activity (*karmanu bhandhe manushya loke*). Transform those activities into sacred activities. Speak sacred words. Develop a sacred vision. Through this, acquire a sacred heart. Then, we will attain purity.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba
January 1, 1992



Seek & You Shall Find

UNTIL I MET SAI BABA IN 1984, MY LIFE HAD BEEN CONFUSED—a situation I shared with many after the protests of 1968 against the establishment. My family was not particularly religious. My paternal grandmother attended church, but we never discussed spiritual matters or faith at home. So, I missed this dimension without being aware of it.

Thus, I had no strong religious affiliations during my childhood or adolescence. All my life, I had been looking for something. I did not know what it was. One day, I was attracted to the Church of Scientology. I also went to a session on transcendental meditation and paid 500 Danish Crowns (roughly 75 USD) for a mantra, but I felt nothing afterward.

The Discovery and First Experience of Sai Baba

One year, I was going on a winter vacation to the beautiful Canary Islands, which I had visited many times. Before leaving, I went to *Strubes Bookstore* and asked Mrs. Strube whether she could recommend some books to read during my vacation. She showed me a book about Sai Baba. My reaction was, “No thanks! India and gurus—that is not my cup of tea.” I thought India was a dirty, poor country very far away, and gurus were money-grabbers whose only intention was to cheat others, an ill-informed notion held by many. I once saw a guru who visited Denmark and sat on a throne. People gave him money, and I felt that it was all wrong. It did not appeal to me. I bought two other books and then impulsively said, “Give me that book too.” The book that Mrs. Strube had recommended was *Sai Baba Avatar* by Howard Murphet. I took

Baba says, “If you take one step toward me, I will take a hundred toward you.” That is to say that if we start on the spiritual path, make a little effort, and take small steps toward the cosmic, higher, divine consciousness, we will get answers.

it with me on my vacation. **The weather was wonderful, and I lay on the beach and read it from cover to cover in just one day. Every time I turned a page, it was as if I recognized something appealing. I had come home!**

I felt that everything I could not understand by using my brain was now becoming clear, and I knew instinctively, or somewhere in my subconsciousness or soul, that what I read was true. Instinctively, I knew that Sai Baba was true. I knew that what He stood for was true. Of course, He could perform miracles; otherwise, He would not be who He said He was. **But the words He spoke, the philosophy He espoused, and the spirituality of His speeches enthralled me. It imbued me with the realization that divinity had descended on Earth and that this divinity was Sathya Sai Baba.**

This naturally had a strong impact on me. The same evening, I went to the beach and thought about the miracle I had just experienced when suddenly Baba spoke to me telepathically! I did not see Him but recognized Him as He spoke to me. I asked Him questions, which He answered. The essence of our conversation was that Baba said that our Earth is one giant organism that breathes in and out—just like our lungs. He told me that the universe also breathes. It was not something I knew then, but I read later that scientific theory affirms the universe expands and contracts—as if it breathes! Baba went on to say that the Earth exhales into the universe. The Earth is part of the whole, an integral unit. Baba said the breath of the Earth is so polluted that it has a detrimental impact on the universe, and this must be changed.

I, Steen—like many others—would participate in this work.

It was a vision, a revelation. It was a powerful experience for an ordinary human being like me. But that was how it was. I never doubted for a second that the experience was real and that I had talked with Sathya Sai Baba.

Back in Denmark, I called Mrs. Strube to get the address of the Sai Baba Center in Copenhagen. I visited it one day to get Baba’s address in India. I came too late for a meeting that had just ended; however, two



people were still there. I told them my story and asked whether they wanted a ride, as I had my car outside. They declined my offer. One of them was a lady who later told me that someone like me, who had had so many supernatural experiences, was too far out. It was, in fact, so far out that she did not even want to have a ride!

The Hidden Reality

It was 1984, and I was on my way to India. I happened to travel with a woman whom Baba healed from cancer while our group was there. Later, she presented an account of her healing in a program on Danish national

TV called *'The Hidden Reality.'* During her stay in the *ashram*, the lady, who suffered from a terminal illness, said that one night, a liquid flowed out of her nose. **When she returned to Denmark and was examined, there was no sign of cancer.**

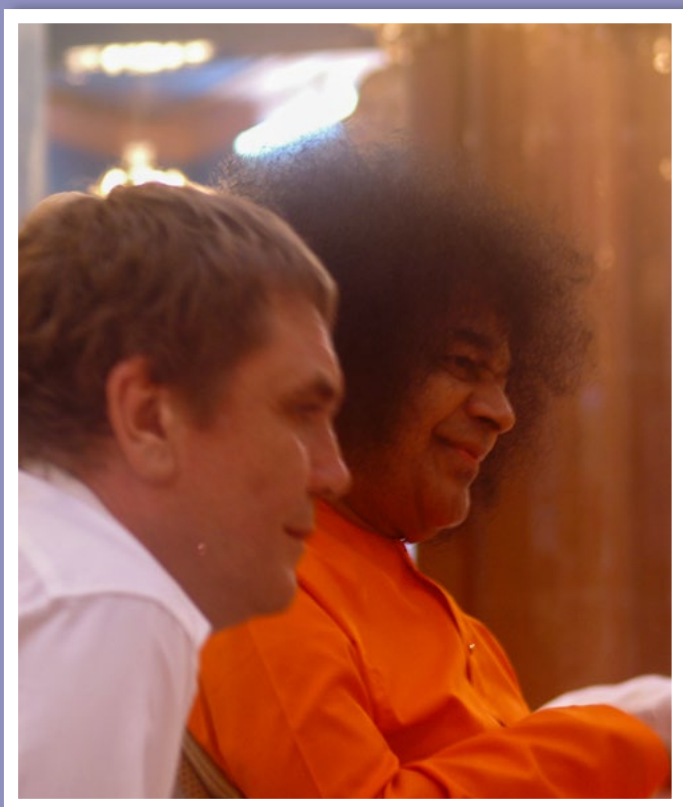
Staying at the ashram was a fantastic experience for me. From the moment I stepped inside the gate, I felt very much at home. I knew that everything was as it should be. It was as if I recognized the power, energy, and spirituality in the air at Prasanthi Nilayam. It is a powerful energy, and I knew it to be true. The first two weeks felt like I was in heaven—almost floating. I was home. I do not think I have ever been so happy in my entire life. However, when I returned home, I was convinced that

me focus on. **Looking back, I can see that it was to help me deal with pain later on so that I could be at peace with myself, which I certainly was not able to do at that time.** The spiritual part of me, the love aspect that we all have, was given such a boost that it influenced me greatly and has grown ever since.

