



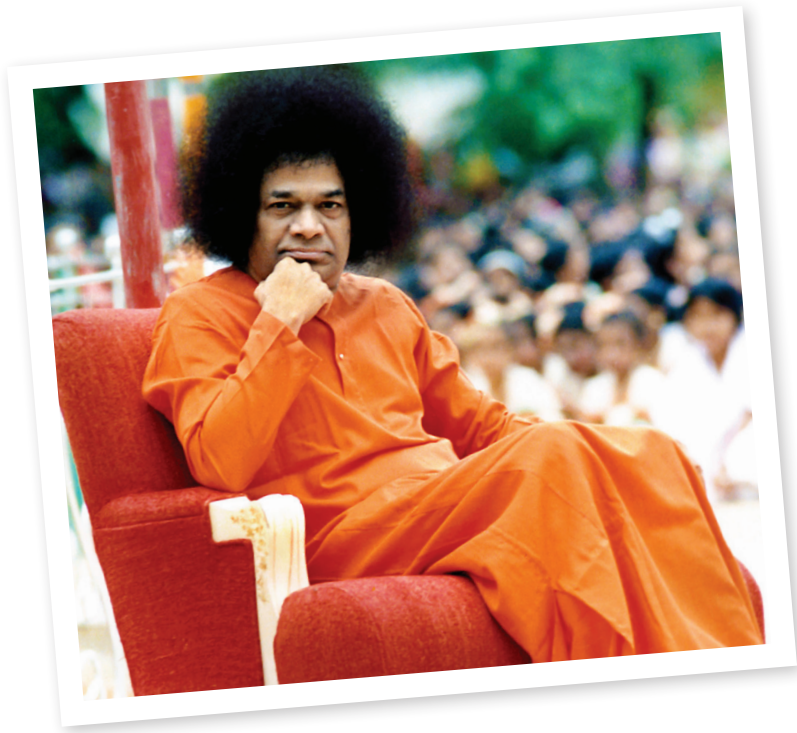
SRI SATHYA SAI INSTITUTE OF HIGHER LEARNING
(Deemed to be University)

SUMMER COURSE

in Indian Culture and Spirituality







Dedicated with Love to our Beloved
Revered Founder Chancellor
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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Vidyagiri, Prasanthi Nilayam – 515134, Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh, India

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SUMMER COURSE IN INDIAN CULTURE & SPIRITUALITY

12-14 June 2015 | Prasanthi Nilayam



Preface

The Summer Course in Indian Culture & Spirituality serves as an induction programme to all students and teachers of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning with an objective to expose students of the university to the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of *Bharat*. It orients students into Bhagawan Baba's educational philosophy and gives them deep, first hand insights into how they can directly benefit from this unique institution.

At universities across the world, induction programmes go beyond the academic and practical requirements of university life and include social elements that (more often than not) disperse the focus, time and energies of students.

At Sai educational institutions, integral education (which includes the focus on a connection with the Higher Self) is a close confidant to the academic curriculum. It is in line with the vision of the Founder Chancellor, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, that spiritual and empirical education must go hand in hand. In fact, He had initiated the series of Summer Courses as early as the 1970s. It was and still is an effective way to inspire young minds to follow a life of good values and character.

The event—which took place from the 12 June to 14 June 2015 at Prasanthi Nilayam—marked the beginning of the academic year for students and teachers of all the four campuses of the university, as well as Sathya Sai Mirpuri College of Music, Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam (Class XI and Class XII) and Sri Sathya Sai Gurukulam English Medium School, Rajahmundry. Over 2500 students and 200 teachers participated.

The Format

Each day is typically split into the morning, afternoon and evening sessions. The morning sessions consist of talks by teachers and research scholars of

the university. Typically, they entail key insights and lessons from the ancient Indian scriptures, spiritual personalities and concepts. The sessions also feature a short video show on Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

In the afternoons, students and teachers from all four campuses have breakout sessions where they discuss teachings and lessons from Bhagawan Baba's discourses. This year, the main theme (from Baba's discourses) were Mysteries of the Mind and Message of the Vedas. Key moral messages from these are creatively presented on the final day before the valediction.

The evening sessions on the first two days of the event consist of a music programme by students of individual campuses, along with *veda* chanting and *bhajans* at the Sai Kulwant Hall.

Perhaps the highlight of the day for students are the post-dinner *Parayanam* sessions. They consist of 2-3 talks by alumni or teachers of the Institute who share personal experiences with Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba and the profound impact they have had in shaping their lives. The valuable and profound life lessons and the sheer love that Baba had for His students and devotees is vividly communicated through these intimate sessions.

The Book

This book chronologically represents the entire programme of the Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality 2015. This includes all the speeches, interactive sessions such as the Parayanam sessions (experiences with Bhagawan Baba), panel discussions and situational analyses. Every effort has been made to keep the first person narrative intact, so that the reader can appreciate the personality of the speaker and the purport of his or her talk.

The reason for publishing the proceedings of the Summer Course in the form of a book is threefold. First, it functions as a valuable reference publication for the staff, students and visitors of the university. Secondly—for the public at large—it serves as a wonderful introduction to Indian culture and spirituality. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the book is glittered with personal incidents that the speakers have had with Bhagawan Baba and in many instances highlights Bhagawan's teachings on several spiritual topics.

CONTENTS

SSSIHL Summer Course 2015

DAY 1 - 12 June 2015

WELCOME NOTE

Dr. Pallav Kumar Baruah | 10

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Prof. K B R Varma | 13

FACULTY PANEL DISCUSSION –

Lessons from the Mahabharata for Modern Society | 17

ALUMNI PANEL DISCUSSION –

Ideal Sai Students and their role in society | 29

THE DILEMMA OF THE GREATER GOOD

Sri V Sai Raam | 40

TYAGAINAIKE AMRUTHATWA MA-NASHUHU

Sri Seemesh Bhaskar | 45

DAY 2 - 13 June 2015

FACULTY PANEL DISCUSSION –

Lessons from the Ramayana for Modern Society | 49

BHAJAN WORKSHOP | 64

MESSAGE OF VEDAS FOR PRACTICAL DAILY LIVING

Dr. Sekhar Boddupalli | 74

THE ESSENCE OF BHARATIYA CULTURE

Sri Sanjay Sahni | 84

DAY 3 - 14 June 2015

INTERACTIVE SESSION:

CHINNA KATHA ANALYSIS | 93

QUIZ ON THE LIFE OF BHAGAWAN

SRI SATHYA SAI BABA | 106

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

Dr. (Miss) S Kanaka Durga | 108

PARANAYAM SESSIONS

Campus-wise evening sessions -
Sharing of Experiences with
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Anantapur Campus

Dr. Neelam B Desai | 112

Ms. Vimla Singh | 118

Ms. Anantha Lakshmi | 123

Kum. K Uma | 127

Prasanthi Nilayam Campus

Sri Shyam Kumar Sundarakumar | 135

Sri Tribhuvan Sachdev | 152

Brindavan Campus

Dr. Piyush Kumar Shrivastava | 179

Sri Prem Anosh | 189

Muddenahalli Campus

Dr. N Niranjan | 209

Dr. Jagadish Chandra | 211



Welcome Note

Dr. Pallav Kumar Baruah

Head, Dept. of Mathematics & Computer Science, SSSIHL

When we talk about Summer Course, it reminds us of how much importance Bhagawan gives to spiritual education. For this reason, in the beginning of every academic session, we all gather at His lotus feet to remind and rededicate ourselves to this cause of higher education and His mission. To understand spirituality, the three important components are body, mind and soul. Life is an interplay of these three components. Many scholars tell us- get rid of the mind, kill the mind and it confuses us because the mind is a very important component and you are trying to take it out. Bhagawan Baba clarifies and emphasizes the importance of the mind. He says, “In this model of body, mind and soul, body is the means for action, mind is the means for realization and soul is the eternal witness.” Mind has to be used for fathoming the depth of spiritual understanding and body is just a vehicle for action.

Bhagawan repeatedly says: *Manayeva manushyanam karanam bandha mokshayoh*

Mind is the key for both bondage and liberation. It is up to us to use the lock of *samsara*. If we have a big lock without a key, the lock is useless. In the same way, the key is the mind and if you turn the key Godward you realize the truth of life; and if you turn it towards the world, you are caught into the web of *samsara*. This is such a simple elucidation as to how to use the mind to dissect the different complexities of life and see through the veil of *maya*. If the mind needs to be trained, it needs the process of disciplining. When this institute was established, He declared, “This is not one of those institutions which will produce degree holders like others. It has higher goals.” And to achieve that He declared that discipline is the medium of instruction in all His institutions. This is because discipline is foremost to train the mind to learn secular and spiritual knowledge.

As a young man, I had lot of confusion in understanding the idea of *atman*.

In one of His Summer Showers discourses which I read, He clarifies it beautifully, “*Atma* is all pervasive. How to use the mind to comprehend this *atman*? Let us take an example of the inflated balloon. The air inside and outside the balloon are same, the balloon is the cause of this distinction. When you burst the balloon, the distinction ceases to exist.” This strikes a chord and motivates you to take up a spiritual path. This is what He does to all of us. This is the result of studying His discourses and discussing them so that we understand what are we here for.

I welcome all of you to this unique experience of the Summer Course. It is very important for us to understand our individual objectives. In the deliberation of the next three days, we should pick up a few teachings of Bhagawan and try and practice them throughout this academic year. This will lead to fulfillment and satisfaction and help our institution to realize the vision of our master.

Bhagawan’s Divine discourse

We should never pray that only our country Bharat should be peaceful. That is narrow mindedness. We should have a broad feeling like- *Lokah Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu*- let everyone be happy. Your happiness lies in the happiness of others. We should never pray that whatever may happen to the world, I should be peaceful. You are a part and parcel of the entire world. Broad hearted, infinite and societal feelings should be inculcated. Worldly knowledge is not enough as it is only to fill the belly. Do we need to study so much and get so many degrees to fill this stomach? You don’t need to go anywhere, don’t need to study, if you know the truth, you will get manifestation of truth at that very place.

Having attained high education and becoming intelligent, it is a foolish one who doesn’t know himself. Having attained high scholarship, he can’t give up his mean mindedness. This education is only argumentation and not to attain wisdom. Why should one die with all this education? One should study to be deathless.

Because of present education, agitation also is more. Education should lead to elevation; this should be our ideal.

Adhyatma vidya vidyanam- Spiritual education is the real education

One can pursue secular education also in addition to spiritual knowledge. To make the rice of spiritual education tasty and palatable, we have to put the items of secular, physical, religious and scientific education. We are all getting bound by the taste, likes, illusions and desires. Once these desires are pacified, mind attains calmness. Then you would become *amanaska*- the state of mindlessness. This is overmind, illumination mind, higher mind and superior mind have to be understood. Once that is understood, everything will be clear and that is the total understanding. Hence, spiritual path is the most essential. To teach you in detail this spiritual path, these summer classes are held. The worldly education goes on every day in the classrooms with the help of your teachers but this spiritual education is the chief one.

The rivers have different names and flow differently but ocean is one. Hence, Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Zoology, English, Mathematics are like different rivers which should merge in the ocean of spiritual knowledge. This is unity in diversity. We can understand this in this very hall. Beings are many but breath is one. The air is one to everyone, there is no distinction like your air and my air. Hence we should understand the unity in all. We should resolve to sanctify, purify, change our hearts by attending these summer classes and then lead a selfless life. To lead a selfless life, spiritual path is the only way.



Inaugural Address

Prof. K B R Varma

Vice-Chancellor, SSSIHL

This august gathering comprises faculty from all the four campuses of our Institute, senior students and the others who have indeed experienced the divinity of Bhagawan and some who are altogether new to the very system and Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The intended course christened as Summer Course on Indian Culture and Spirituality provides a unique opportunity to the new students to establish close contacts and healthy interactions with their senior brothers and sisters. This Summer Course is the fifth one in series after it was restarted with the blessings of our beloved Bhagawan. I am bestowed with the honor of inaugurating this Course because of the chair that I occupy, and not because I am an expert to give you deeper insights on the aforementioned Course. I would like to utilize this opportunity to extend a hearty and spiritual welcome to the new students to this Institute.

The idea behind this Summer Course, I suppose, is not to give a very comprehensive view on Indian Culture and Spirituality—as this is vast and difficult to comprehend within these three days—but to arouse the interest of the audience to get more acquainted with the titled subject. However, it is intended to induce an appetite and curiosity to the persons who have spiritual and scientific bent of mind. For me, and for many others on this campus, today is the most hopeful day of the academic year – the day when the university, now almost thirty-five years old, is refreshed by our newest members and begins again. Bhagawan has sacrificed His entire physical life to make His educational institutions strong, talented, positive and with a supportive community comprising people associated with wonderfully varying interests, backgrounds, perspectives and ideas. I am glad that all of you are becoming part of this family, and I look forward to our journey together.

Well, while the journey begins, it is important for each one of us here to understand who we are, why we are here in this world and what is our purpose

of being here. Programmes on spirituality and Indian heritage may show us a path to understand these aspects and possibly even provide answers to these questions. The spiritual practices help us to attain and understand the basic concepts or paths, namely, the way of knowledge, the way of devotion, the way to carry out one's duties as a service to the entire world, as a path to enlightenment. The way is indeed an unknown and a difficult one, but with the help of a guru or a teacher, one can attain the goal. We are fortunate to have our beloved Swami as our *Sadguru*. Although His physical presence is not with us, His way of life is before us. These programmes will also make you understand his simplicity and sacrifice for the benefit of the mankind. These were very close to Swami's heart and I heard that a lot of brainstorming has gone in, to structure these. Therefore, I hope that the programmes of this kind will revive our confidence and faith and give each one of us the strength to perform and carry out the legacy of Swami.

The culture of our country is the way of living of our people. The languages, religions, food, and customs differ from place to place within our country. The rich culture that has deep roots helped in laying a firm foundation of spiritualism. In its existence over several centuries, it has been acquiring new dimensions. Many saints and philosophers made significant contributions for its evolution and facilitated the spiritual upliftment of humanity. Many elements of India's diverse cultures that include Indian religions, and especially yoga, have had a profound impact across the world. As you all know, our country is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world associated with deep religious and cultural values.

When I talk about our culture, one thing that comes to my mind immediately is the concept of *Namaskar* or *Namaskaram*. *Namaskar* is a simple and beautiful expression of divine qualities like devotion, love, respect and humility that endows one with Divine energy. Scientifically, it helps in avoiding the transmission of negative energy.

The word 'culture' is a literal translation of the word *sanskriti* in Sanskrit language. The word *sanskriti* implies that action, method or system which has virtuous tendencies restraining the mind, as it is the sole source of orientation of one's attitude, deeds and character. The core of Indian culture is centered on the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*- treating the entire world as our

own family, which reflects universality of serene love, and sharing and caring of responsibilities of all beings. The evolution of the Indian culture blossomed from the Indian philosophy of continuity of life and realization of the soul as a manifestation of divinity. Subsequent periodic refinements of human consciousness devoid of animal instincts and evil tendencies of the mind and enlightenment of its inner core were therefore given utmost importance by our ancestors. The system of performing *Shodasha samskaaras* at different stages of human life aim at continuous refinement and self-development. Performing these *samskaras* in a disciplined manner in personal and social life constitute an important phase in Indian cultural system. It is indeed this culture that produces true saints, social reformers, great personalities, intellectuals, scientists and spiritual masters such as *risbis*.

In ancient Bharath, even the mighty kings/rulers revered the sages, sadhus and *sanyasis*. As a result, the world was gifted with a rich galaxy of great sages, seers, saints and savants. Indeed, they taught and spread the message of peace and co-existence against conflict, violence and unhealthy competitions. Therefore, the world still regards Bharath as the torchbearer of the light of truth. The global prestige and respect of our country has been chiefly due to the spiritual foundation and deeply insightful philosophy and science of spirituality. Though spirituality was the core of the *vedic* way of life, we had never neglected or looked down upon healthy progress in the worldly pursuits. Our history is the witness to the fact that we were at our best in the areas of science, sculpture, astronomy, mathematics, commerce, etc., and indeed we were on top of the world. This had made fundamental contributions to the growth and enrichment of human civilization and culture. Our beloved Swami was very keen that every student of His educational institutions should be equipped with spiritual, ethical and moral values through which they could bring back the past glory and pride to their motherland Bharath.

Our Bhagawan has several times declared that He has not descended to this world to found a new religion. But He is rather here to tell the world that religion should be seen as a pathway to God and self-realization. Swami expects every Hindu to become a true Hindu, every Christian a true Christian and every Muslim a true Muslim. Bhagawan used to say:

There is only one caste, the caste of Humanity.

*There is only one religion, the religion of Love.
There is only one language, the language of the Heart.
There is only one God, He is Omnipresent.*

If one wishes to be in bliss, he or she should attempt to erase bad thoughts and feelings. Henceforth, this university is your immediate home. Therefore, we are placing a big responsibility on you to imbibe the culture of this university and take forward the teachings of our Bhagawan as true members of a family, that is, to be strong, talented, positive, supportive and to live in peace and harmony with each other, help each other and to remain good human beings throughout. As Bhagawan often said:

*The end of education is Character,
The end of knowledge is Love,
The end of culture is perfection,
The end of wisdom is freedom.*

Bhagawan always gave preference to education, particularly the right education to the younger generation, because He believed that if the younger generation is not exposed to a proper education system, then we as their mentors and guardians would be responsible for the ill-fate of our country. You are all aware that He established a model education system, including primary schools, secondary schools, and an accredited university with four campuses, offering undergraduate, Masters, and Ph.D. degrees, designed to foster self-discipline and pro-social conduct. I am very sure that you would all strictly adhere to the teachings of Bhagawan Baba and help yourselves to lead an enlightened, blissful and most vibrant academic life. I conclude by quoting the following poem from Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, a 13th Century Persian poet and Sufi mystic:

*You were born with potential
You were born with goodness and trust
You were born with ideas and dreams
You were born with greatness
You were born with wings
You were not meant for crawling, so don't
You have wings
Learn to use them fly.*



Faculty Panel Discussion – Lessons from the Mahabharata for Modern Society

Moderator: Prof. A Sudhir Bhaskar

Director, Radiosai Global Harmony

The Mahabharata is also referred to as the Panchama Veda. Swami has often described it as a treatise on good and virtuous living along the path of dharma which is known as *iba* and results in a pleasant after life which is known as *para*. This entire epic is a quest for dharma and has illumined many seekers studying it. Bhagawan says, “When dharma fails to transmute life, the world is afflicted with agony and fear, tormented by stormy revolutions.” Mahabharata demonstrates this particular aspect to perfection. It provides various facets to the nuances of dharma.