I was again on a plane heading for India four months later. This time, Sai Baba called me in for an interview, along with a few others. I was sitting less than a foot away from Him, so close that I could touch His hand, which I did. While speaking to those present, Baba materialized *vibhuti* for the ladies and several rings. Approximately 20 minutes into the interview, He turned and, looking at me, asked, *"Where is your wife?"* I said with a wry smile that I was not married. Then Baba gave me a serious look and said, *"Too much of one thing, too much of another,"* and mentioned specifically what He referred to. *"Why don't you get married, have a wife, and have a family?"* I giggled. That thought wasn't on my mind at all. I was 38 years old and had never imagined getting married, but the moment Baba mentioned it, I knew it would become a reality.

I returned to Denmark and again met the girl at the Centre who refused to travel with me in the car! This girl was Inge. We became friends and started seeing each other. I knew she was the one; there was no doubt in my mind. I asked her one evening if she would marry me, and she said, *"Yes! When will we get married?"* I replied, *"In a fortnight."*

We got married, and our honeymoon was, of course, a trip to see Baba. We traveled with about 20 Danes, headed by Thorbjorn Meyer, an ardent devotee of Sai Baba. At the *ashram*, we were called for an interview. Sai Baba smiled and asked Inge, *"How are you, Sir?"* Sai Baba often addresses women as Sir, perhaps because He sees the human being, not the gender. Thorbjorn Meyer responded, saying that Inge had just got married. Baba turned around 90 degrees and said, *"I know."*



I would never go back to Prasanth Nilayam because I had experienced such pain at the end of my stay.

We all probably feel pain from experiences during our childhood and adolescence. I experienced much pain, which Baba made

Then, looking directly at Inge, He said, “*Don’t fight with him,*” and pointed at me. I can say that the marriage that Baba ‘arranged’ for me is consistent with my free will, if free will exists. And while I think there is only God’s free will, it has been the best thing that has happened to me. I have the world’s loveliest wife and cannot thank Baba enough for the blessing—and Inge never fights with me! Thank God for that!

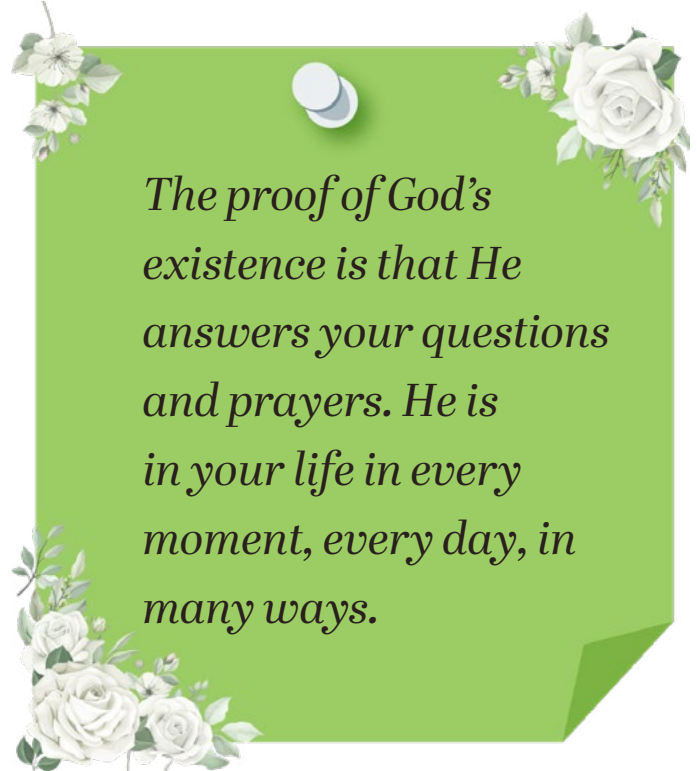
Practicing His Teachings Instead of Preaching

Baba says that we should not proselytize. We should not tell people about Him but, instead, be an exemplar of His teachings—which I certainly was not when I returned from my first visit to Prasanthi Nilayam. I used to be quite wild. I said what was on my mind. **After my first visit to Baba, I started saying, “God is amongst us; He lives in India, and His name is Sai Baba.” I thought the whole world should know.**

I’ll never forget the resistance I experienced. People looked at me as if I was crazy. I may have been half crazy in my joy and bliss at having met Swami, but you cannot convince other people to understand that Christ or Buddha is reborn and think they will believe it. I learned a great lesson from that experience.

After a year or so, I stopped trying to convince people to listen to me about Baba. Instead, I would do as Baba advised. When I stopped talking about Him and instead started living His message, people started asking, “Why do you go to India? What do you do there?”

I have had the opportunity to make all the mistakes that can be made and met all the obstacles and pitfalls in the spiritual path. I appreciate these experiences because they have taught me a lot. If you haven’t tried it yourself, you cannot understand others who have made mistakes, empathize with them, and love them at their level, wherever they are.



The proof of God’s existence is that He answers your questions and prayers. He is in your life in every moment, every day, in many ways.

Baba says, “If you take one step toward me, I will take a hundred toward you.” That is to say that if we start on the spiritual path, make a little effort, and take small steps toward the cosmic, higher, divine consciousness, we will get answers. The proof of God’s existence is that He answers your questions and prayers. He is in your life in every moment, every day, in many ways.

Mr. Steen Piculell 
DENMARK

Excerpt from the book “Journeys To Love” compiled by Ms. Kirsten Pruzan Mikkelsen



Mr. Steen Piculell was a long-time devotee of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He served in the Sri Sathya Sai International Organization (SSSIO) tirelessly for decades before merging with Swami in May 2013. He was the Chairman of Zone 8 of the SSSIO, serving Russia and adjoining countries. His exemplary leadership was of benefit to many Sai devotees in countries spanning Europe and Asia.

MY FIRST DARSHAN

I WAS DRAWN TO SATHYA SAI BABA THROUGH SERVICE, and He soon became my 'Swami.' Though I accepted Swami as my Guru and Guide, my family and friends did not. Coming from a humble Muslim family background, I had many factors to consider.

I was reprimanded for breaking rules, traditions, and beliefs, which sank my heart. I wasn't allowed to have any altar or physical pictures of Swami, and He has been formless for me ever since. **He has resided within me, around me, and is omnipresent. As a result, I have never needed Swami's presence in a physical form in my life.**

Over the years, I have had many remarks hurled at me, which were tantamount to bullying, and I have been teased for my beliefs. However, Swami and His teachings always kept my faith stronger than my doubts.