The panel will discuss a few aspects of dharma which will allow us to have an insight. The endeavor of the panel is to look at few of the characters namely Bhishma, Vidura and Gandhari, who by their own rights had many good qualities. Let us examine how in certain situations their ability or inability to understand and practice dharma could have changed the scenario and could have taken a totally different path. Contextually, we will look at how this translates into current day situations and what is the type of dilemmas we normally face.

The Participants

- » Dr. (Miss) Sharada Subramaniam (SS), Associate Professor in Philosophy, SSSIHL.
- » Sri Bhabhani Shankar Padhy (BSP), Doctoral Research Scholar, Dept. of Management & Commerce, SSSIHL.
- » Sri S Sai Manohar (SM), Asst. Professor, Department of Management & Commerce, SSSIHL.

Moderator: Let us take the example of Bhishma. Bhishma confesses to

Krishna, “If you would have imparted this wisdom to me earlier, then a lot of injustice would have been avoided.” What is this wisdom which Lord Krishna imparted to Bhishma on the tenth day in the battlefield? Lord Krishna tells Bhishma on the tenth day on the battlefield, “Grandsire! The vow of celibacy and renouncement of claim to the throne were indeed great deeds, but why did you give up your responsibility towards the society. Look all around you O Grandsire. What is happening here? Your oath did not avert this war. Ponder over it. You considered your vow as dharma. If indeed it was dharma, why would this great war occur?

Dharma is the name of life and life changes constantly. Change is the characteristic of life.” Let us take this opportunity to discuss all that Bhagawan’s system of education imparts right from primary school, the wisdom which Bhishma is talking about.

Let us study how Bhishma tried to cope with the idea of his own oath, loyalty and dharma. What are the things that we can learn from his life? What do you feel is the apparent strength or otherwise of Bhishma in terms of his oath which he had taken for life?

SM: The very name Bhishma symbolizes that he had many noble qualities. He took a terrible bhishan (vow) which defines his life. This vow portrays him as a man of sacrifice, determination, will power and filial piety, i.e. the respect that he had for his father Shantanu. At the outset we feel that the vow which he took was for a higher purpose, promoting the feeling of sacrifice. But it is necessary for us to critically analyze that this very vow constrained him in several ways.

Moderator: Don’t you think that the oath which Bhishma had taken had actually put a boundary within which he had to operate. This acted as a constraint for him in subsequent periods of time which he had not foreseen.

SM: Krishna tells Bhishma that he was too loyal to his oath. He did not look at the larger good, at the social responsibility that he had to undertake. The vow of celibacy created instability at different points of time in the kingdom. Similarly, the vow of abdication of the throne finally led to the war of Mahabharata. He didn’t realize that he has a higher dharma to look at.

Moderator: From the life of Gandhari, can you indicate what her loyalty was?

SS: All will agree with me that all the woman characters in this epic have risen up to higher conduct of dharma through their conduct and behaviour. They have also shown us that it is possible to practice dharma in our day to day life. One such noble yet a tragic character is Gandhari. She was a resolute but a puzzling character. How? She refused to see the colourful world as her husband was deprived of sight. She blindfolded herself and deprived herself also of this lovely experience. For this sacrifice, she is lauded as a true Indian pativrata who stuck to the family tradition, safeguarded the family tradition and followed her husband to the letter. What did it really result in? On many occasions there was a need for her to give up this vow as a queen and also when Sage Vyasa blessed her with one hundred sons. What we eventually see that she stuck to the stated duty of a pativrata but failed to grasp a higher sense of duty of an empress or a mother.

Moderator: Krishna tells that as situations change in life we also have to change. As demand changed Gandhari could have changed without compromising the original vow of hers. Moving on to another character. Normally Vidura, is referred to as a person who has been righting through his actions. How to interpret his loyalty in terms of a role of dharmic person that he wanted to play?

BSP: Sir, you rightly pointed that Vidura was a person who was always righting through his advice. As he was a minister, he could only advice and the execution was with the king. At the heart of Mahabharata epic, the conflict starts with the two brothers, Pandu and Dhritarastra. It is interesting to note that Dhritarastra, Pandu and Vidura, all three were sons of Sage Vyasa. All three were brought up under the protection of Bhishma. They all differed in their temperament, character and approach to dharma and that becomes the defining feature of Mahabharata. It is also very interesting to note that Bhishma, the son of independent and very strong willed goddess Ganga, ironically finds himself chained to the throne of Hastinapura. On the other hand, we have Vidura, who is a daasiputra (son of a slave), rises up to become a great counsellor who refuses to be intimidated by the authority and is quite assertive. It can be concluded that perhaps he inherited his sense of dharma

from his father and simplicity and humility from his mother. Coming to the question of loyalty, Vidura was in the Kaurava camp throughout as he was with his elder brother Dhritarastra and after the war accompanies Gandhari and Dhritarastra to the forest and perishes in the forest fire.

What we have to understand is that as a brother he was loyal to Dhritarastra but as a minister, he was always loyal to dharma. For Vidura, the relation between Hastinapura and dharma is similar to the relation between the body and the soul. As we know that the body derives its existence from the Atman, and when Atma leaves, body is dead and has to be discarded. In the same way, dharma has to be enshrined in a state. State can be a generic term referring to a society, a nation, an institution or a system. For Vidura, Hastinapura gains its validity from dharma. The moment dharma is displaced, the state has no meaning. Unlike Gandhari who was loyal to Dhritarastra and Bhishma, who in turn was loyal to Hastinapura, Vidura tried his best to be loyal to dharma.

Mahabharata as an aid in Decision Making

Moderator: These three personalities are very good examples to understand what loyalty is; because they practiced loyalty most often keeping themselves in the focus and let go the larger role they were expected to play by the society. The exception is Vidura, who tried to play the role in some situations. To whom is this loyalty – an individual, an institution, a set of values or dharma principles? We have to really understand this before giving some prescription. This brings us to the question of practicing dharma alone and let go off our actions due to our position or duty which we hold. Do the individuals have the courage to face the consequences of the choices which have been made based on those decisions? How to take decisions which involve dilemma?

During the Mahabharata war, Krishna chastises Bhishma for his inaction in some important situations in life and says, “In this birth of yours, in order to keep yourself away from the ties of actions, you have not truly engaged in any significant action. The meaning of action is to take decisions and accepting the consequences of one’s actions. But when did you take any decision O Grand sire? Was the crowning of King Pandu your decision? The decision of hosting the game of dice and that of not stopping the humiliation of Panchali, were these your decisions? You had the competence and the power to stop all these unrighteous deeds but you didn’t take a decision. You

remained bound by your vow. In order to free yourself from bondage, why did you renounce actions altogether? You could have renounced the fruits of your actions. Instead of deeming someone's order to be your duty, if you could have deemed your action to be so, you could have got liberation from this bondage.”

SM: It is very clearly mentioned by Lord Krishna that Bhishma didn't take decisions when we was required to take them. He didn't make the right choices. His oath got translated into his loyalty to the throne at any cost and under any circumstances. It was necessary that Bhishma had to redefine his priorities. All of us have to redefine our priorities and move away from stated positions for societal welfare and according to the need of the circumstances. We need to decide on what is right and what is wrong without giving up on our core values.

Moderator: As Bhishma was guided by Lord Krishna, saying that there comes a time where you need to give up certain things in the larger interest and instead of identifying with an individual, you have to identify yourself with a cause. In this context, I want to mention what Swami has written in Geeta Vahini, Sarva dharman parityagya - give up all dharma taking refuge in his lotus feet but never Sarva Karman parityagya, i.e. never give up performing of actions in the position you are holding or the responsibility vested with you. This distinction one has to make when we are faced with a dilemma. Let us hear what Krishna had to say about this aspect.

At one point Bhishma asks Lord Krishna, “What are my mistakes?” Krishna replies, “Ignorance is your mistake, O Grandsire! You never tried to comprehend the true form of dharma. Until the roof of compassion spans the entire world, until then dharma in society remains incomplete. You thought only about your family. You never thought about the well-being of the world. Therefore, your sacrifice is also a form of selfishness.

SM: Krishna mentions to Bhishma that his ignorance was the greatest mistake. The ignorance was not swerving away from the vow taken by him toward the throne instead of promoting the greater good of the society. Bhishma never made an attempt to understand what true dharma was. Bhishma was in a position to make the right choices and take the right decisions but he always

remained indecisive.

Moderator: In this context, the second vow of remaining a servant to the throne puts restriction on his decisions and it was not contextually necessary to take that vow after the vow of celibacy.

The question which now arises is that in what situations one should hold on to one's vow and when one should give it up?

Krishna gives an answer to this in his conversation with Bhishma, "An oath that benefits the whole society indeed holds value. However, the moment the oath of a person and his decision begins to affect the society adversely, then at that moment it becomes mandatory to break that oath."

There is a beautiful check point which has been given to us by Swami where he says that all that you should look at is that if I hold on to the vow, will it lead to greater good or not.

Moving on to the life of Gandhari, is it possible to illustrate a situation where she could have changed the vow of blindfolding herself for the larger interest of the society?

SS: In the case of Gandhari, we will see that why she really broke her resolution. She very well knew that the sons of Pandu gambled away their kingdom and wife, and suffered by going into exile for this mistake for a period of thirteen years. Eventually, when they came out of the forest and were marching into the battlefield, they were sinless and pure. Gandhari comprehended this and she also very well knew that her own sons who made a mistake of trying to disrobe a helpless woman did not realize their mistake. Over and above, they were not ready to give even a needle point of land to Pandavas even after thirteen years in exile. They stuck to the kingdom like an adamant child. Krishna tried to admonish them, tried to give them his arguments but the Kauravas refused to accept it. Gandhari knew that dharma was not on their side. Duryodhana comes to her to seek her blessing before he enters the battlefield as his brother and uncles are no more. He is depressed and comes to his mother at night, prior to the day when he has to fight the war, to seek her blessings. Duryodhana says, "Can you give me the blessings of victory with moon as the witness?"

Gandhari replies, “My son, I will not give you this blessing. Even though I have lost all my sons, I will not give you this blessing but as a devotee of Lord Shiva, I will provide you with an armour.”

She did suspend her vow for some time, to save her son by trying to make him invincible. She was not ready to suspend her vow for the greater good of the society and thereby create a greater evil for the society. She broke her vow for her own selfish cause.

Moderator: Gandhari didn't realize that by keeping Duryodhana alive, she is doing more damage to the society. From Vidura's life can we see if he changed his loyalty due to the demand of the circumstances?

BSP: Vidura never took a vow like Gandhari or Bhishma, but when he was appointed as the minister of Hastinapura, the first thing he does is to strongly oppose the coronation of Dhritarastra as the king of Hastinapura. Few days prior to this incident, as a brother of Dhritarastra, he supports the coronation of his elder brother but as a minister he opposes this move as a kingdom cannot be ruled by a differently abled person. Again, going back to the example of the body and the soul, the essence of dharma remains the same but according to the situation it manifests in different ways as the essence, i.e. Atman remains the same but the body changes. This is the cardinal principle on which Vidura was working. He was looking how dharma has to be manifested in different situations. This is how his approach to dharma was different from that of Gandhari and Bhishma.

Formula for 'JOY'

Moderator: In short we can say that due to the samskaras acquired from father Vedavyasa, whenever an opportunity arose, Vidura was able to practice it.

For analyzing such dilemmas, Swami has given a very beautiful formula called 'JOY' which means: **J**esus (GOD) first, **O**thers next and **Y**ourself last. Joy in life will be acquired if this sequence is followed and if not followed, this JOY won't be acquired. For the characters we looked at in this discussion, starting with Bhishma, let us see what type of priority they had.

SM: The sequence for Bhishma was ‘YJO’. Yourself first, Jesus (God) next and Others last. His false sense of loyalty created a situation where he had to keep himself first due to his loyalty to the throne. God comes next in this sequence and I will illustrate with an incident from the Mahabharata war. Before the commencement of the war, all the Pandavas due to the counsel of Krishna, seek the blessings of the Grandsire to be victorious. Bhishma blesses them all saying that you will be victorious and the reason that Bhishma gives is that dharma is on Pandava’s side. He says, “Because Krishna is on your side, dharma is on your side. Where there is dharma, there is victory.”

Moderator: What sequence did Vidura follow?

BSP: Vidura apparently followed the sequence ‘OJY’. After Duryodhana is born, Vidura goes and pleads with Dhritarastra, “O King, there are prophecies that the eldest son born to you will bring disaster to the entire Kuru family. So be content with the other 99 sons and abandon the eldest one.” Here he makes a famous statement of Mahabharata:

To save a family, abandon an individual
To save a village, abandon a family
To save a country, abandon a village
And to save the soul, abandon the earth.

Dhritarastra doesn’t pay heed to this advice. He is like a typical below average leader who is sanctimonious about his decision that he expects sacrifice from everyone else.

For the second time, Vidura advises Yudhistira to ignore the invitation to the game of dice as he felt that the consequences will be disastrous. Both Vidura and Yudhistira were considered embodiments of dharma but their approach to dharma was different. Vidura was looking at the consequences as to how it will impact the people, the kingdom and hence the O comes first. Yudhistira is a pure moralist and he says, “As a king it is my duty to accept the invitation of a duel or dice of another king as I am king and it is my Rajdharma.” But he actually didn’t follow the correct Rajdharma as he loses his kingdom and allows a hostile king to rule over his subjects. When Pandavas learn to put God first after learning from their mistakes, only then dharma is established.

If we put Y (You or oneself) first it becomes a Mahabharata-like system where we have norms, rules, systems that were intended to protect and nurture dharma but resulted in strangulating it. Then we need a Krishna to come and press the reset button.

SS: It seemingly appears that Gandhari considered others first as she was ready to sacrifice her eyesight and blindfolded her. It is a dilemma whether it was the Y or the O. When the Kauravas were small, the wife in her took over the mother in her so she remained blindfolded. After the war, when all her children were dead, the mother in her overtook the devotee in her. She even went to the extent of cursing Krishna and his whole clan. This is just a case of wrong priority in life. I want to make a small contrast between Draupadi and Gandhari. When Draupadi was in grief, she took refuge in Krishna but when Gandhari was in grief, she cursed Krishna. This is quite evident that God had no place in her outlook.

This also gives a lesson to us- when we are happy, we have to surrender it to the higher power which has really guided us and when we are sorrowful, we should take refuge in the same power which will empower us to overcome the situation. At one point of time she questions Krishna, “Both Kauravas and Pandavas were your relatives, but why did you have a bias towards the Pandavas?” Krishna smiles and replies, “The Kauravas didn’t have the fortune of getting the grace (of God) and looked on their own mother, how will they get the *kataksha* or grace of god? Kauravas didn’t heed to any of my advice whereas Pandavas were verily my body. Therefore, this had to happen.”

Practical lessons for Life from Mahabharata

Moderator: When the students pass and go out what is expected of them and how they should face situations in life?

There is one conversation between Krishna and Karna during the Mahabharata battle where Krishna says, “The annihilation taking place in Kurukshetra today is neither due to Duryodhana nor uncle Shakuni. This is the sin of three great warriors - Grandsire Bhishma, Guru Dronacharya and you Karna.” Karna replies, “You are correct Vasudev, even the unrighteous don’t harm the society as gravely as harm done by the inaction of the ones who know

dharma.” This episode reflects very clearly what happens in the world. Classic examples are the number of scams that have happened over the decades in our country and the world. There is a study which says that the majority of CEOs who have gone to jail have come from world’s premier Business Schools. When educated people go into society, how they should be? Also how to seek education here and what should be the motivation to seek such education. Let me again refer to a dialogue between Krishna and Karna on the battlefield to get more clarity when Karna forgets his knowledge. Karna tells Krishna bemoaning his fate, “I engaged tirelessly to attain knowledge, O Vasudev, then how I forgot my knowledge?” Krishna replied, “Why did you make an effort to gain knowledge? Did you understand the importance of knowledge? Did you have the desire to be useful to the society after attaining knowledge or did you attain knowledge only to seek revenge for your insult? In reality, to attain knowledge, one doesn’t require to put hard work, merely concentration and dedication are enough. A person who attains knowledge by understanding the value of such priceless entity, he excels in his field. However, a person who attains knowledge with the intent of obtaining something else, keeps competing all his life to prove himself superior. But he is never able to attain perfection.”

SS: One saying of Bhagawan is very relevant here. Swami says, the purpose of education is concentration and dedication. The best example of this in Mahabharata is Eklavya.

SM: Then don’t we have to ask the question as to how we have to conduct ourselves after acquiring this education?

Moderator: Yes, it is the motivation which is important to attain education. As Swami has often mentioned, the end of education is character and education is for life and not for mere living. Let us come back to the conversation of Krishna and Karna where Krishna counsels Karna and says, “Pay heed to this truth that a person who lives for the society also derives benefit himself but on the other hand, one who solely lives for himself, harms not only himself but also the entire society.”

Since Swami has given us a simple formula, if you are able to keep god in mind and keep Him in the front and take decisions that are for the greater good of others and then to ourselves then we get what is called as ‘JOY’.

BSP: But will this formula ensure that everything will be smooth in one's life?