A significant turning point in my life was in 2001 when I had my first personal experience of 'darshan' (seeing a holy person).



My First Darshan

It was in Prashanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi, that I saw Swami physically for the first time. Interestingly, I didn't even know what the word '*darshan*' meant during my first darshan of Swami.

I was seated in the first row, just along the entrance gate that Swami entered, not sure what happens during *darshan*. When Swami walked in gracefully, my fellow Sai sisters, seated beside me, nudged me to look right. I looked up, and I looked right. There, I saw Swami approaching us swiftly. I just stared. I didn't move. I didn't budge.

However, I noticed everyone around me fidgeting, moving, and raising their hands with palms put together in a '*vanakkam*' (Tamil word for 'Namaskar' or palms put together in respect) position in salutation.

Swami approached and was five steps away from me. I was in tears, which were rolling down my cheeks uncontrollably. No! I was not crying in sorrow, nor were they tears of joy. Yet I had tears flowing, along with a strange sense of calm. I felt at peace as Swami walked past me. **I felt I had conquered the world's tallest mountain at that moment, and I experienced that contentment for the very first time.**

By the time I experienced all these emotions, it was time for Swami to return to His residence. As He came out of the interview room, I hoped Swami would walk past us again. This time, I was told to put my hands in the *vanakkam* prayer pose and hand over some letters to Swami from devotees behind me. As I was mentally preparing my course of action, Swami was already standing before me. I looked up. I could sense my lips moving but couldn't hear myself speak. Suddenly, I felt a nudge. The Sai sister seated on my left whispered, "Tell Swami, Tell Swami, He is talking to you only..." That was when I realized Swami was asking me, "*Where are you from?*" As I was gathering my courage and energy to reply, "Swami, Singaaaaapoooreeee Swami," He

reached for the letters in my hand and gently touched them. No, he did not take the letters from me, but instead, He turned away for a moment, turned back, and answered the question I had written in my letter to Him.

I took a deep breath and held it till the music stopped in the *darshan* hall. Phew, then I let out a deep breath! I sat there frozen. I couldn't comprehend what had just happened. I was recalling every moment when I suddenly realized that my Sai sisters were slowly leaving the hall and told me to stop daydreaming. I quickly got up, took my cushion, and started walking back to my room. As I started walking back to my room, everyone kept asking about what Swami had said to me. But I was still absorbing all that transpired during those precious moments.

Lost & Found

Since then, Swami has become my Guide, my Mentor, and my Inner Voice. I have heard many stories about how devotees have come to know of or found Swami. I always tell myself that Swami actually found me. Swami came into my life when I felt alone and was at my lowest point, looking for the purpose of my life. When my life seemed like an ultimate failure, Swami found me at the "Lost and Found counter." **He decided to walk into my life and stay to guide and guard me. I've strayed away from Him many times and have given up on Him many times, but He has always found a way to get back to me and be a part of my life.**

Becoming a Better Muslim, Becoming a Better Person

My learning about Swami's teachings and practicing the five values, *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti*, *Prema*, and *Ahimsa*, worried many people around me. Many thought I was part of some cult. Many people remarked that I was being influenced into becoming someone else, which was not true. Sadly, even today, some of them continue to think that way! What no one realized was the positive changes happening in me. I had everything in place for a good life: a good education, a

respectable job, and the ability and stability to do *seva* all around the world. I was, in fact, becoming a better and more well-versed Muslim. But most importantly, I was becoming a much better human being.

Swami always says,

**If you are a Christian,
become a better Christian.**

**If you are a Muslim,
become a better Muslim.**

**If you are a Hindu,
become a better Hindu.**

And that was precisely what I was becoming. **Swami's teachings made me read and learn more intensely about Islam. I went back to learning the Quran properly and with meaning, and I even started sharing verses and chapters of the Quran with my Sai family.** It cannot be any more beautiful than this.

22 Years and Counting

Since I met Swami, I have always internalized everything. My happiness, bitterness, joy, and sense of contentment were all kept within me. In the same way, Swami was also kept internalized. But during the recent trip to Sri Lanka for the SSSIO International Conference, I spoke for the very first time about my experiences with Swami to Aravind Balasubramanya when he asked me about my first *darshan*. During the sharing, I realized how beautiful my life has become! How much good work Swami had exposed me to, like doing *grama seva* (village service) in different countries! Swami taught me the value of teamwork by involving me in Sai Center

activities. Swami taught me to follow discipline, which has brought me far. Swami also made me realize that I needed an ultimate purpose and goal in life.

The Ultimate Purpose

For me, realizing my purpose in life took 'forever.' I now take every breath with a purpose, and that purpose became evident when I was busy with Swami's work.

In February 2023, I was doing *grama seva* in India when a ten-year-old girl came up to me and said, "When I grow up, I want to be like you, serving others. Can I take a picture of you and get it printed so I can see myself in you?" My heart leaped with joy! It might have been a simple statement, which I later realized it was not, but her words took me by surprise. I realized how service from the heart can have a ripple effect and leave a significant impression on others.

I had always thought my purpose was to get a good job, earn more money, own a big home, provide for my family, buy big cars, and travel around the world. **But that day, that ten-year-old made me realize what I was meant to do. Seva! Yes, I've realized that I was made to serve. Seva is my purpose—that magnificent, inexplicable contentment I realize today.** Again, I am not sure how, when, and with whom I will continue my journey, but I am confident that Swami will guide me, direct me, and make me His instrument since I was born to serve. I am pretty sure Swami will make me His instrument of service.

Love All, Serve All.

Ms. Habidah Shah
SINGAPORE



Ms. Habidah Shah hails from Singapore and came to Swami at an early age. Her first *darshan* of Bhagawan was in 2001. She graduated from Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, majoring in Accounting and Business Law, and spent eight years practicing law. Habidah also holds a postgraduate diploma in Law - Mediation Studies from the University of Western Australia. She volunteers *pro bono* to help Tamil migrant workers in Singapore. She presently works as a Financial Consultant. Habidah actively advocates for social causes on media and social media platforms.



*Message of Bhagawan
Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

On the 5th Anniversary of Dharmakshetra

My Dears!

11-5-1973

Verily, Thoughts are Things. As you think, you become. What we sow, we reap. GOD if you think of, GOD you are. Dust if you think of; Dust you, are. In my turn, in my own way, I love to ask the same question of you.

We are in the light. The light is in us. We are the light. That which exists is one. You are that light. TAT TWAM ASI—Thou art That. The Power that sets the winds and moves; the suns and fiery galaxies through space and mind is in me, is me, that I am. That is Atma.

There is something which is impossible for the men of GOD realisation to do. Do you know what this is? He cannot forget Himself!

The Effulgent light is the only changeless Reality in the World of never-ending changes. When once he has seen the light, has known the light, when once he has recognised the light, how can he ever forget it? Verily, that light is Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient. The man of GOD realisation is Himself the light.

It is incorrect to use words such as 'seeing' and 'knowing' for there is nothing for him to see or know besides Himself, the light. He is the One without a Second.

He is SAI, always with you, in you. You are in Sai. Sai is in you. Be GOOD.
With Blessings.

With Love,

Baba



LOVE IN ACTION



AZERBAIJAN Feeding and Fostering the Hungry

For over 15 years, the SSSIO of Azerbaijan has been actively involved in various service projects benefiting the families of former orphanage residents. These initiatives encompass a range of activities, from providing food and medical treatment to organizing outdoor activities for adults and children.



At the end of September 2023, volunteers of SSSIO in Azerbaijan organized a cooking and food distribution service for 40 individuals in a small village. The wholesome meal included Margie soup, bread, apples, pilaf with vegetables and raisins, salad, pear juice, and apple juice. **The presence of Swami was palpable, infusing the atmosphere with love and joy.** The gratitude expressed by the beneficiaries continued even after the event, creating a lasting impact on both, those engaged in serving and the recipients.



CANADA A Retreat Receives Sai's Treat

In the beautiful fall weather, under bright skies, and amidst the fragrance of conifers at Pigeon Lake in Alberta, Canada, more than 200 members from the Edmonton Sai Center enjoyed a Sai Retreat from August 25 to 28, 2023. Each day began with a resounding *Nagar-Sankirtan* and concluded with an entertaining campfire and marshmallow roast. During the day, invited speakers gave inspirational talks and workshops on nutrition, yoga, and balancing spiritual and social life. SSE students offered uplifting musical performances, participated in sports Olympics, and displayed their artwork. The musical presentation by the enthusiastic Young Adults was both energetic and delightful.



The participants felt Swami's blessings throughout the retreat, especially when He even showed His presence with the profuse manifestation of sacred *Vibhuti* in one of the sealed boxes of chocolates set aside as *prasadam*.



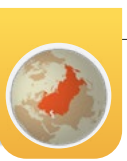


THAILAND

A Green Hundred for SAI-100

Little drops coming together make an ocean; single trees growing together make a forest! The SSSIO has pledged to plant millions of trees as an offering of love to Bhagawan for His Centennial Birthday celebrations in November 2025. Striving toward this goal, in November 2023, SSSIO volunteers in Thailand planted saplings at two separate venues to serve Mother Earth.

On November 11, six SSSIO members from Bangkok traveled to the Lopburi Sathya Sai School and planted 100 trees on campus. **The teachers and students from the school also joined the volunteers in this noble effort while vibrantly chanting the Gayatri Mantra, bringing joy to everyone.** Meanwhile, on November 16, members from the Maesai Sai Center planted 30 different varieties of fruit trees, such as lichi, longan, mango, rambutan, and jack-fruit, at the Baan Nana School. Tree-planting drives on private campuses help reduce the high sapling mortality because the saplings can be cared for regularly.



ZONE 8

Acts of Kindness

In early October 2023, more than 200 SSSIO members from Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Russia came together, lovingly opening their hearts to help people in need. **Warming the hearts of more than 800 needy people with delicious meals, they warmed them literally by distributing woolen clothes, shoes, gloves, underwear, and food.** The volunteers sought out people in need near temples, recycling centers, and social shelters and served them lovingly.

Random acts of kindness bring a smile to everyone's faces, but thoughtfully planned services ensure that such smiles stay on for a long time!



For more stories of loving service by volunteers from around the world, please visit the Sri Sathya Sai Universe website:
<https://saiuniverse.sathyasai.org>

A Conference on the Transformative Power of Sathya Sai Education in Human Values



Beyond the materializations, manifestations, and amazing medical cures Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is widely recognized for, **His greatest miracle is the transformation of the human heart.** Witnessing such a transformation that usually takes years, decades or even a lifetime, within a short span of days is phenomenal and very inspirational. Many testimonials of such transformations were highlighted during the International Conference on *Strengthening Values Education* held by the Education Committee of the SSSIO in Barbados, West Indies, from October 12 to 14, 2023.



- Mr. Fiaz Shah, a representative for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the person in charge of education at UNICEF Eastern Caribbean Office, openly declared that his dream was to be involved in Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) after retirement! He stated this heartfelt desire at the end of his talk, which focused on quality inclusive education in the Caribbean.
- Mrs. Teshia Hinds, a TV host and a producer for Radio, TV, and Digital Broadcasting, moderated a panel discussion on “Developing a Value Based Society”. The discussions inspired her so much that she aired individual interviews with each panelist on her TV show and pledged to fully support the SSEHV program!
- Education officials from Barbados, Grenada, Suriname, Guyana, St. Martin, and Jamaica, as well as other conference participants, expressed enthusiasm for implementing SSEHV across the Caribbean.



Worldwide Participation

The conference was conducted by the Sai Institute of Education, West Indies (SIEWI) in partnership with the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, USA (ISSE-USA) with input from the Canadian Institute of Sathya Sai Education (CISSE). **The goal of the conference was to raise awareness about the holistic SSEHV program in the Caribbean, a long-term vision and goal of the SIEWI.**

The event at the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference Center drew more than two hundred government officials, policymakers, and educators, including representatives of teachers’ associations and unions, parents, and members from nine Caribbean countries. Over two hundred people also logged in online from Belgrade, Croatia, Italy, the Virgin Islands, Uganda, and other countries.

An Experiential and Impactful Conference

It is said, “The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.” What better way to inspire everyone than to highlight real-life examples of how SSEHV has been embedded into educational systems and communities at large across the world!

The conference was off to a rousing start when Dr. George Bebedelis from Greece, the co-chair of the SSSIO Education Committee, spoke in his inaugural address about how anyone can join this great movement. Then, the past President of the Caribbean Association of Principals of Public Second-



ary Schools, Barbados, spoke on a vision for peace and prosperity in the Caribbean and the role of human values.