Moderator: Certainly life is not going to be smooth but then, how we should look at it? Let us hear how Krishna guides Karna on this aspect.

Krishna tells Karna regarding the insults and sorrows faced by Karna, "Yes Karna, the sorrows and insults experienced by you were real. However, if you had transformed them into opportunities, then society would have benefited from them and you would have got peace and happiness. If the help of a powerful man like you could have been obtained by other aggrieved people, then the lives of many people would have been joyful. You had the opportunities, competence and you even knew what that agony feels like, but you didn't dedicate your life to such people. You dedicated your life to Duryodhana." Karna interrupts, "How can I forget the favours of my friend Duryodhan?" Krishna rejoins, "Which favour you are talking about? After befriending you, did Duryodhana give every charioteer and aggrieved person of Hastinapur the right to gain knowledge? Did he adopt all the underprivileged and downtrodden? No, not at all, he befriended you only for his selfish ends. The competitive spirit in your heart against Arjun is the reason why he befriended you. Had you forgotten your woes and had adopted the ones of the society then you would have known the truth of Duryodhan's false friendship."

It won't be a bed of roses when you all go out. What is important for us is how clear are we about our life, about various activities which encounter us and how we are able to define our understanding properly. This conversation of Karna and Krishna can be contrasted with that of Bhishma and Vidura and see the difference.

SS: Generally, Swami expects His students to take part in societal work. With what attitude and motivation should they take up these activities? Are they doing a favour to the society or whom they are favouring? We can find a beautiful answer to this in again the conversation between Krishna and Karna. Karna tells Krishna, "All my life, I have engaged in charity to the hapless and downtrodden. I have not kept any of my property with me. Krishna replies, "The actual benefit of giving away the wealth goes to the one

who is engaged in charity and not the one receiving it. Had you employed your competence to liberate other aggrieved people like you, then everyone would have got benefited.”

Moderator: From this conversation what we understand is the inculcation of the right attitude. If you are in a situation and have experienced the negative effects of the situation, can you use this experience as an opportunity when you are in a position of authority and make change for others who might be going through the similar type of experience? Let me narrate an experience from Bhagawan’s life. When the Sri Sathya Sai drinking water supply project was going on. Halfway through the project, the sarpanchas of all the villages where water was being provided assembled here to express their gratitude to Swami. When Swami came for darshan, few of them got up on their knees and told Swami, “We are very grateful to you for providing us with water even without asking for it.” Swami interrupted them and said, “No, on the other hand, I should express my gratitude to you all as you gave me an opportunity to serve you.” Swami always says: My life is my message. He has actually demonstrated this dictum ‘Service to others is serving yourself’ in this way. Swami also told that if you find someone in distress don’t give them cash. Create an opportunity for them to live their life with dignity.

In conclusion, the idea of this panel discussion is to make you all contemplate, deliberate and internalize these lessons and start listening to your inner voice which is nothing but your own conscience which verily is Swami himself.

Alumni Panel Discussion –

Ideal Sai Students and their role in society:

Focus on success in professional, social, family, personal and spiritual domains

Moderator: Prof. (Miss) Rajeshwari C Patel

Professor & Head, Department of English Language & Literature, SSSIHL

Bhagawan once said that the educational system of a country is a bank on which the nation draws a cheque whenever it wants reliable and skillful workers. The crown jewels of this system on which the nation depends are the students who pass out of the institutions and bring good name to their university. Bhagawan used to often say to the outgoing students, “You don’t have to do anything to me, you don’t have to give anything to me, just bring a good name to your parents and to the Institute and I shall be satisfied.”

The Participants

Sri Prasanna Sai (SS), Director, Management Consulting; and Management Consultant, Sai Advisory Services.

Sri Tribhuvan Sachdev (TS), Leading Income Tax and Financial consultant; Honorary Secretary of Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar, Indore; and Secretary to the National Council, Sri Sathya Sai Schools in India

Dr. V. Sakunthamma (VS), Professor, Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati

Ms. Meena Srinath (MS), MLL & LW, MFM, DHRM, Chartered Accountant, Mahalingapuram, Chennai

Moderator: All the alumni of our panel discussion have imbibed the values of Sri Sathya Sai Integral system of education. I would like to start with a question which every student would like to ask. What are some of the practical lessons that each one of you have learnt at the divine lotus feet at your respective campuses during your stay at the university, if possible with a personal anecdote?

PS: It is said that the proof of the pudding is in its eating. If someone says that a particular car is the best, we don’t need to test all the cars coming out

of the assembly line. We just need to keep one car and explain, as done in the showrooms. Similarly, we here are just a sample in the assembly line, you will find many like us in the world outside. What did we learn in the Divine presence? Something which significantly impacted my life was Bhagawan's passion for perfection. Every piece of activity be it painting, drama, food, education, procurement of equipment for the laboratory, Bhagawan demonstrated how it had to be done. We learnt this in our tenure as students. Bhagawan used to see the dramas 30 to 40 times and finally the drama was put only for Swami. The drama is done for Swami and He himself sees the rehearsal 40 times. What does it mean? Swami used to say, "So many people are watching, you cannot have a single error." Organization these days give lot of emphasis on quality and talk about six sigma, PPM (parts per million defects), high product quality etc. Swami used to demonstrate to us these things when we were students.

TS: I can only say that it is our greatest good fortune that we are part of these hallowed portals. Let us not waste time and imbibe every single moment given to us. When I was a student, I used to wonder, why this barrage of lectures, why these summer camps and why these things are happening to us day in and day out. Little did I understand that Swami was sowing a seed of love, seed of service and a seed of care in our hearts so that when the time comes we all will grow up to be a big tree. We are all here undergoing a Summer Course in Indian culture and spirituality. What did Swami say about culture? It is called samskruti in Sanskrit. To illustrate this let me take an example. You are hungry and have many delicacies on the plate. When you take the food and eat it that is prakruti. Myself and Prasanna are sitting together for food and both are served with gulab jamun. I am fond of gulab jamun and as we say our prayers closing our eyes, I quickly take one gulab jamun from his plate and put it in mine. This is what is called as vikruti. I sit down for food and find someone on the door asking for alms. I quickly get up share part of the food with this person who has asked for food as he is also hungry. This is verily samskruti. In short, Swami has taught us how to care and share.

Moderator: What we have understood from the first two panelists is the passion of Bhagawan for perfection and His passion for service. I want you all to share something where Swami guided you and taught you something very

practical. Are there any other practical lessons that Bhagawan has taught?

VS: When I entered the college for the first time, I felt that I entered a holy place as it looked like a temple. I felt that this is the place where I was destined to be. Before joining Bhagawan's college, I had no idea of God or spirituality. Whenever Swami used to come to the college or whenever we used to come to Prasanthi Nilayam, we learnt a lot from our personal interactions with Him. We always used to exhort- Don't waste time, time waste is life waste. Whenever we had time, we used to clean the hostel premises, we used to do gardening. Swami also used to say- Don't waste food, energy and sound. We used to practice silence when we were in the hostel. Here I am reminded of an important incident. When Brindavan campus hostel was going to be inaugurated in 1977. Swami asked all the Anantapur Campus students to come for the inauguration. Prof. (Miss) Rajeshwari C Patel was our senior and guide. She took a small class as to how we should behave. Our only aim was to be disciplined and please Swami. She told us not to utter a word from the time we sit in the bus in Anantapur to the time we get down at the Brindavan Campus. We followed her scrupulously. Bhagawan was waiting for us at the gate and said, "Devatalu vacharu", i.e. Divine beings have come. If we practice what He says He showers His bountiful love on us.

Moderator: The main concern of each student was to earn Swami's love. We found a way of making Swami love us by following whatever He told us to do. That is why we liked to maintain silence as Swami likes less talk.

MS: Our batch of 1997-2000 was branded to be the most unfortunate batch as we never had the Summer Course during this time. We kept on praying for a Summer Course from Swami. We stopped getting sarees directly from Swami's hands. In 2000, we were in final year and had practiced for the final year interview song and were waiting for the interview eagerly. But Swami didn't call us for an interview. Since Swami was in Brindavan, we all booked our tickets for Brindavan, waited there for a week. Till the last day, He didn't call us for an interview. On the last day many of the girls were supposed to leave in the afternoon. Swami came for bhajans, took arati at 9:30 am and went back to His residence Trayee Brindavan.

We were crestfallen as we won't be allowed to sit in the Sai Ramesh Hall

anymore. At around 9:45 a.m. when the sevadals told us to leave, I was able to see a glimpse of the ochre robe in the Trayee lawns. Swami sent a messenger with a message to all of us to assemble in the Trayee Brindavan lawns. So in the lawns of Brindavan, we had our final year interview. We quickly ran, all the while conscious of the discipline and neatly sat in lines. Swami walked through the lines and gave us sarees. All our prayers would be answered, if not today tomorrow. The yearning for Swami will definitely answer all our prayers. When He came near me, I became blank seeing His charming face and sweet smile. He asked me to take *padanamaskar* and gave a saree to me. After finishing the distribution, He turned to us and said, “Dear children, please attend the summer course this year as ex-students.” We were the most fortunate batch to attend the summer course as ex-students.

Moderator: Are there any lessons that you have drawn from this experience?

MS: If you yearn for Swami and don't ask for anything else but Swami's love, He answers all our prayers, if not immediately definitely one day.

Moderator: Regarding the theme of the discussion about the ideal Sai student, many thoughts come to my mind. Swami wants us to talk less, Swami wants us to respect elders, care and share whatever we have with others. When we are in the campus, we have been trying to diligently follow all of this. It is easy to practice Swami's teachings inside the four walls university campuses. Milton in his *Areopagitica* calls this cloistered virtue. Cloistered virtue means that in a protected environment being virtuous is very easy. The virtue must be tested. So when you finished your studies and went out in to the world, what were some of the challenges you faced and how did you successfully overcome these challenges.

PS: When you want to practice something you have to internalize it. This is the learning which we had here. It is a misconception that the outside world is different. This is for a simple reason that in a company we tell our executives, you are all like frogs in the well, go and look at the competition outside, benchmark yourself outside. Hence this theory is relative and not absolute. All will come across challenges where you have to decide- to be or not to be, but the boldness with which you approach the problem, will help you in solving the problem.

I was negotiating a union settlement twenty years ago in an oil and lubricant industry in a harbour (port) where murders are normal. The question here is - how do you handle this kind of militancy with love? With Bhagawan's principles in mind, with courage and self-confidence, I went ahead and there was a settlement which had never happened in the last seventy-five years in the industry. How did it happen? The workmen found that the dialogue is not against them. It is for the mutual good of the organization and their lives. You moderate their life- I got them out of gambling, money lending and all other personal problems. This was done purely due to Swami's teaching- You be my instrument, I will handle the rest. So act and not sit and pray. It is very important to offer yourself as an instrument to Him and stand by it. There will be anxieties but you can overcome them.

Let me narrate the second example. I joined the industry after my education and my first assignment was to justify a price hike in the cement industry. There was a case against the industry by the BICP (Bureau of Industrial Costs and Pricing) saying that the prices were unduly high. Generally, for a study like this they will deploy the most qualified experts. I was lucky enough to be part of a leading cement company at that time and being a management trainee who other than Swami can give such an opportunity. We worked late night and completed the assignment in time. One of my senior colleagues was horrified and commented, "After twenty years of my employment, I feel we dare not attempt this again."

You will face ethical questions propping up in front of you, if you are in leading positions wherein you have to take decisions. At that point of time, you have to stand by the values. The success and failure in the long run is by the value system. This same aspect I experienced in consulting also. There are plenty of consulting firms but why people come to us- on account of our value system which is reflected in what we imbibe in Swami's institution. During the value mismatch, you will have the courage to stand up and say 'No'. This is very very critical in today's world. As we saw in the panel discussion on Mahabharata, there is no dearth of competence in the world but the real competence is lacking. Real competence means skill + values. Organizations succeed and fail only because of this combination. Any mismatch between skill and values there has to be a corrective action.

Moderator: Sri Prasanna Sai kept Bhagawan's ideals and principles while dealing with problems in his professional job. It is clear that he derived JOY from it. First GOD, then Others and finally Yourself.

TS: There is a saying in English- just because you are a vegetarian don't expect that the lion will not attack you. Hence when you go out in the wide and wild world, there will be lot of distractions, troubles and seemingly small problems around you. But I feel if you are involved in some way or the other in personal sadhana, you will be able to overcome all the problems faced by you. I was once asked - What are the two most important qualities which you learnt while in Swami's college? That set me thinking. I thought to myself, "I have learnt so much from you Swami, how can I put it into two most important ones? When I thought and went deep inside my heart, I realized, that the two qualities that have stood the test of time for the last 25-30 years are- hard work and sincerity. This was taught to me by our faculty and Swami Himself. Whichever field you take, if you are inclined to do hard work and if you have sincerity in your heart; success will always come running to you.

In the outside world we see that people don't work hard but work hardly. Although they work hardly, you will find that they gain success. But this success is short lived. Once I was asked what is the shortest distance between point A and point B. My mathematics teacher replied that it is a straight line. When we know that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, why take to crooked manners and short cuts. It really takes some effort to draw the line to touch both the points but this is life all about. When you are outside there will be many people who will try to put you down but you must have firm faith in the values you have learnt here and should have a personal sadhana to support it. For example, I am a tax lawyer by profession and sometimes I have a very bad case at hand. At such moments, I pray to Bhagawan and tell Him, "Swami, let me do whatever best I can, you have to fight the case in my place. It is my dharma to safeguard my client today." It is not easy to get the arguments which you have to put forth for the case, but if you are meditating regularly and sitting for *dhyanam* regularly, you will be surprised that the solution comes to you when you are concentrating or meditating. Eventually, you are able to support what you are thinking.

Don't think lightly about anything which is given to you here. These huge

doses of spirituality, Indian culture, would they be really effective? They will be really very helpful as there are very few people in this world who are working hard and also are sincere. Whenever I go to meet the Income Tax Commissioner, he immediately says, "Let him do it his way, I know, he will not do anything wrong, he is a Sai Baba devotee." You see, how our name is attached to Bhagawan's name and His name is carried on our shoulders. We have to be constantly watching ourselves. We have a definition for the word SAI. Sai first, All others next and I last. If you follow this formula, you will be a winner always.

Moderator: Indeed, Swami has many times stressed on the need for sincerity. Once He was speaking to some ex-students in an interview. In the interview He said, "You students don't understand, I lack sincere people who will work for me." Swami always used to look out for sincere people who will stay with him and work for Him without thinking about money, power or position. Swami always gave lot of importance to the virtue of sincerity.

VS: When I passed out of Swami's university, I had to join a college where caste quarrels, political conflicts, strikes were very common. I thought of leaving the place but then on second thought felt that if I practice what Swami says, He will be with us and stayed back. I am warden of a woman's hostel which has around 1,800 inmates spanning research scholars, engineering students, M.Tech. students and postgraduate students. We have around 200 different branches in the university. Around six years back there was a strike by the students of the hostel as the monthly mess bill was unduly hiked to Rs. 2000. The Vice-Chancellor called me and said, "I repose full faith in you that you can tackle this situation as you are from Bhagawan Baba's college." Then he made me the warden of the hostel. I was able to see the irregularities in the mess and reduced the monthly mess bill to Rs. 1300. Due to some political conflicts some went on strike again but I held firmly to my decision which was backed by the Vice chancellor, Registrar and Principals. The students then understood the sincerity of a Sai Student. If we sincerely follow the teachings of Bhagawan, He helps us in every step we take. In the hostel also, as students we learn small things like putting a rangoli, cooking etc. which helps us a lot in our future lives.

My advice to the students is - Please follow the rules and regulations that

were laid down in the hostel so that they help us in our lives.

As recently as yesterday, the Vice-Chancellor of my university called me and entrusted me with many responsibilities of organizing the 54th convocation of the university. He said, "I can trust you with all these tasks because we have faith in you to make enhance our positive image in front of governor and many other dignitaries who are coming for the convocation." This is the trust reposed in us due to our sincerity and hard work.

Moderator: It is the experience of the teachers of all the campuses of our institute that some students who give us little problem when they are the university; when they go out and come back after around a year and say, "We know the value of our university now, after we leave the university, we know the value of it."

MS: The first challenge for me as a woman when I did my masters from the University of Pune was the cultural shock regarding the fashion statement. We have been trained to be in a particular way but it was totally different in this educational set up. Do I have to imitate them to gain acceptance was a major dilemma? I thank Swami as He showed me the best way- Be Yourself. We don't have to ape others to gain acceptance. At the end of two years, I gained lot of love and respect for this attitude of mine. Let us not lose the good values that we have learnt in this institute.

The second challenge was in my professional life. Whenever I had to represent the proposals of my clients to the income tax department, major dilemma was- Do I have to pay extra to get my things done? I was very straight forward and adamant in this respect. I would handle only straight cases and was very straight forward while dealing with them. Now it is around a decade from the time I started the practice and all the officials know that they will not get anything from this person so let the work be done in a straight way. All in my work place have understood that I am a straight forward and an honest person.

The third and the biggest challenge is how to balance your professional and personal life, fulfilling the duties of a mother and a wife. I raised my children in the same way as Swami had shown His love for His students i.e. giving

everything and not expecting anything in return. The best thing that can happen to a person in this life is to know and love Swami because when you love Swami, you won't do anything that will displease Him. I want to show my children that if you love Swami, things will fall in place because they are going to be the torchbearers of the next generation.

Moderator: Can you all briefly give your message to the present students which is crisp and they can carry with them.