Mrs Doris Hampton (USA) and Mr. Lalu Vaswani (Barbados) presented the story of the 'Miracle School of Ndola', Zambia, in the place of Dr. Onanga Opape, Professor & Psychologist from Gabon, who could not make it due to unforeseen circumstances. Mrs. Juanita Villa, Director of the Sai Institute of Colombia, and **Mr. Alfredo Harmsen, Founder-Director of Sathya Sai School of Ecuador, presented extraordinary stories of transformation and love from Latin American schools that had embraced SSEHV.** Many hearts were touched and motivated. Everyone listened in admiration, spellbound and amazed.

Equally enlightening and inspiring was the brief presentation by Mr. Rawle Heralal, Principal, Sathya Sai Primary School Trinidad/Tobago, on the impact of SSEHV in schools. It was heartening to learn about the 'Peace Project' to reduce crime in Barbados from the program director, who presented it on behalf of the Minister of Crime Prevention in the Office of the Attorney General, Barbados.

Videos with testimonials on SSEHV from American teenagers showing the impact of SSEHV programs worldwide increased the audience's enthusiasm for this unique and sacred program that benefits all humanity.



Mr. Anthony (The Mighty Gabby) Carter, Cultural Ambassador of Barbados, presented a specially composed song on the five human values that brought the entire audience to its feet in applause. It was a fitting expression of the joy, peace, and harmony that human values usher into our hearts and, thus, into society.

The experiential learning continued with a very engaging interactive session on "Who Am I," which explained the integrated awareness of our oneness with innate human values. It was presented by Mrs. Doris Hampton (USA), a Faculty and Board member of ISSE-USA and a member of the SSSIO Education Committee.

The Keynote and Key Workshops

Dr. Shantal Munro-Knight, Barbados Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, delivered the keynote address. She spoke on enhancing the practice of human values in the Caribbean to achieve unity, prosperity, and opportunity for all. **She called on leaders in Barbados and across the region to take deliberate and strategic action to strengthen values at home, school, workplace, and communities.** She stated that leaders must exemplify the behavior they want the youth to emulate.

The conference featured six 90-minute breakout sessions on topics dealing with human values:

- In classrooms for kindergarteners and primary-level students.
- In classrooms for Secondary and Higher Secondary level students.
- For parents.
- Integration Into new and existing programs.
- Integration Into public and private work-spaces.
- How to improve health through the EASE program.

Detailed discussions were held over two days in an interactive and informative format.

Interactive Sessions

Dr. Ramadevi Sankaran, MD (USA), delivered an informative talk on how human values are central to a holistic approach to mental well-being, followed by a highly appreciated Q&A session. Mrs. Kalika Grana, Director, ISSE-USA, and Miss Pavani Pathirana, ISSE-USA, also gave an interactive presentation on a direct lesson plan (explicit method) for experiencing SSEHV. A reflection by Mrs. Ann Lady Hewitt, retired chair of Erdiston Teachers' Training College in Barbados, made everyone think about their experiences in their spiritual journey.

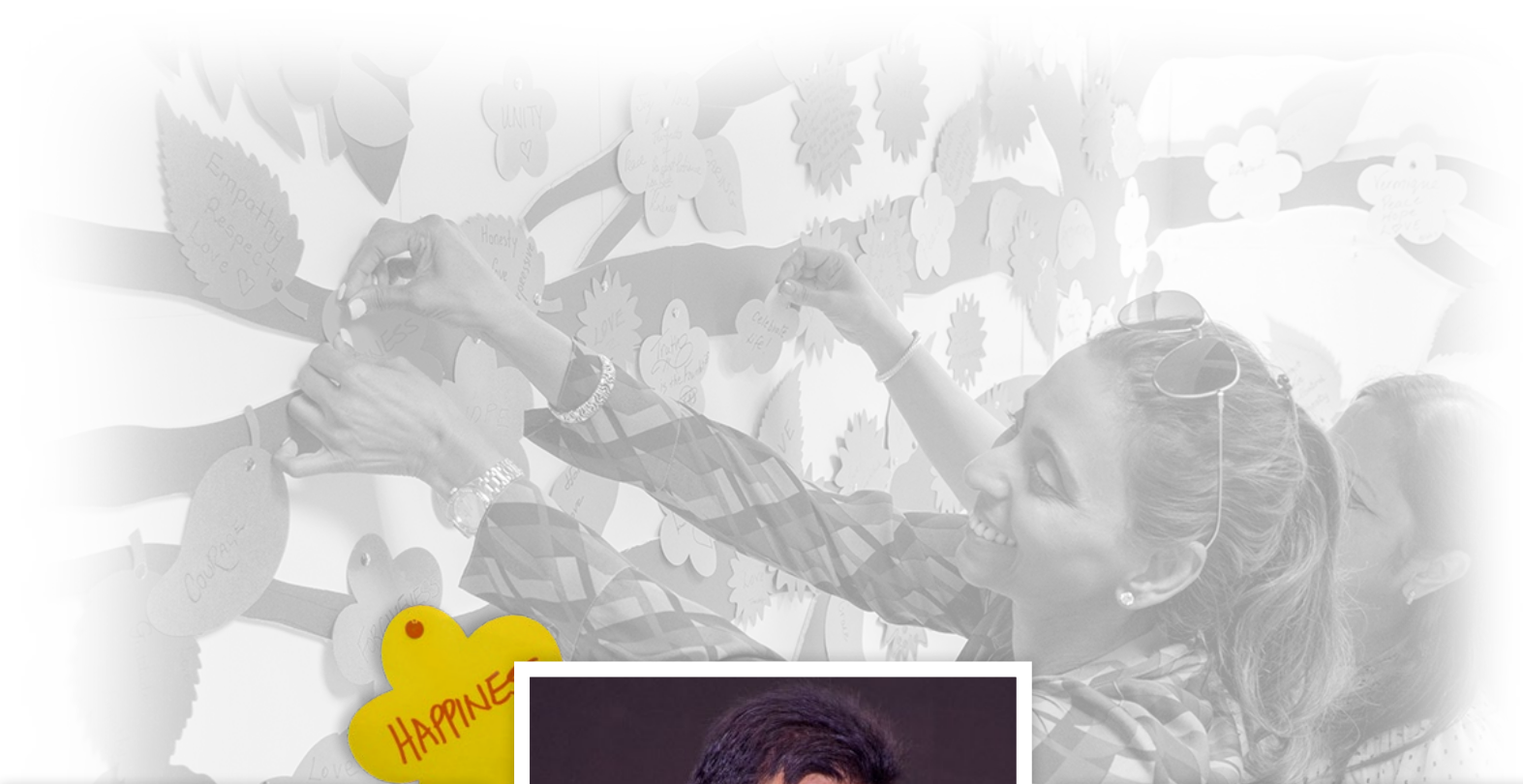


The Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Lalu N. Vaswani, and all presenters ensured that every presentation included audience reflections, comments, and Q&A sessions. Even after the recorded video address on *Teacher Well-being* by Dr. Margaret Taplin and Dr. John Johnson was presented, they responded to audience questions live online! Feedback sessions were ubiquitous. The final day of the conference featured a *Meet and Greet* session—an informal exchange between local and international speakers and attendees engaging in a community forum where questions were answered.

A Memorable Conclusion

The SIEWI presented a memento of gratitude to all speakers, consisting of a 10-inch-tall mahogany plaque of Barbados engraved with the human values logo. The international visitors also enjoyed an island tour of Barbados' sights and historical attractions.

Multiple newspapers carried reports of the successful SSEHV conference. However, **the hundreds of hearts inspired by attending in-person or online is a true testament to the success of the conference!**





HAPPINESS



FOREBEARANCE



His Constant, Compassionate Presence



THE YEAR 2019 WAS AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE IN MY LIFE.

An incident that vividly demonstrated Swami's omnipresence occurred during SSSIO Malaysia's 'Yuvathi Yathra' (pilgrimage of young women) to Puttaparthi in 2019. It might be a little incident as far as the world is concerned, but for 'little' me, it made a world of difference!

Sai is the Destination and the Journey

We prepared for the trip by participating in service activities, spiritual practices (*sadhana*), and study circles for several months. The visit to Puttaparthi itself was filled with many activities, which would sometimes cause us to miss the regular programs in the *mandir*. The day before the trip ended, we traveled in a van in the evening for a scheduled activity. We got delayed, and it became evident that we would miss *darshan* and *bhajan* (devotional songs) sessions in the *mandir*. This hit me hard, and I was disappointed, but I was not alone! The others, too, were all feeling the same sentiment.

To uplift our spirits, our facilitators suggested that we sing *bhajans*. However, in our van, only a few of us were familiar with *bhajans*, and fortunately, I was one of them. We began singing *bhajans* wholeheartedly as we continued our journey toward the *ashram*. The melodies flowed through us, fill-

“Like a loving and watchful guardian, Swami is always there to uplift us, protect us, and carry us through life’s trials and tribulations.”

ing the van with devotion and an uplifting energy. Since it was a long journey, many fellow travelers fell asleep exhausted. I was also tired but continued singing with an unwavering focus on Swami’s beautiful form in my mind. It was the maximum number of *bhajans* I had ever sung in one sitting, and the experience was exhilarating.

Then, a profound moment unfolded! Precisely when we entered the *ashram* gates, I concluded my last bhajan! And to my utter astonishment, at that very moment, the *Arathi* (concluding prayer after a *bhajan* session) was being sung in the *mandir*! Tears welled up in my eyes as a profound realization swept over me. I could feel Swami whispering to my soul, “*You thought you were missing Me because you were not at the mandir in time. But I orchestrated this moment to show you I am present wherever my devotee sings for Me. I made you sing so many songs for Me, timing the Arathi perfectly for your arrival, My beloved child!*”

In that instant, I understood that **Swami’s presence transcends His physical**

presence. He orchestrates moments of profound connection and divine grace in the most unexpected ways, reassuring us of His ever-watchful care and love. This learning became critical the very next year because COVID-19 made travel impossible, and the only pilgrimage I could undertake was to the Sai within!

My Swami Comes to Me

As the pandemic struck the world, I was afflicted by severe head pain that radiated to my neck and shoulders. The pain was unrelenting and excruciating, and none of us knew the cause. After months, I was diagnosed with Chronic Pain Syndrome, a neurological disorder for which there is no known cure. This was the last thing one would want during a lockdown when no help was available, and all hospitals were overwhelmed with COVID patients. My family was thrust into a state of immense stress, grappling with the overwhelming burden of caring for me. Physically and emotionally, we were all teetering on the brink of despair.

That was when I got introduced to the beautiful poem, 'Footprints in the Sand,' a metaphor for having faith in God even when times are tough:

*One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed many scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.*

*After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.*


*This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,
You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome
times of my life, there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most,
You would leave me."*

*He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you.
Never, ever, during your trials and tests.
When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you."*

That was my experience during this harrowing journey. I felt a remarkable sense of Swami's presence. Even as I was wondering how I could go on with my daily routine with such pain, my mother decided to employ a helper, Sumarni. She was Swami's gift to us when it was difficult to get any new person to help with household chores. I believe Swami Himself came to my rescue and helped me in her form! She took such excellent care of me, along with the responsibilities of cleaning and maintaining the home. This also gave my family the time to care for and support me. Swami was my painkiller to endure my pain and go through the process of *karma*.

Like a loving and watchful guardian, Swami is always there to uplift us, protect us, and carry us through life's trials and tribulations. It serves as an important reminder that even when we cannot see His physical presence, His divine grace is ever-present, cradling us in times of need and guiding us along the path of spiritual growth and self-discovery.

Today, I am doing much better with my spirits uplifted, grateful for His grace, and all thanks to my compassionate Swami!

Ms. Bhavadharni Ealingoo 
MALAYSIA



Ms. Bhavadharni Ealingoo has been with the Sri Sathya Sai International Organization since age 7. She is an active Young Adult from Malaysia and produces the popular podcast 'Chai with Sai' for her Sai Center. She is studying to become a neuropsychologist.

from the
International Sai Young Adults

We wish you a Happy New Year from the International Sai Young Adults committee and subcommittees! In our first issue of the year, we are thrilled to share updates on an exciting leadership retreat organized by our YAs in Chicago, USA. A center in Australia was also transformed into a cozy café for the YAs, creating a unique ambiance. We welcome you to delve into a heartfelt reflection from our Zone 4 YAs, and be sure to catch Episode 2 of InSAIde Scoop, where we explore the intriguing question, “Does Equality Make Me Less Empathetic?”



Follow the @saiyoungadults accounts on social media

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Sai Young Adults

<https://sathyasai.org/ya>

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AROUND THE WORLD

National YA Leadership Retreat, USA

The US National Young Adults Leadership Retreat held in Chicago from October 6-8, 2023, was focused on “Embracing Leadership as a Spiritual Discipline”. More than 100 YAs and many Regional/Center Young Adult Advisors from various parts of the country attended the retreat. They were warmly welcomed and accommodated by gracious devotees in the greater Chicago area.

A fantastic transport system called *SAlber Buddies* ensured smooth and efficient transportation to and from the venue, the Sai Spiritual Community Center. Consistent with its name, the venue had Swami's interview room and a library stocked with literature about Swami and His mission.