TS: The younger generation doesn't believe in long speeches and lengthy talking. I was also at one point of time on the other side. Do you want the formula to be happy for the rest of your life? Let us say you were expected to be in this hall and listen to this panel discussion. You had a choice of going back to your room and quietly sleep off, nobody would have noticed. You would have got one hour of happiness. If you want happiness for one day- take a break and go for a picnic, you will get happiness for one day. If you want happiness for one week- Go and stay with one of your relatives, take a break for one week, you will get happiness for one week. If you want happiness for one month- take a vacation, go abroad for one month, you will be very happy. But after one month, you will feel homesick and would want to touch your motherland hence it wouldn't last long. If you want happiness for one year- Get married! But if you want happiness for the rest of your life- Learn to love what you have to do, you will be a happy person for the rest of your life. I am trying to tell you this formula from the bottom of my heart as I am also trying to follow that. It was not by choice that I became a tax lawyer and I detested this work. But I understood, that if I love this work, it will love me back. Hence, learn to love what you have to do- as a student- be a good student, when you come out as a householder, do your duties as a householder, when you go for spiritual activities, go into it headlong. Then you will always be happy.

PS: I will only say it in one word- internalize. Let me narrate one anecdote. This was around 1983-84. Swami was in Kodakanal during summers. In the Prasanthi Nilayam mandir, the granite slabs were being replaced with concrete. I went to Kodaikanal carrying letters and couple of other works. Swami called me for a private audience with a couple of more people. Swami looked at me and asked, "Has the concreting job completed?" I looked at Him

and smiled. Swami asked, “Why are you smiling?” I replied, “Swami, after you left mandir, what job I have to go there? I went from hostel to the college, wrote my examination and took a bus and came here.” Swami said looking at others, “This is my student. They won’t roam around unnecessarily.” Swami always insists on the 3 Ds of duty, devotion and discipline.

We have to completely internalize these traits. We should not do it because someone has asked you to do it or Swami is watching you. If you internalize, people around you will know how to align with you. If you don’t internalize, you don’t reflect that energy. If you don’t reflect that energy, others won’t know how to connect with you. This is like a mobile phone, if you want to connect to the mobile tower, you need to sync with it with the same frequency. Swami expects us to conduct like this, not because somebody is watching you or you want to please someone. He wants us to internalize these traits and exhibit them naturally. This will always make you victorious in life.

Swami used to always come out to us and tell us our results even before we used to go and look at it on the notice board. He used to feel happy with childlike enthusiasm that we got O grade. This used to happen every semester. He taught us a lesson with this. He expected that we have to consistently perform every time and should not be happy performing once. Every day you have to perform being a Sai student in the outside world. Every night you have to go back to Swami and tell Him what you have done and offer it to Swami.

Moderator: Swami has given a definition of happiness. He says- Happiness is not doing what you like but doing what you have to do.

VS: As a member of the Sathya Sai Seva Organization, I have only one question for the students- What is the legacy of the Sai avatar? It is not the projects or the beautiful edifices. It is following his divine mission of Love All, Serve All through the Sathya Sai Seva Organization. I appeal to the students to join this organization and do miracles in the society. In 1977, there was Summer Course held in Brindavan. In one of the speeches in the institute auditorium, Bhagawan recollected His childhood experiences, in the end He asked- How many of you will join the Sathya Sai Seva Organization? All of us raised our hands. Swami said, “Very good, very good, very good.”

The day I left the college and went to Tirupati, I joined the organization. Hence, my sincere appeal to all the students is to join the seva organization after you pass out.

MS: Right from our childhood we are taught to walk, talk, run etc. but we have never been taught to listen and think. Both these traits are taught in our campus. This is a place where we can think independently and take our own decisions and listen a lot. Keep your eyes and ears open and observe as much as you can and I am sure you will be very thankful for this opportunity.

Moderator: This panel discussion was very inspiring. I thank you dearest Lord for taking us by your hand and leading us on the right path.



The Dilemma of the Greater Good

Sri V Sai Raam

Student, I.M.Tech. in Computer Science, SSSIHL

It was at the start of the Kurukshetra war when Arjuna asked Krishna to move his chariot between the two armies so that he may see all his enemies. Even as Arjuna saw those faces he sworn to destroy, he saw the faces of some people whom he adored, loved and even worshipped. He saw Bhishma- the great grandsire, his gurus Dronacharya and Krupacharya, and all of a sudden, Arjuna grew despondent. He lost all his desire for war. It was at that time that Krishna urged him to fight and do his duty as a warrior. The dialogue that followed between Arjuna and Krishna, as we all know, is known as Bhagawad Gita.

What made Arjuna lose this desire to do his duty? What caused this unseemly reaction in Arjuna? The answer is- In place of seeing opponents on the battlefield, Arjuna saw his kinsmen and therefore had a confusion of his duty as a kinsman and as a warrior. This is because Arjuna was not in tune with the essence of dharma. This essence of dharma which is common to all people irrespective of caste, creed, race and colour is atma dharma. Its application to various situations is *paradharm*.

An example would clarify the concepts better. Let us take a bulb, a fan and a radio. All these devices run on electricity but perform different functions. The functions each of these devices perform can be called para dharma but the current flowing is the same for all the three and hence can be compared to atma dharma. All these definitions are good in theory but how to follow it in practice. There are two methods out of the possibly many. One is to follow the conscience and the second method being, think incessantly about God.

Let us consider the first method. The pandavas in Mahabharata are the best examples of the first method. For them Krishna was the voice of their conscience. Whatever Krishna commanded, the Pandavas obeyed implicitly. One day when the Pandavas were roaming in the forest along with Draupadi

during their exile, they see a large and tasty looking fruit hanging from the branch of a tree. Being hungry, they decided to eat that fruit and hence Arjuna shot it down. To their surprise and dismay, they were not able to lift the fruit. Even Bhima with his superhuman might was not able to budge the fruit even by an inch. The Pandavas didn't realize that in their effort to move the fruit, they were disturbing a sage doing penance named Roma rishi. This sage was doing penance in the forest for a number of years during which his hair had grown all over the forest floor. The Pandavas were trampling his hair in their effort to move the fruit. This fruit was no ordinary fruit. It had the results of all the tapasya of Roma rishi. This fruit had a trait that whoever eats it would not suffer from hunger and thirst for years together. Roma rishi awoke from his tapasya and divined that somebody wants to take away his fruit. He didn't know who was trying to do that but was furious. His angry voice echoed through the whole forest and the Pandavas also heard it and they realized that they were in grave danger. As always, Draupadi immediately called out to Lord Krishna and Krishna appeared instantly. When the Pandavas asked Lord Krishna for help, He said, "I will protect you but on one condition that you will not question my any action at any point of time."

Having said this Krishna instructed them to follow him after a while and went straight to the ashram of Roma rishi. The moment Roma rishi saw Lord Krishna, he forgot all his previous anger and welcomed the Lord with open arms and they sat conversing. The Pandavas arrived and the moment Krishna saw Pandavas, He went and fell at their feet. The Pandavas were shocked as they were devotees of Lord Krishna. The Pandavas didn't open their mouth as they had promised Krishna. Roma rishi seeing that the Lord is falling at someone's feet did the same thing. After this Krishna told the entire story to the sage and asked him to give the fruit to the Pandavas, as it would be very helpful to them during the exile. The Pandavas were relieved that the one who prostrates would not curse them. Roma rishi very joyfully gave the fruit to the Pandavas. The moral of the story is that whoever follows atma dharma never comes to any harm and even if there is some danger to the person, the Lord will immediately come and protect them.

Let us come to the second method- thinking of the Lord incessantly. Thinking of the Lord incessantly and atma dharma are not two things which many of us will relate to. How thinking about the Lord as equivalent to atma

dharmā. Let us try and understand this with an example. I would like you all to visualize a tree which is inverted. Its branches are below and the roots above. Each individual is like this tree. The branches represent the various roles this individual has to perform like father can be a friend, a mother can be an aunt. The roots represent the connection between the individual and his higher consciousness. For the branches to remain healthy, the roots must draw sustenance from the atma. This is equivalent to be in constant communion with the Lord. So we see that thinking about the Lord incessantly is same as following atma dharmā. An incident comes to my mind from the Mahābhārata.

During the exile of Pandavas, sage Durvasa comes to visit Duryodhana in Hastinapura. Duryodhana is aware of the sage's legendary ill temper and hence treats him with excellent hospitality. Despite the sage's occasionally outburst, Duryodhana manages to keep him more or less happy. At the end of Durvasa's stay, he decides to confer a boon on Duryodhana. He asks Duryodhana, "What do you want?" Duryodhana always had ill wishes towards the Pandavas hence asks this boon on behalf of Pandavas. He asked Durvasa, "O great sage, please visit my cousin Yudhisthira who is staying in the forest. But don't visit him during the day but in the evening." There was a reason of visiting in the evening. The Pandavas had got a Divine vessel called as Akshaya Patra from Lord Surya. The Akshaya Patra would yield food throughout the day till Draupadi had her meal in the evening. Once Draupadi has her meal in the evening, it will yield food only the next morning. When sage Durvasa visits the Pandavas unannounced, by then Draupadi had already had her meal and had even washed the vessel. So there was no chance that there would be some food left for Durvasa and his entourage of 1000 disciples and there was every chance that Durvasa would curse the Pandavas. There was a small comfort that Durvasa and his disciples would go to the nearby river to freshen up before coming for the eagerly awaited meal. The moment Durvasa went away from Pandavas' abode, Draupadi called out to Krishna and as always, instantly Krishna appeared before Draupadi. This time Krishna had a different game to play. Ignoring Draupadi's plea for help, Krishna went straight and asked, "I am hungry, give me some food." Draupadi replied, "There is not a morsel of food in the house, how do you expect me to feed you?"

Krishna said that doesn't believe Draupadi and went straight to the Akshaya Patra and ran his fingers along the inner surface of the vessel and found a single leaf. Finding the leaf was also His leela as He willed that the leaf be there. He took it and put it in His mouth and exclaimed, "Ah! This is enough to satiate my hunger." As Krishna ate this single leaf, the hunger of 1001 people, Durvasa included was satiated. The sage didn't want the hospitality of Yudhisthira and quietly slipped away blessing the Pandavas. This is another example how the scriptures provide us stellar characters worth emulating.

For those who think incessantly about the Lord, He has given an assurance:
Ananya-s-chintayanto Maam Yae Janaah Pary-upaasatae
Taesbam Nithya-abhi-yuktaanaam Yoga-ksbemam Vahami-aham

Those who think about the Lord incessantly, the Lord would provide for their material and spiritual need.

Another incident comes to my mind which is about Mahabharata and Pandavas. During the Kurukshetra war, it was not going in favour of Duryodhana and Bhishma was in command. Incited by Duryodhana, Bhishma took a terrible oath that he would destroy all the Pandavas or he would make Krishna take up arms. Hearing this, Draupadi was terrified as earlier Krishna took an oath that he would not lift any arms in the war. Krishna tells her a plan, he says, "When night comes, you go straight to Bhishma's tent and fall at his feet. He must not recognize you when you do this and he will give you the traditional blessing of *Deergha Sumangali bhava!* After he gives such a blessing, he won't be in a position to harm your husbands." Draupadi agrees to this and Krishna accompanies Draupadi to the camp of Bhishma at night. Krishna suddenly realizes that the footwear that Draupadi is wearing is making sound and could alert Bhishma of their arrival. Krishna wanted Bhishma to be completely off guard when Draupadi falls at his feet and hence tells Draupadi, "Quickly give me your slippers."

At that moment, Draupadi gives her slippers to Krishna and He takes it and wraps it in His *uttariyam* (upper cloth). Draupadi goes and falls at the feet of Bhishma and he knows that it is a married woman from the sound of her bangles and gives the blessing- *Deergha Sumangali bhava* (may you live long with your husband). Draupadi stands up knowing very well that

her husbands' lives are safe. Bhishma looks at her, recognizes her and knows that this can't be her plan and laughs. Krishna immediately enters the tent showing Himself. The moment Krishna enters the tent, Bhishma is curious to know about this bundle. When Krishna opens the bundle, Bhishma is shocked to see the footwear of Draupadi and remarks, "O Lord, what will you not do for your devotees!"

In 2007 when Swami went to Chennai for the Athi Rudra Maha Yagna conducted over there, Swami visited the house of one of His devotees. This devotee had arranged for a renowned Carnatic singer to give a recital there. Even as Swami entered this devotee's house, singer began to sing this song- *Krishna nee begane baro* which is a song entreating the Lord to come to the devotee. Swami spontaneously replied, "I have already come." Swami is the same Krishna. He was the conscience of the Pandavas then and He is voice of our conscience now.

All of us must obey the command of the Lord for we may remain in tune with our atma dharma. In the 1965 Gurupoornima discourse, Swami had commanded all His devotees to do Gita Sadhana. What is this Gita Sadhana? In an earlier discourse in the same year, Swami had clarified that Gita was the command of the Lord and therefore Gita Sadhana would mean following the command of the Lord implicitly. I pray to Swami so that He gives us the strength, will and intellect to obey His commands implicitly.

Tyagainaike Amruthatwa Manashuhu

(By Sacrifice Alone we can Attain Immortality)

Sri Seemesh Bhaskar

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The Vedas declare- *Na Karmana na prajaya dhanena Tyagainaike Amruthatwa Manashuhu*- Not by action, not by progeny or wealth but only by sacrifice one can attain immortality.

Let me start with a small story which Swami has narrated. There was a Rajput kingdom and the crown prince had just got married. As fate would have it, the kingdom was going to war. The king, the prince's father, told his son to stay back out of sympathy for the newlywed couple. The prince decided to stay back. When this news was told to the wife of the prince, she sent him a gift with a letter through her maid servant. It was a silver plate with something on it covered with a cloth. When the prince removed the cloth, he was shocked. It was his wife's head. With trembling hands, he picked up the letter and read, "It is your dharma to protect your subjects which is your family, I will not let you to turn away from dharma to be with me. Go fight the war." Even today the children of Rajasthan are aware of the sacrifice of that noble woman. Had she been any other woman she would have been forgotten in the sands of time. This sacrifice made her immortal.

Let me quote some examples of sacrifice from our history. A prince gave up his throne, was ready to sacrifice his palatial comforts, attachments to his family just to keep up his father's promise given to his mother. He lived a life of sacrifice and that is the reason why Sri Rama who walked the earth millennia ago is still remembered, adored and worshipped by millions. In the Kurukshetra war, Arjuna used to be terribly upset with agony that he has to touch with his feet the head with saints and sages and gods and goddesses adored and worshipped. Arjuna had to prod the charioteer's brows with his toe to his feet to indicate the directions. If the chariot had to be driven straight, both the toes had to be pressed with equal force. Sri Krishna never assumed the role of a universal sovereign which was His nature and status. That was his sacrifice for those who were devoted to Him. Hence, Sri Krishna's name

is heard in every nook and corner of the world.

What is illiteracy? According to me if a person is not able to read or write, it is not illiteracy. But if a person is uncultured, it is absolute illiteracy. Needless to say, the basic foundation of Indian culture is sacrifice. Sacrifice means, sacrificing the ego, the bad in you and become the best citizens of the country. The best way to do sacrifice in life is to consider ups and downs, joys and sorrows, positively. Sri Krishna says in the Chapter 18 of the Bhagawad Gita:
*na-dveshtya kushalam karma kushale-naanu shajya-te
tyaagi sat-tva samaa-vishto medhaavi chin-na sansha-yaha*

The relinquisher endowed with *sattva* and a steady understanding, with his doubts dispelled, has no aversion to disagreeable action and no attachment to agreeable action.

Lord Brahma started his creation and after a while felt that his creation is incomplete. He meditated on Lord Shiva and Shiva appeared in front of him. Lord Brahma explained his problem to Shiva and asked for help. Shiva separated Shakti from himself and gave that power to Brahma. That is how the *Prakruti* came into existence. This earned lord Shiva the title Mahadev, i.e. God of Gods. Today, if Jesus Christ is remembered by billions of people, it is because of his selfless sacrifice. He sacrificed his entire life and died on the cross. When Sri Krishna and Arjuna came to Mayurdhwaja disguised as Brahmins and told him that their son has been captured by a tiger and the son could escape only if the flesh equivalent to the body of the boy is given. Mayuradhwaja was immediately ready to offer the right half of his body. When the body was about to be cut, a tear rolled down from the left eye. 'Stop!' said Sri Krishna, "this sacrifice is not being done with full heart." When asked why Mayuradhwaja was crying, he said, "The left half of the body was feeling sad that it can't be offered for the sake of the boy." Immediately revealed himself as the Lord of the universe and then and there immortalized Mayurdhwaja. Rishi Dadhichi had received a boon from Lord Shiva that his bones would be used to make a weapon for Indra i.e. *Vajrayudha*. After few years, the gods needed the weapon, the sage without a second thought gave up his life so that his bones could be used to make the weapon.

In the Ramayana, one of the incidents that shines out the most and fills the

reader with awe is the sacrifice of the noble Jatayu. Jatayu fought demon king Ravana to rescue Sita forgetting his own limitations. Ravana struck Jatayu's down without any mercy. Jatayu breathed his last only after Rama came to him. Rama was so touched by the devotion of Jatayu that He himself did the final rites of Jatayu which even His father Dasaratha didn't get. As revealed by Swami, mother Kaikeyi sacrificed her name, fame and reputation to keep up Sri Rama's wish. She commanded Dasaratha to send Rama to the forest for fourteen years and even till today the whole world curses her. It was her immense sacrifice that made Sri Rama start his mission and accomplish it.

Many of us know about the historic speech of Swami Vivekananda in Chicago but the days before the speech went unnoticed. When Swami Vivekananda landed on the soil of America, he realized that still there were three months for the conference to be held but the money in his pocket was just sufficient for 10-15 days. Someone suggested him to go to Boston as in Chicago he would become a pauper. We can't believe that a man who could shake the entire world three months hence, slept in the railway bogies, footpaths. Mornings, he would wake up and go around house to house with his begging bowl. The men and women of America used to close their doors saying, "A brown man is coming to ask alms." Swamiji was irritated, frustrated and decided not to beg anymore. He decided to starve but for the one who led a life of sacrifice, the one who followed the dictum of Lord Rama- *Janani janmabhumi sha swargadapi gariyasi* (mother and motherland are greater than heaven), the Lord himself came and gave food. This incident indicates that if you sacrifice, god will always be there to look after. After the conference someone came to Swami Vivekananda and asked him, "What is the inherent power in you that makes you so popular?" Swami Vivekananda replied, "The power of sacrifice that I have done flows through every inch of my body, that what America, the whole world should come and fall onto my feet." Salutations to that great soul.