The retreat kicked off in the evening of Friday, October 6, 2023, with a vibrant meet and greet session, allowing attendees to mingle, share experiences, and establish connections and spiritual fellowship. The conference commenced on Saturday, October 7, with soulful bhajans coordinated seamlessly to set a beautiful and serene tone for the entire event. The interactive portion of the retreat began with a workshop titled “Lead Your Ship with the Spirit of Worship,” which unraveled the theme of the retreat.

As a symbolic gesture of an icebreaker, two teams were formed and tasked to break a massive slab of ice to get to the bottom. This task emphasized the importance of repeating God's name while completing the (difficult) task at hand—“*Mann me Ram, Hath me Kaam*” (Undertake work with the mind focused on God). The YAs also engaged in an innovative ‘escape room’ challenge, decoding a puzzle inspired by the book ‘*Sai Baba's Mahavakya on*



Leadership.’ This team-focused activity emphasized leadership through spirituality, highlighting the interplay between collaboration, problem-solving, and spiritual growth.

Dr. Geetha Govindarajan shared her leadership journey, which included the transformative potential and power of a single dedicated YA and the kind of movement it can inspire. Mr. Alex Grana delivered an enlightening talk, which included a visualization of how the opportunity to serve in His mission is a once-in-a-billion-year opportunity. A dynamic roleplay and panel discussion depicted common challenges faced by YA leaders in the form of a game. Distinguished leaders from various parts of the nation provided diverse and dynamic answers based on their roles (Envirocare

lead, SSE coordinator, women's coordinator, regional YA representative, etc.). Multiple workshops were held on topics across three groups: 1) YA coordinators, 2) YAs serving at the center or regional levels, and 3) YA Advisors advising YA programs. There were also intimate and informal sharing sessions among the YAs and also with a panel of YA leaders.

A significant highlight was the conscious effort made by the YAs to prioritize sustainability throughout the retreat. They embraced eco-friendly practices using reusable dishes, water bottles, cloth napkins, and badges from previous retreats.

Read the entire story of this wonderful retreat at [this page](#) on sathyasai.org.



Coffee with Sai, Australia

In October, YAs of the New South Wales Region were invited to a session called Coffee with Sai to connect YAs with members and officers of the organization. The morning saw multiple engagements in heart-to-heart conversations, with the bonus of delicious food.

YAs from across Sydney joined the session, and the center was transformed into a pop-up café. Some center members stepped into the roles of waiters, baristas, and food designers to create a café vibe to facilitate conversations. YAs had the opportunity to engage in conversations that covered a wide range of topics, including but not limited to personal spiritual journeys, what the organization means to them, how they identify with Baba, and how they integrate His work and teachings into their daily lives.



Self-Reflection...



Ms. Umassree Murugesan
Malaysia

I am Umassree, a dedicated psychologist from Malaysia entrusted with the responsibility of guiding and supporting the mental well-being of individuals. My graduation from the esteemed Sri Sathya Sai International Leadership Program has deeply influenced my journey as a professional. This significant milestone spurred my decision to embark on a profound expedition—to participate in the SSSIO International Conference in Sri Lanka.

Initially apprehensive and uncertain of the conference title, “*My Life–His Message*,” I was gripped by confusion and fear, pondering the potential implications of this theme for my life’s direction.

Set amidst a land steeped in rich ancient history, vibrant culture, and a profound spiritual community, the conference’s location exuded an undeniable sense of tranquillity upon my arrival. The warmth and kindness exuded by everyone I encountered were profoundly moving. The conference was an amalgamation of enlightening speeches, engaging workshops, soulful bhajans, enriching forums, captivating cultural programs, and a serene meditation session. Each segment seamlessly wove together, echoing the resounding message of realizing our innate divine nature.

The pinnacle of this transformative experience for me was the awakening to the significance of holistic well-being—embracing the vital importance of physical and mental health. The chanting of the Gayathri mantra at the beach invoked a profound sense of peace and serenity. Moreover, comprehending the underlying theme of “*My Life–His Message*” profoundly deepened my understanding of the fundamental pillars for a truly content and fulfilling life.

This spiritual voyage was an enriching and eye-opening encounter that unveiled the significance of healthy living and shed light on aspects of well-being that I might have previously overlooked.

Gratitude overwhelms me as I reflect on the privilege of attending this life-altering conference—a momentous and transformative experience that has left an indelible mark on my life’s journey. It’s a chapter I shall forever hold dear, nurturing its wisdom and revelations for years.

InSAIde Scoop Podcast Series



Series 2022, Episode 2:

“Does Equanimity Make Me Less Empathetic?” featuring Sister Vaishnavi Nair

In this episode of the *Inside Scoop* podcast, the profound concept of equanimity and its practical application in our daily lives is explored. The episode features Ms. Vaishnavi Nair, aka Vaishu, a guest who brings with valuable insights to the discussion. Vaishu is a Search Policy Lead at Google, a regular *bhajan* singer, and a devotee of Bhagawan since she was 16, with a deep commitment to practicing daily the values taught by Swami.

The conversation begins with a reflection on the challenges and suffering prevalent in the world, and the hosts ponder whether suppressing empathy and compassion is necessary to maintain equanimity.

Vaishu shares her perspective on equanimity, emphasizing that it doesn't mean not feeling things. Instead, equanimity involves how quickly one can recover from emotional reactions. The goal is to shorten the reaction time so that one can respond lovingly and consciously to life's challenges, even before reacting emotionally.

Vaishu shares how she once struggled with a long recovery time after facing disappointment, but eventually learned to recover more swiftly from setbacks. Equanimity, as she describes it, is about responding with love and consideration. The conversation naturally leads to the story of Swami's remarkable way of switching instantly from 'anger' to 'love,' marveling at Swami's ability to exhibit pure love and compassion, even in the face of strong emotions.

The hosts then raise a compelling question: How should one deal with prolonged suffering or happiness? Vaishu introduces the concept of baseline joy, which is a person's general level of happiness and contentment. She explains that baseline joy significantly influences how one handles prolonged suffering or happiness. She highlights how affirmations can shift one's perspective during challenging times.

The discussion touches upon the Russia-Ukraine conflict and how to reconcile the concept of karma with empathy. Vaishu explains that while understanding karma shouldn't impede empathy, it's essential to remember that everything happening to individuals is ultimately for their highest benefit. She encourages finding a balance between self-preservation and faith in Divine orchestration.