Indian freedom fighters fought the British and continued the struggle with their undying spirit and achieved freedom for India. Independent India was the dream, goal and aim of every Indian who had the hearts where the blood of sacrifice was pumped into their veins.

Let me take a small jump from present to the future. Vision 2020, a book by

Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, explains the height mother India will reach by the year 2020. We are reaching the year 2020 and we should know what to do before reaching that milestone. Bhagat Singh fought for our independence but died before he could get the independence. If we work hard now, we will be alive to see the pinnacle of glory of our Jagadguru Bharat. But if the foundation is not strong, we will collapse. That foundation should be the essence of Indian Culture and Spirituality which is sacrifice. It would be wrong on my part if I don't mention about one being who is sacrifice personified. Vedas rightly declare her as *Matru Devo bhava*. She forgets herself, her conveniences, and her comforts to see a smile in her child's face. For such a tyagajeevi we keep aside the second Sunday of May as mother's day. What a plight! Each day should be a mother's day.

If I had a chance to alter words in world dictionaries, I would replace sacrifice with Sathya Sai. What a sacred life of sacrifice it was! If we see Swami's residence, it appears like a bungalow, but if we go inside and see, He led the simplest of the simple life. One 8x8 feet room, one bed, one tumbler. He sacrificed everything and took upon Himself the sufferings of His devotees. Though He didn't have anything for Himself but He provided to the world- Educare, Sociocare and Medicare and the list is unending. The very fact that we have supremely cultured teachers in our institute, moved and touched by Swami, sacrificing their entire lives for the sake of we students, shows the deep roots of sacrifice Swami has driven into them. If not god, who can create such noble souls of sacrifice! If life becomes a sacrifice unto Him, then every human breath will carry the scent of the blossoms of heaven.

Self-centeredness is the killer of faith, sacrifice is the pillar of faith. The whole Indian culture is itself a sacrifice to the humanity. Let us explore that hidden and eternal happiness of sacrifice.



Faculty Panel Discussion – Lessons from the Ramayana for Modern Society

Moderator: Dr. (Miss) T R Rajeswari

Associate Professor, Dept. of Management & Commerce, SSSIHL

Today's society is plagued by modern, western thoughts which seek reason, logic and validation for every action. Rapid strides in science and technology have brought the world together at the physical level. But we remain disconnected at the emotional and spiritual level. Can scriptures like Ramayana and Mahabharata give solutions to the ailments of modern society? Bhagawan gives the following answer to this question in His Divine discourse.

“The modern society needs important principles contained in the Ramayana. Why? Son is not paying heed to the words of the father. Parents are not bothered about the future of their children. Teachers are not imparting virtuous teaching. Students don't have any confidence in their teachers. In the present circumstances, Ramayana is very essential. Ramayana reveals the importance of individual's duty, significance of the family and sanctity of the community. Ramayana teaches human values in full to mankind. Today, all fields like business, work place, judiciary and politics are highly polluted. Under such circumstances the principles of Ramayana are very essential.”

The Participants

Dr. M Venkata Lakshmi (VL), Assistant Professor in Philosophy, Anantapur Campus, SSSIHL.

Sri Sandeep Patnaik (SP), Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Physics, Prasanthi Nilayam Campus, SSSIHL.

Dr. N Venkatesha Rao (VR), Associate Professor in Sanskrit, Brindavan Campus, SSSIHL.

Sri B V K Bharadwaj (BVK), Assistant Professor, DMACS, Muddenahalli Campus, SSSIHL.

Moderator: Ramayana speaks about the true identity of the individual, the real significance of the family and the sanctity of the society. What is the true identity of an individual? We humans are a special species in God's creation because we have a faculty called 'mind' which can think and imagine. Because the mind can think and imagine, we seek reason and value for our existence. We create our own imaginary version of our world. We ask many questions, and we imagine many answers to these questions. We ask questions like - Who am I? What am I doing on this earth? Where was I before I was born on this earth? What will happen to me after my death? What is right, what is wrong? These questions do not have any specific answers but we have the freedom to imagine answers for these questions. We can create our own version of the imaginary world. As we are creators, we can dub ourselves as Brahman- Aham Brahmasmi- I am Brahman and so are you! This fact instead of giving us joy, gives us fear. We are scared of our true identity, our true self, our true I. But tapas can help us to unknot the mind, outgrow the fear and discover the true identity i.e. Atman. This Atman is an expanded mind which doesn't fear death, which doesn't long for living or even extension of life. It doesn't ask for validation; it witnesses the world as it is. Consciously or unconsciously we are in this journey of life moving from the mind level Aham to the mindless level Atman.

All the characters of Ramayana teach us this truth. All the hundred odd characters in Ramayana teach us a profound lesson that every experience that we go through in our lives is only an exercise in this journey. It helps us to move from the state of mind to the state of mindlessness. Ramayana revolves around human emotions, family relationships and focuses on core values of life pertaining to truth, dharma and the code of morality. In this life, we are confronted with so many conflicts at the physical, mental and emotional level. Ramayana gives us certain cryptic clues as to how to transcend these levels and search for our true identity. Ramayana teaches what dharma is for a common man. I request one of the panelists to give a bird's eye view of the importance of Ramayana to the modern world which seeks reason and logic for everything.

VL: Ramayana was written by sage Valmiki somewhere in 1500-2000 B.C. It consists of 24,000 stanzas. It is bulky in size and rich in its content. Down the ages, it has influenced the different dimensions of Indian life, be it spiritual,

moral, ethical, emotional, aesthetic, social or cultural aspects. A A Macdonell, a Sanskrit scholar observed- no epic in the world literature has produced such an impact on lives and thought of people, as Ramayana. Ramayana is so important due to its ethical and spiritual content.

Ramayana is a Dharma *sastra* of a different kind where the Vedic injunctions are concretized in the form of characters in Ramayana. These characters lived and moved among people practicing dharma. They exemplify values like forgiveness, forbearance, love, compassion and moral courage. Ramayana teaches us how to be an ideal man and an ideal woman. To expand this concept, Ramayana teaches us how to be an ideal son, ideal husband, ideal wife, ideal ruler and ideal enemy and above all an ideal devotee. Swami beautifully tells in Ramakatha Rasavahini- The undercurrent of Ramayana is love of dharma and fostering of karuna. It teaches us the values of detachment and the immanence and transcendence of the divine. The values enshrined in the Ramayana are eternal. The relative values may change but the absolute values of Ramayana are relevant at any period of time. Brahma tells sage Valmiki, “As long as there are rivers and mountains are on the earth, Ramayana will be there.” Some people may wonder how Ramayana, an outdated, 4,000 years old scripture be relevant to our present times. But Ramayana is relevant at any period of time because of the absolute values it teaches without which we can't have a stable and healthy society.

Lessons to learn from characters in Ramayana

Moderator: What are the lessons that we can learn from some of the characters that we come across in Ramayana?

VR: Anandavardhana in his work Dhvanyaloka, a work articulating the philosophy of 'aesthetic suggestion' says, “One should behave like Rama or face his end behaving like Ravana.” Ramayana represents three characters from the Pulastya family- Ravana, Kumbhakarana and Vibhishana. The ten-headed Ravana represents looking in ten directions with the motive of enjoying and consuming the luxuries of this world. If we look at some people in the world their objective is working hard, earn lot of money and enjoy a luxurious life. This is the tendency of Ravana. From the age of 30-60, working hard, earning lot of money and leading a life of opulence without any thought

on social responsibility- this is the life of Ravana. Another category of people are the ones who eat and sleep after retirement. They are like Kumbhakarna. Tamo Guna represents a state where there are no high aspirations. Both, Ravana and Kumbhakarna were killed by Rama.

We should not lead a life of luxury without any social obligation. But one should behave like Vibhishana. Vibhishana was always surrounded by Rakshasas. In this Kali age, sadhakas will be surrounded by so many diseases, troubles and disturbances. Even when Ravana warned him not to chant *Rama Nama*, he did it. Finally, he surrendered his *sattvic* energy to Rama. We should be like Vibhishana, nurture the Satwa Guna and fight against Rajo Guna and Tamo Guna. In life most things come and go, life is never stagnant. Man should not get agitated by these ups and downs in life. To give an example- Dasaratha announced the coronation of Rama and Rama was pleased as he was following the orders of Dasaratha. Rama was about to ascend the throne when Dasaratha comes to Rama and tells that it is not coronation but banishment into the forest. Rama was not at all disturbed. He says, "Father, as you command, I will follow." He was not elated at the news of his coronation and was not dejected when he was asked to go to the forest.

Moderator: How these characteristics of Rama can help us in our journey from Aham to Atman?

SP: When Rama leaves for exile, everyone around him was weeping, but He was unaffected. Truly Rama was a Mahatma. But who is a Mahatma? It is said- Manas ekam, vachas ekam, karmanyekam mahatmanam- unity and purity in thought, word and deed makes a person Mahatma. Rama stood by these ideals all through his life. That is why Rama was extolled as a man with ek vachan, ek patni and ek baan- one word, one wife and one arrow. When Rama, Lakshmana and Sita were leaving for the forest draped in ochre robes, Dasaratha comes and asks him, "Anyway you have to leave for the forest for fourteen years, why don't you go after one or two days?" Rama replies, "The goodness that I will achieve by leaving for the forest immediately, I will not achieve by doing it after a day or two." He had no second thoughts. Rama says, "I have given a word to mother Kaikeyi that I will leave to the forest and I shall obey it immediately." This is one word.

Once the demons approach Ravana and say, “We have tried all possible ways to convince Sita to acquiesce to be yours but have failed. You can change forms at will. Why don’t you take the form of Rama and approach her. She will become yours. Ravana replies, “You fools! The moment I think of taking the form of Rama, my desire to possess Sita, somebody else’s wife, ceases to exist.” That was the level of purity that Rama had in his character and thoughts. This certificate was given by Ravana, an archrival and sworn enemy of Rama. This is one wife.

Rama’s purity and integrity of thoughts and words made him a man of matchless heroic actions. He never had to shoot a target twice. Be it the demons or the seven trees that he had to shoot to prove his mettle to Sugriva. One arrow was always the answer.

We are living in a fast-paced world. We need faster communication, faster modes of transport. To match these is the increasingly fast fickleness of the mind. If only we can follow Rama’s ideals and have a non-dual mind and if only we have faith in our own words, we will be men and women of matchless character and deeds and the world will be a better place to live in.

Lessons from Ramayana vis-à-vis interpersonal relationships

Moderator: Ramayana also stresses on the need to build healthy relationships. Contented individuals, happy families and stable societies derive their strength from healthy relationships. Ramayana is potent with so many such healthy relationships which have proved this point. Mother Sita had unshakable trust in Sri Rama and herself and Sri Rama had complete faith in Mother Sita. Urmila had deep love for Lakshmana and Lakshmana had great regard for Urmila. Hanuman surrendered completely to Sri Rama and Rama had full confidence in Hanuman’s abilities. Bharata obeyed Rama’s command and Rama obeyed Dasaratha’s intended command. All were healthy relationships which helped them to grow as individuals, be contented with the relationship and contribute positively to the society around. On the other hand, the relationship of Kaikeyi with Bharata was strained. Though she was a very talented, gifted and an intelligent lady, she abused them for her selfish motives. She loved power and whoever came under her shadow, regretted it.

Ravana, a man of great knowledge dug his own grave as he tried to grab everything. He measured his success with the type of things he possessed. He believed in possessing people and things. He wanted to possess emotions also and refused to expand his mind. He refused to build healthy relationships and that was the reason for his downfall. Sugriva challenged Vali who was his own brother. Power will be challenged by the ones with less power if they feel it is illegitimate. But if power is legitimate and if it comes with spiritual authority it is appreciated and even revered. This is what we learn from Sugriva challenging Vali and Bharata saluting Sri Rama. Ramayana teaches us to build a healthy relationship in life and sustain it. Any intricate relationship has an ideal answer in Ramayana worthy of emulation by all people in all countries, at all times.

How we should conduct with each other in terms of brotherly relationship? What are the lessons from Ramayana in this context?

BVK: Why do we have relationships? They are required to move from dvaita (duality) to advaita (non-duality). We have to feel the divine love in the relationships which we have. What about the current day relationships? Many of the present day relationships are temporary and need based. They are as fragile as potato chips, you touch them, and they will break. What do we do now? What kind of solutions we can seek from Ramayana to make these bonds permanent? Let us take brotherly relationships. We have got different types of brotherly relationships. Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna are a set of brothers; Vali and Sugriva another set of brothers; Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana another set of brothers; Jatayu and Sampati yet another set. Each set of brothers teach us an important lesson in terms of how relationship should be and how to keep a relationship happy.

There was never a selfish motive when it came to the brotherly relationship of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna. Rama sacrificed his kingdom for Bharata, Bharata in turn sacrificed it for Rama. After the war when either Bharata or Shatrughna had to take up the kingdom of Lavanasura, Bharata sacrifices it for Shatrughna and Shatrughna in turn gets ready to sacrifice it for Bharata. Take the example of Vali and Sugriva. Vali always doubted the nature of Sugriva. At the same time Sugriva also didn't have trust in Vali's powers. Vali had selfish motives toward Sugriva's kingdom and had captured the entire family of Sugriva with his kingdom. There was no happiness in

their lives. Let us take the example of Ravana and Vibhishana. If the younger brother points out the mistakes of the elder brother, it is duty of the elder brother to keep his ego aside and listen to the younger brother. If not, we already know what happened to Ravana. These are the basic lessons which we can learn from Ramayana.

Current day relationships are little different. We don't have families where all the brothers live together in the same home. Brothers might be living in different parts of the world and might not meet each other for years. In such circumstances, how do you keep up your relationships and have that godly love among the brothers? In Ramayana, Bharata loved Rama so much that even when Rama was in exile for fourteen years, they were not out of touch. In fact, Bharata was completely contemplating on Rama leading a life similar to that of Rama who was in the forest. This even made him look like Rama at the end of the fourteenth year. This was the kind of mental connection that they had. Is this not relevant today? Can't we keep such mental connection with all our brothers?

Another aspect of relationship that I want to highlight is sacrifice in case of Jatayu and Sampati. Sampati sacrificed his own wings which are his life, to safeguard the wings of his brother, Jatayu. This type of sacrifice is required to keep up a relationship in a healthy manner.

Moderator: Trust and sacrifice are very essential to build a relationship but the company you keep also matters a lot in sustaining the relationship that we have built. What is the opinion of the panel?

VL: Very true, in life we have good company and bad company. Good company is the one which makes us live a righteous life and takes us closer to god, uplift our spirit and maintain harmony. Sumitra had all these characteristics and whoever came in contact with her got benefited by it. She proved herself as an ideal wife, ideal mother, ideal friend and ideal counsellor. When she comes to know that Lakshmana has decided to follow Rama to the forest for fourteen years, Sumitra doesn't feel sad at all. Instead she feels very happy and encourages Lakshmana to accompany Rama. She tells Lakshmana, "This is the best opportunity, make the best use of it, and serve Rama with all your love, dedication and one pointedness." She also tells Lakshmana, "Look upon

Rama as your father, Sita as your mother and the forest as Ayodhya.”

She proves herself to be a best friend, the best counsellor in relation to Kausalya. Kausalya was heartbroken and grief stricken when she sees her son leaving Ayodhya. Sumitra gives the best counselling to Kausalya because it was Sumitra who had hundred percent conviction that Rama was divine. Sumitra asks Kausalya, “Who do you think Rama is? He is not a mere mortal, he is the emperor of the entire universe, and he is the illuminator of the sun, fieriness in the fire and the forbearance in forbearance. So don’t pity your son, very soon you will see Rama coming back and ruling Ayodhya once again.”

These words of Sumitra uplift the spirit of Kausalya and she overcomes her grief. Sage Valmiki devotes one full canto on the way Sumitra consoles Kausalya. This is the best example of good company. In contrast to Kausalya, the best example of bad company is Manthara. The crooked Manthara poisons the mind of Kaikeyi in such a way that the noble Kaikeyi turns demonic. We see so many calamities taking place in the lives of people due to this bad company. Hence Swami says- Mercilessly avoid bad company. Vibhishana cautiously avoids bad company and takes refuge in the lotus feet of Lord Rama.

Moderator: Sometimes we go on a wrong path not because of company but because of delusion. We are affected by our own internal and external enemies. Let me tell you a Japanese fable to support this statement. The fable starts with a game having two different parties with a question and answer session. One has to question and other has to answer but the rule is that the one giving the answer should not pause even for a second. If all the questions are answered he will be honoured but if he pauses, he will be dubbed as **Chokchi**.

I will play the game with one of the panel members Sri Sandeep Patnaik. I will ask questions and he will answer.

Moderator: What is this lid for?

SP: For covering the glass

Moderator: What is this glass for?

SP: For Drinking water

Moderator: What is this notebook for?

SP: To write on

Moderator: What is this paper for?

SP: To Read

Moderator: What is this table for?

SP: To Support

Moderator: What is this chair for?

SP: To Sit on

Moderator- What are you born for?

SP: (No answer)

Moderator: Now we can dub Sri Sandeep as Chokchi. We are all gleeful but don't you think all of us are Chokchis? If I put a question to all of you, I am sure none of you will give a concrete answer as to what are we born for? Because we have the power of imagination, we create questions and create answers to those questions. Sometimes when the imagination is not according to our wish, we get scared.

The Fable of Chokchi goes like this: One day a Zen master calls his disciple Chokchi, gives him five Yen and asks him to procure five things from the market for worship. Chokchi went to the market, saw a merry-go-round on the way, got attracted to it, spent all the five Yen and came back empty handed. The kind master again gave him five Yen and sent him to the market. This time Chokchi got attracted to a sweet shop, spent all the five Yen and came back empty handed. This happened many times and still the kind master gave him five Yen and Chokchi got deluded and every time he spent the money on some other purpose. Finally, the master took him by the hand, went to the market, procured the five things and Chokchi understood the purpose of his visit to the market. This is symbolic of our birth. We come to the earth with five senses with a purpose of offering them to God. But we get deluded, misuse our senses and finally the Avatar has to come down, hold us by His hand, walk along with us in this world, show us the path and make us understand the purpose of life. This is what the characters in Ramayana teach us. Lakshmana and Hanuman stuck to Sri Rama and focused on Him and could reach the goal. Sita got deluded for a split second and had to move away from Sri Rama and had to pine for long to get reunited.

Lessons from Lakshmana's character

What are the lessons which we can learn from Lakshmana's character?

SP: As always, desire is the root cause of suffering. We have to rise above the level of Kama to be near and dear to Lord Rama. Let me analyze the path of Lakshmana. Once Swami was seated with some students and a group of senior devotees in Kodaikanal and Swami posed a question. Who are the five people who are near and dear to Lord Rama? People came up with many answers but none of the combinations seemed to please Swami. Finally, Swami had to reveal the answer. He said, "The five people are Kausalya, Mother Sita, Bharata, Ahalya and Lord Hanuman." Hearing this one of the senior devotees was surprised and he asked, "Swami, what about Lakshmana? Lakshmana has served Rama all through his life, how come he has not featured in this list?" Swami replied, "There is no difference between Lakshmana and Rama. They are verily one. So the question of Lakshmana being near and dear to Rama doesn't arise."

How did Lakshmana achieve this state of *Sayujyam*? To answer this, let me narrate another story. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita reached Panchavati during their exile and Rama requested Lakshmana to build a hermitage at any spot as per his choice. After a while, when Rama went to see Lakshmana, he found his brother weeping inconsolably. When questioned, Lakshmana replied, "Rama, what sin I have committed, why did you ask me to do something as per my choice. When you are there, do I have anything as my choice? Your choice is my choice." Lakshmana had attained *Sayujyam* by surrendering his ego to Rama's will. This was the journey of Lakshmana from Aham- ego to Atman- Rama.

Lessons from Bharata's character

Moderator: Another beautiful character in Ramayana is Bharata. What are the lessons that we can learn from this beautiful character who suffered a lot very quietly?

VR: If someone goes to a traffic police and asks, "I have been following traffic rules for many years, how long I have to follow, when will I get exemption?"

He will reply, "What is this question, as long as you are on the road, you have to follow traffic rules." As long as we have awareness we have to do namasmarana, sandhya vandanam and all the auspicious ritualistic baths. Even during exile Rama was doing magha snana (a holy ritualistic bath) by getting up in Brahma muhurtha. The water used to be very cold and during one such bath, Lakshmana asked Rama, "Rama, the water is so cold and the weather is very chill." Rama replies, "It is true that the water is very cold, but think about the plight of Bharata. Bharata has to take bath in Sarayu river before 4 a.m. because if he takes a bath after 4 a.m. and people see him they will accuse him. They will think that this Bharata who first snatched the kingdom from Rama and now taking magha snana. He can neither drop magha snana nor face the allegations of people. So he is taking bath in this cold water before 4 a.m." Lakshmana gets one more thought and asks Rama, "Bharata is so noble, then how is Kaikeyi, his mother, so cruel, I am not able to understand?" Rama is not happy with this question and says, "Lakshmana please talk about Bharata only, repeat his virtues again and again. Talk about the positive aspects and don't talk about negative aspects." We take the example of a needle and describe the difference between a sajjana (good man) and a durjana (evil man). The front part of the needle is like the durjana which always makes holes or finds faults with everything. The back part of the needle where the thread is woven goes on patching up all the holes created by the tip like a sajjana who tries to patch up all the differences.

Look at Ravana who kidnapped Sita (symbolizing money and wealth). All want only money these days. Ravana didn't like Rama (symbolizing spirituality). Look at the life of rich persons there are only two books- pass book or cheque book which are not essential. Look at the purse of anyone there will be only credit card and debit card but no library card. Krishna says- Gain knowledge and wisdom in this birth. Dasaratha was one more personality who wanted to have both Kama and Rama. He wanted to please Kaikeyi still wanted to have Rama with him. He tells Kaikeyi that he has granted her the boons and tells Rama not to go to the forest. We should be like Bharata. Though Rajyalakshmi or kingdom was waiting for him, he didn't accept it saying that it is suitable only for my elder brother Rama. Bharata went to bring back Rama but Rama didn't accept his request. Bharata accepted Rama's will and came back to Ayodhya.

There was a passenger in a train who was continuously complaining about the position of the engine. He said, "The engine should not be in the back side, it should be in the front side." One co-passenger heard this for a long time and said, "Don't complain, please change your seat from that side to this side." Bharata used to say, "I am not the doer, God is the doer, I have done to my capacity and pray for your grace."

Lessons from Hanuman's character

Moderator: Any discussion on Ramayana will be incomplete without touching upon the character of Hanuman. What can we learn from this beautiful character of Hanuman?

BVK: I would like to highlight how Hanuman dealt with a particular situation and how to apply it in our daily lives. The most beautiful kanda of Ramayana is Sundara kanda which starts with Hanuman taking a leap to cross the ocean and go to Lanka. He comes across three types of obstacles. The first obstacle was Mainaka, the second one was Surasa and the third one was Simhika. These three types of obstacles are the three gunas which we face in day to day life.

The first one Mainaka is a *sattvic* type of obstacle. When you want to go forward someone wants to offer you help you can take it or politely say no or take a middle path. Hanuman touched Mainaka and told that it is equivalent to taking hospitality. The second type of obstacle is *rajasic* type of obstacle. This is like testing times which test your intellectual prowess. Use your intellect to tackle this problem and move forward. Surasa says, "Devas have given you as a prey to me, you have to enter my mouth." Hanuman very tactfully increased himself to a gigantic size and Surasa also increased her mouth to match his size. At one point, Hanuman quickly reduced himself to a tiny form entered Surasa's mouth and came out. He used his *viveka* to tackle this obstacle. The third obstacle is a *tamasic* obstacle in the form of Simhika. She didn't want to test Hanuman's power but she, didn't want him to reach his goal. Hanuman discriminated that this being a Tamasic obstacle, it has to be annihilated. He used his power and courage to kill Simhika.

In our day to day life in hostel, students also face such obstacles. For example,

if one student wants to go for a Veda class in the evening at 6 p.m. and it is already late and one roommate asks his help in cleaning the room, he can extend his help if time permits or politely say, “Sorry brother, I can’t help you now, my Veda teacher is waiting for me.” This is a *sattvic* obstacle. Second one is *rajasic* obstacle. When I was studying, some brothers in the room of twelve inmates wanted to get up at 4 a.m. in the morning put on the tube light and wanted to study. This would have created a disturbance for those who were desirous of sleeping. These brothers used their intellect and hanged a newspaper from the tube light so that light is focused only on one table and not disturb others who were sleeping. There are no *tamasic* obstacles as such which have to be annihilated in our day-to-day life in our hostels. But the subtle tendencies present in us like laziness, inactivity are the *tamasic* tendencies which stop you from attending bhajans or an inspiring talk. We have to overcome it with courage and strength.

In a Nutshell

Moderator: What we have touched upon today is just the tip of the iceberg. One has to dive deep into this scripture to find the precious pearls deep below. All should take interest, dive deep into this scripture, discuss it, analyze it and internalize it. I request the panel members to come up with the lessons from Ramayana just in one sentence.

SP: When Lakshmana looks at the beautiful Lanka and asks Rama to take over Lanka, Rama says- Janani janmabhūmishā swargadapi gariyasi- mother and motherland are greater than heaven. We might have to go abroad for further studies but our motive should be to come back and serve our motherland.

VR: When Ravana was killed, Vibhishana said, “Ravana is a black spot on our clan, I will not perform his funeral rites.” Then Rama says, “No, you should perform the funeral rites, as he too belongs to me.” Rama stood for expansion. Expansion is life and contraction is death.

VL: One important lesson from Ramayana is to remain unaffected by the dualities of life. In life, we come across ups and downs but the greatness lies in not getting affected by them. Rama gets ready for the coronation but was

not excited about it. Few hours later, he is told to leave Ayodhya and go to the forest for exile. At this point also he was not dejected. Valmiki says that Rama always retained his native bliss; he was neither excited nor dejected. Krishna also tells this in Bhagavad Gita-

*Samah Shatrau cha Mitre Cha Tathaa Manaapamaanayoooh
Sheetoshna-Sukh-Dukheshu Samah Sanga-Vivarjitah*

One, who is same to friend and foe, remains unaffected by honour or dishonour, who is same in heat and cold, in pain and pleasure and free from all attachments.

One more important lesson in Ramayana is avoiding bad company. Manthra spoiled the mind of Kaikeyi with her evil counsel. When you leave the portals of this institute, you may come across all kinds of friends and acquaintances. They may tempt you to get into bad habits. Please be careful in listening to them and use your discrimination as to what should be done, what should not be done. We have to be very careful in making friends.

BVK: The lessons that we can learn from Ramayana can be at three levels. First is the individual level. There should be an ideal character, whom we have to look up to and that is Rama. Sathya and dharma are the two major pillars for a happy life. If we follow them, we will also get elevated to a godly state like Rama. Second level is at the family level. How should be the relationships? How should a father behave towards his son? How should a son behave towards his father? In case of Rama, when Dasaratha called him to tell him about the cancellation of coronation, even before he heard the word cancellation he was mentally ready that whatever Dasaratha was going to tell Rama will agree.

That is how a son should be towards his father. At the societal level how should we behave? How should one administrate the state? How should be the politics? How should be the economy? All this information is also there in Ramayana. There is a chapter in Aranya Kanda in Ramayana where Rama enquires from Bharata, the way he is ruling the kingdom. He also lays down some guidelines for ruling the kingdom like appointment of ministers or collection of taxes. Hence Ramayana also explains as to how to keep the

society happy and healthy.

Moderator: I have learnt a very profound lesson from mother Sita. She forgave the demonesses who troubled her, forgave Ravana who abducted her and forgave even Sri Rama who abandoned her. All the time she was at peace. This is because of her nature of forgiveness. We have to forgive to maintain the peace within and peace without and move on in our life. Second lesson is that in the battle of life, nobody really loses, everybody wins. In the battlefield, Rama fixes his arrow on Ravana and invokes Lord Shiva for his blessings. Ravana also took his bow and fixes the arrow and aims at Rama and invokes Lord Shiva for blessings. There at Kailash, Mother Parvati asks Shiva, “Whom will you favour?” Lord Shiva replies that he will favour both and says, “Ram will win because He will make Ravana to see the truth of existence. Ravana will win because he will finally open his eyes and start seeing and will start his journey from Aham to Atman.”

All the experiences that each one of us gets in this life are an exercise in the journey from **Aham to Atman**. Let us all march forward in our journey, face the obstacles which we come across in a Dharmic way and reach our goal.



Bhajan Workshop

The Participants

- » Dr. A Sunil (AS), Research Faculty, Dept. of Chemistry, SSSIHL.
- » Sri P Sujith Kumar (PSK), Teaching Assistant, Dept. of Biosciences, SSSIHL.
- » Sri Aswath Narayan S (ANS), Doctoral Research Scholar, Dept. of Biosciences, SSSIHL.
- » Sri Abishek H (AH), Asst. Professor, Dept. of Physics, SSSIHL.
- » Sri Abhinav Prakash Nair (APN), Doctoral Research Scholar, Dept. of Biosciences, SSSIHL.

Antaranga Sai Anathanath Sai
Deenbandhu Sai Karuna Sindhu Sai
Ram Krishna Shiva Shakti Prema Roopa Sai
Yugaavatar Baba Sri Sathya Sai

AH: There is a beautiful story behind this bhajan. If we know the story behind the bhajan, we can enjoy the bhajan much more. It was in the olden days, when Swami established the Arts, Science and Commerce College in Brindavan. Many boys joined but unfortunately one boy who was from a poor background developed the disease of leprosy because of which he had to be sent back home. His mother gets shocked finding him at home in place of being in the college and asks the reason. He says, “Mother, I have been diagnosed with leprosy and hence have been sent home and I have to discontinue my studies.” Then, the mother, with agony in her heart and tears in her eyes, prays in the altar of her heart and this bhajan springs forth. If we notice, there is not a single line in this bhajan where the devotee is asking for a favour or a cure from an ailment. This is the epitome of surrender of this mother because she doesn’t pray for a cure for the child. She just prays in surrender.

APN: It would be so wonderful if we knew the story behind each and every bhajan, then we could spontaneously connect to that bhajan and prevent our mind from wandering into some random thoughts.

Genesis of Bhajan singing

Let us start with how bhajans began, what Swami had to say about bhajans and what instructions did he give the singers. What was the genesis of bhajans?

ANS: This bhajan singing started when Swami was just 8-9 years old. He was the leader of the children in every field of activity. He formed what was known as the Pandhari Bhajan group. He inspired youngsters to sing the name of god. He used to go in a group with little children in the streets of Puttaparthi singing bhajans. At that time, the villages nearby were having cholera. All the villagers in Puttaparthi were fear-stricken thinking whether they would also be afflicted with this disease. To their astonishment, nobody in the village got cholera. All the villagers ascribed this to the strong divine vibrations emanating from the bhajans of these children. This small seed planted by Swami has grown into such a gigantic tree being an integral part of the life of Prasanthi Nilayam.

AH: Bhagawan also gives a scientific explanation of the bhajans. He says, "The vibrations of the bhajans reach the air and become part of the clouds which then gives us the rain."

PSK: Other than the normal bhajans sung every day, there were two more formats- the 24-hour format known as the akhanda bhajans and the 12-hour format during Shivaratri. In the early days, there were only three singers to sing the entire 24-hour bhajans. These three were Sri Krishnadas Errady, Sri Mohan Rao and Sri Raja Reddy. At one point of time, a doubt arose in the minds of one of the singers, "What would happen if our voice gets choked?" Swami answered this question, "There will come a time in future when my students will queue up to sing bhajans for me." This was when the university was not yet started.

AS: In the year 1981 when the university was established, college and hostel

was still under construction. The boys would stay in the building just in front of the (now) Sai Kulwant Hall known as old hostel. One day Bhagawan asked the students to put up a programmeme. The students prepared an instrumental violin programmeme and presented it to Swami after a bhajan session. Swami was immensely happy and allowed the students to sit just behind these veteran singers in bhajan hall. The boys used to follow with lot of sincerity and devotion. One day, Swami asked these boys to also lead these bhajans and from that day onwards, students started singing bhajans. After every bhajan session, Swami used to train the boys how to sing, how to put facial expression and so on.

ANS: Swami used to inspire older batch of students to compose bhajans. He used to come and ask the boys, “Any new bhajan is there today?”

APN: One more doubt which come to our mind is- Why should we sing aloud, why should we clap? Why can't we sing the bhajan within ourselves and feel Bhagawan within?

Why to Sing Bhajans Loudly with Clapping?

PSK: This is a very important question. We all feel why not sit back and enjoy the bhajan. Let us see what Bhagawan has to say about this:

Students! Let me take a small example. Our life is like a tree. On this tree of life, sometimes birds in the form of the six inner enemies (lust, anger, greed, attachment, vanity and jealousy) come and collect. This creates lot of agitation and pollution of mind. How to drive away these birds? When you clap and sing loudly, the birds will fly away. Similarly, in this tree of this body, if you sit in the heart and loudly sing Rama, Krishna and Govinda with claps, all these birds of bad qualities will fly away. If you do this all the three will get purified. What are the three? Purification of mind, speech and body- which in Vedanta is known as *trikarana shuddhi*. Many students feel, “What should I sing aloud, is it not alright if I sing within?” this is utter ignorance. Would you be happy by merely thinking that food is there in the kitchen? No, it has to be put in a plate and then you have to eat it then only your hunger is satiated. It is of no use if it is only in the mind. It has to come out as speech and then should enter through the ears. The one which comes out through

the mouth only go into the ears. You must partake such king of food. Some people while singing only move the lips. This is not at all correct. If a person has fallen into a well just murmurs that he has fallen in the well, no one will come and rescue him. But if he shouts at the top of his voice from the well that he has fallen in the well, all people around will come and save him. Hence, when you have fallen in this well of the heart, you have to sing aloud to come out of it. This is called *samyak keertanam* i.e. *samkeertanam*. Till you have voice you should sing these bhajans aloud. Why is this throat given? Is it for gossiping? There should be some limit to gossip but name of the Lord should be sung incessantly. Samkeerthanam should be done without any inhibitions with full spirit. Pronunciation should be correct like Rama should not be pronounced as Rooma. Hence bhajan should be sung loudly from the core of your heart with the correct pronunciation.

Is Raga and Tala also as important as Bhava?

ANS: Swami gives most emphasis on Bhava (feeling). But Raga (tune) and Tala (rhythm) are equally important because only then the music can move the Lord and all the participants. Let me narrate one incident as to how to follow. This happened during the 2009 Kodaikanal trip. Swami used to give darshan and during that time we used to sing bhajans as part of the Kodaikanal schedule. After the bhajan and a one-to-one interaction, we have a dining session with Bhagawan. Swami used to eat along with guests and students. Some students used to take up turns and serve the guests. One particular day, I was part of the serving team. Swami suddenly called me and asked me, "Who sang the chorus today? He sang with lot of apasruti (without proper tune)." While giving darshan, Swami was observing keenly the students who were singing in the following mike.

We can give an analogy regarding Raga, Bhava and Tala. If we are offering a garland to Swami then Bhava is the most important underlying thread, the flowers can be compared to the *ragam* and the knot as the *talam*. Many times Swami used to say Bh Ra Ta- Bharata i.e. Bhava, Raga, Tala.