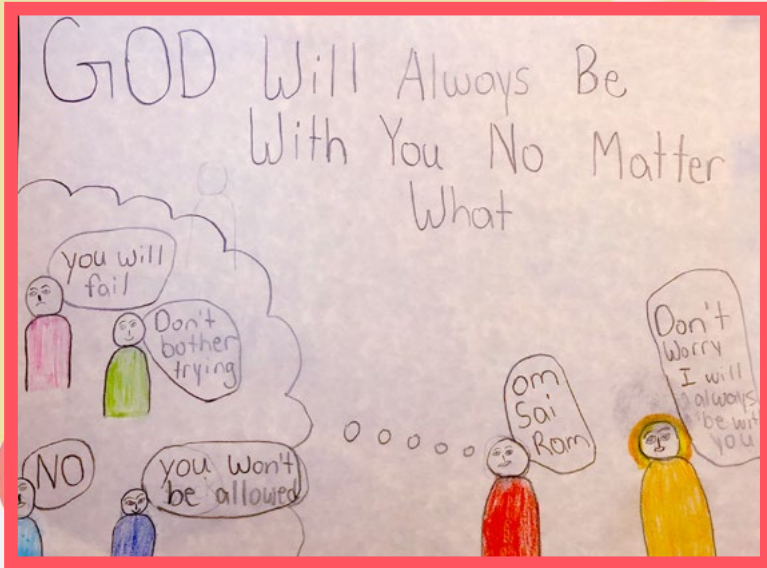
Next, Vaishu reveals her secret to maintaining a high level of baseline joy: practicing gratitude. She explains how gratitude can transform one's perspective. The hosts express their admiration for the positive impact of COVID-19 on people's perspectives, as many have become more grateful for simple joys and newfound hobbies during the pandemic. They stress the importance of sustaining this sense of gratitude to maintain equanimity.

You can listen to the full episode here:

[InSAIde Scoop Episode 2–YouTube](#)

LOVE ALL

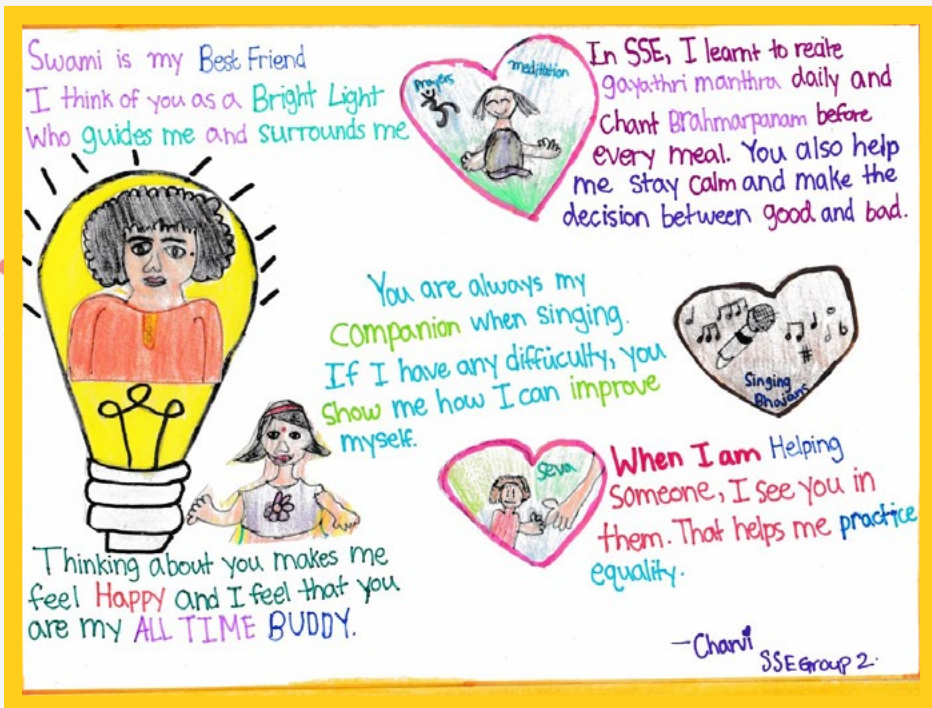
SERVE ALL



Keshav W. | Group 2 | Canada



Ashish C. | Group 1 | USA



Charvi N. | Group 2 | USA



Saketh M. | Group 2 | Thailand

THE FIVE HUMAN VALUES

Most important of all values, the first is Love,
Compassion and selflessness are a few of the above,
As long as we carry this virtuous glove,
God resides with us at all times thereof,



Next is Truth, the value that dictates our conscience,
To maintain truth, we must always remain honest,
The effects of being truthful return to us through karma,
Expressing the great value in developing Dharma,



The value of peace allows us to maintain equanimity,
And build a calm environment in our close proximity,
Patience and humility develop our inner calm,
Providing the value of peace in the grip of our palm,



Righteousness teaches us to do what is right,
And prevents wrong actions with all of its might,
Our subtle conscience, otherwise the “voice of God”,
Ensures to teach us what is right and wrong,



The control over our thoughts, words, and deeds,
Is a significant value that we all need,
Non-violence teaches us to cause no harm,
Completing the set of values of a true devoted charm,



The one who follows Swami’s teachings,
Is the one who fulfills the role of a human being,
Known as “the jewels that reside with us”,
These values guide us throughout our lives thus.



Upcoming SSSIO Online Events

SSSIO has been conducting online events to share Swami's love, message, and works with everyone around the world. Hundreds of thousands of people have been reached through these events streamed on the sathyasai.org/live page.

Please visit sathyasai.org/events for further details on scheduled events, local dates and timings.

Date of Online Event	Day(s)	Festival/Event
February 17-18, 2024	Saturday-Sunday	Akhanda Gayatri
February 24, 2024	Saturday	Chinese New Year



[Streaming on sathyasai.org/live](https://sathyasai.org/live)



Stay in touch with SSSIO news and activities, by visiting the SSSIO websites and following/subscribing to the various communications channels below. **Click on each icon or name to visit the site.**



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- [Sri Sathya Sai Humanitarian Relief](#)
- [Sri Sathya Sai Young Adults](#)
- [Sri Sathya Sai Education](#)
- [Healthy Living](#)



Fill your mind with thoughts of God. Engage yourself in godly actions. This is true *sadhana*. People claim to spend hours in meditation. But of what use is it if there is no concentration of mind? It is better if you engage yourself in your regular duties or render social service or participate in *bhajans*. By these means try to bring the mind under control. Also, such work will be transformed into worship.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

January 1, 1991



sathyasai.org

Love All • Serve All
Help Ever • Hurt Never