How to sing when concentrating on all the three Bhava, Raga and Tala?

ANS: Each one has a unique and wonderful relationship with Bhagawan.

Swami has given some instructions in this regard. Practice the bhajan as many number of times as possible. He says that one should practice a bhajan at least 100 times before singing in a public place. When you practice 25 times, the lyrics and the tune sink into you. If you practice around 50 times, then you can sing the bhajan effortlessly. If you practice the bhajan 75 times, then you can converse with the Lord and can have darshan of the Lord. Swami used to say that Saint Tyagaraja used to not sing but converse with the Lord Rama. If the bhajan is practiced 100 times, then the singer and everyone seated in the audience will have the darshan of the Lord.

AS: I recall an incident in 2004. We used to reach mandir at around 3 p.m. and by that time Bhagawan would have finished darshans and would have gone inside to grant interviews. We should to utilize this time to practice from around 3.15 p.m. to 4.15 p.m. and go into the bhajan hall at 4.30 p.m. for the bhajans which were at 5 p.m. One day, Swami came in bhajan hall before us and sat in the throne. He asked us to slowly coming from behind and beckoned us to come front. As we went in front, He asked, “Why are you late?” We replied, “Swami we were practicing bhajans.” Swami was happy and said, “Good, practice is important.”

AH: It is not always possible to relate to a story behind a bhajan then how can we keep the same intensity and feeling while singing bhajans.

ANS: During a bhajan session, if one is able to attain a few moments of intense yearning and pining it serves the purpose of the bhajans. One should dwell upon the meaning of the bhajan. Let us consider a bhajan to understand this-

*Jaya Maa Anandamayi Janani
Sabko Krupa karo Janani*

In this bhajan, we are praying to the goddess to shower her mercy. Bhajan is sung for the welfare of the human being. Bhajan is a platform where you can pray for the wellbeing of others, to alleviate the suffering of others. With this feeling we can sing this bhajan. Bhajan is platform wherein anyone can participate right from a tiny tot to a grandfather.

PSK: Swami has always given emphasis on the right words. For example Rama Krishna Tum Ho, Jai Ram Jai Ram which we sing now was earlier sung as Rama Krishna Prabhu tu, Hey Ram Hey Ram. The singer while singing it earlier stressed on the word tu which sounded like thoo. Swami got annoyed and asked, “What are you singing thoo thoo thoo?” The whole bhajan was reframed as Rama Krishna Tum ho Jai Ram Jai Ram. Hence emphasis on right word is very important. There are few more examples where mistakes are committed in singing the correct words-

AS: Rama Krishna Hari Mukunda Murari, Panduranga Hari Panduranga Hari

While singing this bhajan the singers started giving stress on ‘Hari’ and it started sounding like ‘Haari’ which changes the meaning of the bhajans. To prevent this from happening the bhajan was rephrased as *Rama Krishna Hari Hari Mukunda Murari, Panduranga Hari Jai Jai Panduranga Hari Hari*.

One more bhajan with a mistake was the bhajan- *Har Shiv Shankar Bholenath Shirdipureeshwara Sainath, Ahibhushan Shiv Gaurinath*. In place of Ahibhushan meaning one adorned with snakes it was sung as *Khara dushan*-meaning two demons who appear in the Ramayana epic and are slayed by Lord Rama.

APN: There are a few mistakes which I encountered in some bhajans sung in Sai Samithis. For example, in the bhajan- Anjananada Veeram Ashokvana Sancharam, Vande Lanka Bhayankaram Seetashok Veenashakaram. While taking the bhajan from 2nd to 3rd speed, to get more tempo, they started singing the second line as Vande Lanka Bhayankaram, Bhyankaram Sai Bhayankaram. These lines mean that Bhagawan (Sai) is the most fearful one.

PSK: One more bhajan which I am reminded of- Jaya Nandalala Jaya Jaya Gopala, Mohana Murat Sai Gopal- The singer sings it as Mohan Murakh Sai Gopal. Murat means form whereas Murakh means fool, hence we can see what blunder is committed by changing the word a little bit.

It is always advisable to sing bhajans with knowledge of the lyrics.

Classification of Bhajans

Naam Sankeertan

PSK: It is about extolling the name of the Lord. For example:

*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare
Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*

This bhajan is about just singing the name of the Lord. Name of the Lord or *Namavali* as Swami says is like a lamp which is kept on the threshold. It illumines the inside and the outside. In the same way the name of the Lord illumines the heart of the singer and also sanctifies the surroundings. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu popularized this way of singing Lord's name.

Bhaav Sankeertana

ANS: This is a bhajan where the devotees pray to the Lord for His grace and mercy for love, strength, forgiveness. For example:

*Premamruth Barsao Baba, Daya Karo Bhagawan
Tumri Daya bin Kaisa jeevan, Rom-rom mein basanevale Ram
Janam maran se paar utaro, Day Karo Bhagawan Krupa karo Bhagawan*

I am reminded of an incident of a boy, Sai Krishna, a bhajan singer. His father came to Puttaparthi and got a heart attack. He was immediately rushed to our Super specialty hospital and by Bhagawan's Grace, he was out of danger. This boy went in the evening to sing bhajan and Swami called him and asked about the health of his father and gave an emphatic statement very casually, "*Vaadu bathakadame naa daya,*" meaning his being alive is only due to my compassion.

PSK: I am reminded of a beautiful incident here. In around 1999, we had put up a programme in the foyer of the Institute on bhajan singing and emphasized the importance of Raga (tune) and Tala (rhythm) in singing bhajans. Bhagawan asked for those of us who put up the programme and gave us a private audience. He then said, "You put a programme today in the college on music, have spoken everything on Raga and Tala but you didn't speak about my subject of Bhaava, i.e. feeling." Hence bhaava is very important. One more incident is regarding Raja Reddy garu, who was a veteran bhajan singer of yester years. Once when he was singing, Swami

stopped giving interviews in the interview room, came out and remarked, “Why do you sing so beautifully?”

ANS: A very old devotee of Swami who used to sing bhajans and also has composed many bhajans; whenever she used to sing the bhajan, ‘Shyam murari aayo re, Sai Murari aayo re’ Swami used to get down the steps and come saying- I am coming, I am coming.

Guna Sankeertanam

This type of *sankeertanam* praises the attributes of the Lord. For example:

Hey deenadayalu hare hare, Sri Raam hare hare

Hey Bandha vimochana Rama hare

Hey Rajeev lochan rama hare

Sri Rama hare hare

This extolls the attributes of the Lord like you are the most compassionate Lord, you remove the bondages of your devotees.

There are two singer brothers by name Rama and Lakshmana who had the good fortune to sing before Swami. Once Swami allowed them to sing in a summer course in Brindavan. Unfortunately, one of the brothers was down with typhoid. In utter dejection the second brother composed a bhajan (*Daya karo bhagawan Kripa karo bhagawan*) and sang and Swami was very happy. He created vibhuti and sent it to the brother suffering from typhoid. Within two days the brother recovered and they attend the Summer Course and went back home happy. There, they composed a beautiful bhajan extolling the attributes of the mother aspect of Bhagawan.

Mangala karini Jai Sai Ma

Jai Sai Maa Jai Sai Maa

Bhagya pradayini Sai Maa

Bhavabhaya harini Sai Maa

Tribhuvana palini Jai Sai Maa

Mata maheshwari Sai Maa

Leela Sankeertanam

ANS: There are no bhajans in this category but I will narrate two incidents where Bhagawan's grace was showered on a devotee through the medium of Bhajan. The first incident happened in Bengaluru during akhanda bhajan. Swami was staying at Dr. Padmanabhan's house. There was one devotee who had a skin disease with white patches all over the body. He was praying to Swami to cure him of this disease. Swami came for darshan, and retired without apparently paying heed to this devotee's prayers. At midnight when the bhajans were going on at a rapid pace, Swami comes out of His room and calls out for Dr. Padmanabhan and says, "We have rush to the place where akhanda bhajan is going on." Dr. Padmanabhan requests Swami, "It is raining now and it is midnight, can we go tomorrow morning?" Swami replies sternly, "We have to go now only." When Swami reaches the venue of akhanda bhajan, this devotee with leucoderma was lost in singing the bhajan- *Darsh dekhivo mera Sai Nandalala, Daya karo mujhpe Krishna Gopala.*

As soon as he finishes singing this bhajan, Swami stands right in front of him. This devotee opens his eyes and sees Swami. Swami puts His divine hand upon this devotee's head and instantaneously the leucoderma vanishes. The second leela is regarding the bhajan Govind Krishna Vitthale Venu Gopal Krishna Vitthale. This happened when Swami visited Madurai. Swami approached one particular boy in a village who is blind and physically paralyzed. Swami goes near him and starts singing this bhajan. When Bhagawan sings the first line- *Govind Krishna Vitthale, Venu gopal Krishna Vitthale* this boy gets back his eyesight. Swami sings the second line- *Ranga Ranga Vitthale, Sri Panduranga Vitthale* and this boy gets back his legs.

Let us listen to a discourse of Swami on bhajans:

We should not waste even a minute. Time is God, time waste is life waste, don't waste time. Boys and girls today waste their time a lot. They waste time in indulging in vain gossip. They don't sanctify time by speaking good words. What are these games, songs which they indulge in? If you go and look in the outside world, it is so difficult. It is only in Prasanthi Nilayam that you sanctify your time by bhajans, singing and chant glory of god like Rama, Krishna and Govinda. In the outside world no one knows about these bhajans. They sing meaningless songs like *chal chal re naujawan, chod de re*

mere kaan. Is there any meaning in this song? They also try to sing rhythmic songs without any meaning like da da da dadada da da da... what is this da da da? You know why this tongue is given- it is to sing the glory of god. We misuse this tongue. Hence every student should have a check on his talk. We have to sing such divine songs which give bliss to others, melts their hearts and make them forget themselves. When once you start singing God's name, whether he is a theist, an atheist, a theistic atheist or atheistic theist, he will start nodding his head.

The workshop ended with Bhagawan Baba singing the bhajan *Narayana bhaj Narayana...*



Message of Vedas for Practical Daily Living

Dr. Sekhar Boddupalli

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*Sadasatsvarupam cidananda kandanam, Jagatsambhavasthana sambarabetum
Svabhaktechayamanusam darsayanam, Namamisvaram sadgurum sainatham*

This *sloka* was composed by Upasani Baba in praise of Lord Sainath. I salute Lord Sainath, the great preceptor who is the personification of Truth, Awareness and Bliss. He is the great cause for the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe. He has taken the human form to fulfill the aspirations of His devotees.

It is very important to connect to this *sloka* in today's context. We have to understand what 'Baba' really means. BABA is Being Awareness Bliss Absolute. The English words- Indian Culture and Spirituality actually do not do justice to the words *Bharatiya Samskruti Adhyatmikata*. Bharatiya doesn't mean Indian. India is derived due to the geographical context of people living on the other side of river Indus. Similarly, when the Persians came to India through Pakistan, they called the people on the other side of Sindhu as Hindu. Due to geography we were called Indians and due to the practices we did on the other side of Sindhu it was called Hinduism. Bharatiya doesn't have any context of being Indian. Rata means love and the ones who love supreme effulgence 'Bha'- Bhagawan is a Bharatiya. When this love for God is practiced together in a community then it became a *Samskruti*- which means doing something together *samyak krutam*.

Once when I asked Bhagawan about teaching Vedas in California, Swami said, "Teach and explain the meaning well so that all understand." I told Swami, "I don't know Sanskrit." He frowned at me asked, "What is Sanskrit?" I apologized and said, "Swami, I don't know *Samskrutam*." Swami rejoined,

“Is it some language?” I kept quiet and was waiting for a profound statement from Him. He said, “It is not a language, it is *samyak krutam*, i.e. doing something together. It is not language but action.” I asked Swami, “What is Veda?” Swami said Veda- Deva five times and asked, “Who is God, where is God?” Then He said, “Until you know, it is Deva, after you know it is Veda.” Then He asked, “What is it that we should know? What is the sphere of knowledge that we are talking about?” Swami had said that Vedas are for everyone independent of caste, creed community and religion. It was His wish that everyone should chant the Vedas. He prescribed it to 145 countries. Why would He push these Vedas on His devotees who have not even heard about it? What is this *Vedodharana* and why did He come to do this *Vedodharana*?

We think that Vedas are some books and scriptures which we have to chant and get sanctified. The etymological origin of the word Veda is the root *Vid*. *Vid* means knowledge and awareness. Connecting to this awareness of knowledge is Vedas. As I am a scientist by training, I started analyzing it. When we connect to what these words are and what they really mean beyond our prejudice, judgement and training to hear what we have been brainwashed from childhood, the word will actually speak to you. It is said: first you chant the mantra, then the mantra chants the mantra and finally the mantra chants you.

There is a perceptual knowledge, then there is an instinctive knowledge built within us. Swami Vivekananda explains in Jnana Yoga- A chic who has come out of an egg and hardly opened its eyes, when hears the wings of an eagle flying above, quickly rushes and hides under the wings of its mother. How did this instinct of fear already get programmed into this chic that has never seen the eagle before? This is due to the instinctive knowledge. There is a third kind of knowledge beyond mind and intellect. If you get tutored from inside, then you get intuition because you are constantly intuiting. The question is that have we surrendered to that something inside and are we ready to be tutored.

Ramayana means Rama- ayana i.e. the path of Rama. What is this path of Rama? Once I was invited to Toronto to have a *satsang*. I generally don't prepare myself for any *satsangs* as this is just a microphone and the speaker

is inside. When I asked Swami within what should I speak, He said, “Speak about *Sri Rama Charanam bhaje*.” I was perplexed as I didn’t know what to talk about this though I have sung it zillion number of times. It didn’t occur to me that He was trying to give a profound message of Ramayana to me through this bhajan.

We have to think- what is the message for me from a bhajan and how it can take me to the next step of my journey towards divinity. I started singing the bhajan to an audience of around 400 people. Nothing happened as I was not connected to the bhajan. All enjoyed and followed the bhajan but no connectivity hence nothing happened. I sang it the second time and the third time still nothing happened. They started wondering, why we have called this person for a talk- he is just singing the same bhajan. Suddenly it clicked and Bhagawan started opening the meaning word by word as to how this bhajan helps me become a better person. If a group of people *jana* are present in light *Bha* then it is Bhajan. If the person who is singing this bhajan is not illumined by the bhajan then it is just an individual offering and not a collective light that has shined through the mass that is present.

Rama means *Ramayate iti Ramaha*, i.e. the one which attracts is Rama. The one which attracts by its property is a magnet. Rama is that magnet within me which has to attract that which is wavering, going all over the world, i.e. my mind. Hence this mind which is fickle has to get attracted to Rama the magnet. How this mind will get attracted to Rama is being described by this bhajan.

The next line of this bhajan is *Vaidehi Ramam Vaikuntha Ramam* which means that Rama who has mother Sita (*Vaidehi*) as His consort and whose abode is Vaikuntha. But how do I get elevated by this description, how these words will help me to connect to the magnet? Bhagawan started speaking through me and said, “Focus on the *dehi* the indweller and not on the *deha* the body.” When the mind is focused on the deha it becomes fickle as it is carried by the senses. If you concentrate on the dehi and question who is this dehi then you become ‘Why dehi’ i.e. *Vaidehi*. Vaikuntha Ramam- Vaikuntha doesn’t mean ocean of milk where the gods are present. Kuntha means constriction and Vaikuntha means no constriction. Hence Vaikuntha means a mind without any constriction. Once you go beyond the mind and concentrate on

the indweller- *debi* then you find the next line of the bhajan- *bhoopala chooda mani*, i.e. the diamond or the die-mind as Swami puts it. Then you will be able to find the Atmarama in the lotus of your heart who is none other than Prabhu Sai Rama. Walk the footsteps of Rama- the magnet inside you.

We talk about Ramayana but there is one more word which is close to Ramayana, i.e. Narayana. When we were learning Narayansuktam, around eight-ten years ago, Bhagawan asked me in a dream, “You are chanting Narayanasuktam, who is Narayana?” I said, “Swami, Narayana is a blue person sleeping on a snake coil in a milk ocean with a rich woman pressing his feet.” Swami, hearing this frowned at me and said, “*Dunnapota*, this is what you understand. If you tell this to a person who is a non-Hindu, what interest he will have in learning Narayanasuktam.” Swami added, “These words don’t have a meaning the way you think it as. You are programmed to think about these deities like this.” *Nara* means human *ayana* means path; hence it is the path of human being. Ganapati doesn’t mean a boy with an elephant head, a big belly and a laddoo in his hand. Gana means senses and *pati* mean Lord of the senses. The one who rules over the senses which are the obstacles for carrying out god’s work in full love is Ganapati. If you worship him, he will take you beyond the senses so that his work will go on without any obstacles.

When the knowledge acquired by you is restricted to the senses, it is very limited because the tools are limited you can see only through the eyes and hear only through the ears. But one that is actually seeing and yet remains unseen how to see that? We can’t see that with these eyes. Therefore the senses have to be transcended. Vedas have given the knowledge as to how to connect to that which is beyond the perceptual and instinctive knowledge. Narayana Suktam gives us the exact path how to reach Narayana which even Google maps can’t give us.

*adho nistayā vitasyānte nābhyāmupari tisthati,
jvālamālākulam bhāti viśvasyātanam mahat.*

Below the Adam’s apple, at a distance of a span, and above the navel (i.e., the heart which is the relative seat of the manifestation of Pure Consciousness

in the human being), effulges the Great Abode of the universe, as if adorned with garlands of flames.

*santatagum śilābhistu lambatyākośasannibham
tasyānte susiragī sūksmām tasmin sarvam pratishhitam*

Surrounded on all sides by nerve-currents (or arteries), the lotus-bud of the heart is suspended in an inverted position. In it is a subtle space (a narrow aperture, the *sushumna-nadi*), and therein is to be found the substratum of all things.

*tasya madhye mahanagnirviśvārcirviśvatomukhabh
so'grabhug vibhajan tisthan āhāramajarah kavib*

In that space within the heart resides the Great Flaming Fire, un-decaying, all-knowing, with tongues spread out in all directions, with faces turned everywhere, consuming all food presented before it, and assimilating it into itself.

Hence none of the Narayanasuktam is talking about the blue complexioned person, sleeping on a snake coil. It is describing as to how to connect to that which is already within you. Once you connect to that, you have connected to everything.

The message of the Vedas is not about the name and the form alone but much deeper than that. We have got stuck to the name and the form and are not able to see beyond that. Ramakrishna Paramahansa explains this metaphorically- When a mother has to show a twinkling star to her child she can't just ask the child to look at the star as there are zillions of stars in the sky. There is no way the son can focus on the star which the mother is trying to point to. Therefore the mother says, "Son! See this window of our bedroom, outside the room there is this mango tree. Hanging right on our window there is this mango and at the tip of the mango do you see a star." The son looks at the star and exclaims that it is beautiful. Once the son sees the star, neither he sees the window nor the tree nor the mango. Everything disappears and only the star is seen. Everything else was contextual about the window, the tree, the mango. None of them have any relevance at all. In the

same way, when we are given the names and forms of these gods, they are only for initial focus like the window, tree and the mango. We have got stuck there and have actually not seen the star.

When we go deeper into the words like Narayana, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati and Saieshwara; are these words limited to the forms? If they are limited to the forms, then they are not relevant to anybody else other than 1.3 billion people who are called Hindus. But the truth is that they are not limited, we have limited them. We have to go beyond the name and form. When the spirit and the ritual combine together then we get spiritual. We have got stuck in the ritual and can't see the spirit or we totally ignore the ritual and hang on to the spirit; both of them are imbalances. We need both the ritual and the spirit to become spiritual. Some people say that rituals are not needed, Swami never endorsed rituals. This is not correct. Swami always emphasized that go beyond the ritual and connect to the spirit and take ourselves to higher level.

Dukhena gatum shakhate iti durga

That energy that stops you from falling into misery is Durga. The misery are all the vices which a man falls into. Durga is such a power and energy which takes you beyond the obstacles of doubt, attachment and everything that is stifling you and expands your consciousness. When I was studying Durga Suktam, Swami gave me a beautiful vision. I thought that Durga Suktam is about mother Durga but when I actually saw it only one mantra is about Durga, rest of it is about Agni- Jatveda. I didn't understand why the entire suktam which was about Agni was named as Durga Suktam. It talks about the different obstacles which will come in this birth and how to transcend them. But I never understood why this fire god is associated with this Durga Suktam. Swami once told me, "If you have any question about anything, don't get confused by reading books, just surrender yourself at my lotus feet, I will explain to you actually what it means."

He gave me a beautiful metaphor. There is a room where something which you really want is there but there is no light in that room, there are no windows and it is completely dark. This dark room has lot of furniture in it and you have a very short time and need this thing urgently. What is needed to find this thing in the room? It is light. If you have light, then all the things in the

dark room will become visible. If you see that the furniture is unorganized in the room, what will you do? Will you start organizing the furniture in the room or will you pick up the thing you are searching for and come out? Let us apply this metaphor to our birth. Swami will say, "I gave you this birth in the samsara. I gave you this human birth out of 8.4 million species and gave the light of intellect. I sent you to this world which is full of darkness but what are you doing? In place of finding yourself which is me, you start organizing your samsara- your education, family, job, salary, pension, etc." Durga suktam tells us the purpose of our life and how to come over the obstacles we face in this journey to find that which we are destined to find.

I always thought that Sri Suktam was about money. I thought that we have to invoke Goddess Lakshmi to get wealth. I was studying the second mantra-

*Taam Ma Aavaha Jaatavedo Lakshmiim-Anapagaaminiim
Yasyaam Hirannyam Vindeyam Gaam-Ashvam Purusaa-Aham*

This is the second mantra in Sri Suktam which literally means O! Jataveda please bring goddess Lakshmi in front of me and make sure she is stable so that I can get cows, horses, gold and people. This meaning stuck me. If Jataveda brings this goddess Lakshmi and she in turn gives me 1500 cows, what will I do, I am living in a one bedroom apartment? Then I thought this mantra was at a time when people used cows and horses as wealth and hence this mantra was applicable to those people who chanted it in olden times when cows and horses were the wealth. Then I told Swami, "Why should I chant a mantra now, which was relevant to people who lived 15,000 years ago? How can you call these Vedic mantras eternal and timeless which are applicable to any human being at any point of time?" Swami gave me a reply from within, "Lakshmi is not wealth. *Lakshyam samakurchedi Lakshmi-* the one which gives you a target and a goal is Lakshmi." The target has to be fixed for you to reach it. It can't move all the time. In order to reach the target, you need light to see the path, therefore we are asking the fire god to be present so that we can see the target of our life.

There are four means to reach the target which are the four purusharthas. The one which walks on four legs cow is *dharma*, gold is the material wealth *artha*, horse is the constantly moving mind or *kama* and *purusha* is the ultimate

destination *moksha*. Hence this mantra has nothing to do with the Lakshmi which I was thinking, it has taken a completely different relevance. Now this mantra has become a timeless mantra. Which human being will disagree that they have a target to reach, which has to be stable and the means and the path to reach this target is Narayana? The one who helps you to go on that target is Narayani. The one who is enabling all this through potential and kinetic energies is Shiva.

The Vedas are describing the path and the different means to attain the path. The vedas are giving us a way of life as to how to connect to that by knowing which you shall know everything beyond the boundaries of your senses, intellect and your instincts. The awareness of the cosmos is called Vedas. It is neither a book nor a scripture, it is *vid* – knowledge and awareness of the entire cosmos. Which being can comprehend the awareness of the entire cosmos where as in truth we can't comprehend our own self-awareness? Therefore, it is said Vedas are incomprehensible. Vedavyasa out of his compassion took this awareness of this consciousness of this cosmos and categorized into three different parts of Rig, Yajur and Sam Vedas.

If you consider the whole consciousness as a huge ball then Rig, Yajur and Sama are different layers. The Yajurveda is the central portion of this consciousness of the ball. In the centre of this Yajurveda is Rudraprashna. In the centre of this Rudraprashna is the anuvaka known as Namah Somaya cha. In the centre of this anuvaka is the Namaha Shivaya cha Shivataraya cha. At the centre of that mantra is Shiva. Shiva means male, female; potential energy, kinetic energy. That energy when it is doing action is called Shakti and that energy when not manifested is called Shiva. This Shiva is the core of the awareness of the entire universe. When you are connected to the center of this consciousness you are not affected by the force of anything around you. Hence Bhagawan has emphasized that we have to chant Sri Rudram because when you connect to the centre of the universe you are connected to the changeless in the changing. What is changing is the body and the mind and what is not changing is SAI- Same As I. When I know who I am I have known SAI the indweller. All the different Gayatri Mantras have three things in common. First one is *Vidmabe*, second one is *Dheemahi* and third one is *Prachodayat*.

Swami prompted me the answer to these three words in as - *Telusuko, Nilupuko, Panchuko* i.e. know, meditate and expand. Let us contemplate on Sai Gayatri. What is it that I need to know, what is it that I need to contemplate and what is it that I need to share? Sai Gayatri is a phenomenal Gayatri which tells you what to know, what to retain and what to share.

Sayeeshwaraya Vidmahe- Now I know Saishwara i.e. SAI which means Same As I.

Sathya Devaya Dheemahi- I am meditating on the truth which is nothing but SAI- Same As I.

Tanna Sarva Prachodyat- Now I have expanded that being to every single being around me. This is the manifestation of Sai Gayatri for me in my meditation.

SAI BABA- SAI is a way of living. S is bend the body i.e. Service, A is mend the senses, i.e. Adoration and I is end the mind, i.e. illumination. This is a way of life; it is not the name of a person anymore. SAI is the conglomeration of Service which is Karma, Adoration which is Bhakti and Illumination which is Jnana. Hanuman was an epitome of these three facets.

*Deha-buddhya tu dasoham,
jiva-buddhya tvadamshoham,
atma-buddhya tvamevoham*

Hanuman tells mother Sita, when I am the body I am a servant of Lord Rama, when I think I am the mind, I am His reflection and in spirit He and I are one. When you start doing SAI in your life, you will start to put apart I and reach the inner peace which is Prasanthi Nilayam which is Putt-aparth-I i.e. Puttaparthi. Once in Puttaparthi, you will have darshan of BABA i.e. Being Awareness Bliss Absolute and you have reached your destination.

Sai Baba is not a 5ft. 3in. afro-haired Indian person but a way of life and being and becoming Same As I or SAI. Do we have to really concentrate on the bodies anymore and give them several names? Are the bodies important to become the no-body?

Once in one *satsang* one elderly gentleman shared with me, “Sir, nobody in this world is happy. Why is that?” I replied, “Sir, you made a beautiful statement, you have told a supreme truth.” He was confused. I asked him to repeat his statement. He repeated it twice. I told him, “Isn’t it true that if you are somebody you will always be unhappy and if you are nobody, you are always happy.” Once you become the nobody, the nothing there are no boundaries around you.

Narayanaya Vidhmabe- Now I know the path

Vasudevaya Dheemahi- I meditate on the being who is present in everyone.

Tanno Vishnu Prachodyat- Then I expand like the all-pervading Vishnu- the consciousness.

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba took this avatar due to the prayers of sages and seers to establish a way of life in the awareness of Same As I, So Am I- SAI. Let us be on the path, let us connect to the indweller who is present within us. Let us expand this consciousness and not limit Him to only one religion, one faith or one denomination. Let us not give spoke to the criticism that Vedas belong to only one religion. VEDA the four lettered word means- Values, Educare, Devotion and Action.



The Essence of Bharatiya Culture

Sri Sanjay Sahni

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The Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality is an occasion for the students and teachers of Bhagawan's educational institutions to gather at His lotus feet and experience His love and grace. The Summer Course brings us many memories and I will share a few of them. My first darshan of Bhagawan was during Summer Course of 1978. I was a student of Class 8 and we were on a South India tour during our vacation which culminated in Bangalore in the month of May. This gave us a chance to visit Brindavan and have Bhagawan's darshan. Our visit coincided with the Summer Course of 1978.

One vivid memory of that Summer Course goes something like this. Swami would go to the college auditorium, address all the students and teachers. Devotees also had a chance but they would be outside the hall. Brindavan has two types of showers in summers. One is the divine discourses of Bhagawan and the second being the rains in Brindavan in the month of May. One evening when we were seated outside and the students were sitting inside, it started raining and in no time it became a downpour. All of us got up but as Bhagawan was in the auditorium, we didn't want to go away and instinctively moved towards the wall of the auditorium to protect ourselves from the rain. As we came near the wall, we started peeping through the window and saw Bhagawan on the stage giving discourse. He also saw us and something unexpected happened. He stopped His discourse; we didn't know why. The side gate opened, a volunteer and said that Swami is calling us inside. From nowhere, we were catapulted to a place right in front of Bhagawan. That memory remains evergreen in my mind and reflects how for Bhagawan not only those seated in the hall were near and dear to Him, but also those who were not in the hall and were in distress were equally near and dear to Him. That was the catholicity of Bhagawan's love.

Last year, we were arriving for the Summer Course in Prasanthi Nilayam and

our bus was little late for the evening *Aarati*. Students were streaming out of mandir and in each student's hand I found a mango. Seeing the mango, I thought to myself, "If only we could have come ten minutes earlier, we would have also got the mango prasadam. The mango prasadam was very special for us. The first mango of the season we would get from Bhagawan's own hands and every Summer Course. Lunch and dinner, we would get a mango. So, mango, Swami, Summer Course and us had a very intimate connection. I went to my room, kept my luggage, went to the mandir, took *namaskar* and went to the North Indian Canteen for dinner. I took whatever items I wanted and went to take butter milk which is usually kept on a separate table. To my utter amazement I found that there was no butter milk that day but instead there was mango juice. Ever since, north Indian Canteen started operations, I have been having food there, never ever in their menu, we had mango juice. I felt Bhagawan was telling me, "See, you were thinking of mango, I have kept mango juice for you." That is the love of Bhagawan which we have experienced therefore Summer Course brings to our mind very fond memories.

Today, I will speak on the essence of Bharatiya culture. Who is a Bharatiya and what it is to be a Bharatiya? Bharat is made up of two words- 'Bha' and 'Rati'. 'Bha' stands for Bhagawan and 'Rati' means to be in love with. So, Bharat is a land of people who are in love with God. In that sense, Bharat is not a geographic entity. Bharat is a feeling of God-centeredness in life. When we were students, I used to hear Bhagawan pun on many words and one such word which He will pun on was communist. If you take the history of 20th century, the concern of world leaders was the wave of communism sweeping country after country. In such a scenario when people would express their concern to Bhagawan, Swami would say, 'Communist: come-u-next'. We never used to understand as USSR was a country which was spreading its influence all over but Swami told Communist means 'Come-u-next'. It was divine will that one day this country broke up and the people of this country were able to express their love for God. I still recall, it was a Shivaratri evening, Bhagawan was giving a discourse and He said, "There are so many devotees who have come for my darshan from Russia and they are all seated here." In response, thousands of devotees from Russia, both gents and ladies took their kerchiefs and started waving at Swami. It was a wonderful sight with all the multicoloured kerchiefs waving in the chandelier light. Then I understood

what He meant by come-u-next.

In the materialistic world, there are still people who say, “Does God exist?” the greatest proof that God does exist is the avatar. The Avatar comes not for *Pradarshan* but for *Nidarshan*. He doesn't come to exhibit. There is nothing in the cosmos which doesn't run according to His will. Whether we accept or not, whatever we are and whatever we do is because of His will.

Once a professor shared this incident with us in Trayee Brindavan in presence of Bhagawan. The professor narrated- Swami called a few students for an interview and told one boy to stand up. He stood up. Then He asked the boy to raise his right hand and then put it down which he did. Then Swami asked him to raise his left hand and put it down which he did. Swami then asked the boy to raise both his hands and then put them down. Then Bhagawan told him to raise his right hand again. This boy who was moving his hands so freely was not able to move his right hand even by a millimeter. If God does that this individual should become immobile, this moment this voice will halt and yet running this whole creation- the sun and the moon, you and me, He has not expectation whatsoever that man should love Him.

Once four of us were sitting at His lotus feet just before Dasara and Swami asked, “What are you going to speak this time for Dasara?” One brother replied, “I want to speak that we should express our gratitude to you.” The moment this boy expressed this sentiment, Swami said, “That is not for me to tell you whether you should do it or not. If you want you can do it, if you don't want you need not express your gratitude as well.” Look at divinity which showers all grace on us yet doesn't expect anything from anyone of us. It is the fortune of a Bharatiya that he is brought up in an environment where God is the centre of everything and he learns from a young age to love God.

I am reminded of an episode which I shared in this very hall two decades ago. Ramanavami festival was nearing and I was sitting at Bhagawan's lotus feet. Swami told me to speak on the occasion of Ramanavami. I took this opportunity and asked Swami, “What should I speak on?” He thought for a few seconds and said, “Speak about the importance of darshan.” I searched and ransacked Sai literature to find out what Swami has spoken about darshan. I came across these beautiful lines- *Darshanam papanashanam, sparshanam*

karmavimochanam, sambhashanam sankata nashanam. These three lines were the content of my talk that evening. In course of explaining *darshanam* I quoted the Chinna Katha of Swami from Ramayana which goes like this: Surpanakha has been humiliated by Lakshmana and goes and complains to Khara Dushana. They come in a strength of 14,000 and all are decimated by Rama. Finally, she goes to Ravana's court and complains, "Brother, this is what Rama and Lakshmana have done to me." Her nose is bleeding and her ears are cut. Ravana says, "Sister, don't worry, I will avenge the insult that has been meted out to you. But I have a curiosity- three shots are needed to cut the nose and the ears you are a powerful demoness, how come they did this to you and you didn't react?" Surpanakha tells, "Ravana, you have not seen Sri Rama. The most enchanting form that you can see with your eyes is Sri Rama. When I was beholding the beautiful form of Sri Rama, I lost body consciousness. When my body was in that condition, they did all this to me." This was what the demons felt when the lord incarnated. In Kali Yuga, when people were seeing the lord and they felt or experienced nothing, are we to assume that the humans in Kali age have degraded themselves below the level of demons of Treta Yuga. This is a thought which we need to ponder about.

When Jesus resurrected from the cross, he gave darshan to a few disciples, Thomas was not there. Thomas says that he doesn't believe that other disciples have seen Jesus. In the next few days, Jesus manifested in front of Thomas and other brother disciples. In that situation, Thomas asks Jesus, "Master, will you permit me to come and touch your wounds." The master said, "You are permitted to do whatever you like." Thomas comes close and puts his hand on the wounds which have been made by the soldiers. He found that Jesus was present in flesh and blood. Thomas made a statement, "I believe, master, I believe." Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are you who have seen and believed but even more blessed are those who have not and yet believed."

When the avatar walks on earth, it is an opportunity for every soul on earth to come to the lotus feet, to see and test every individual concept of God to find out if it is in compliance with the avatar of the age. But once we accept Him, to doubt is not the way of the path of love. When we say that Bharatiyas love God, their love for God is always constant. It is not dependent on what God can do for me or didn't do for me. Avatar comes to prove to us that not

only God is there but He has always been there. It is not that He was there at one point of time, today He is not there and tomorrow again He will be there. We can't talk about God in these terms. God was, God is and God will forever be. This is the belief of Bharatiyas. When we live in that conviction, He gives us that experience.

Three days ago, we were in Brindavan. There was one student, who was sick with stomach infection. He was not able to drink any liquid and whatever medicine the doctor was giving was also coming out. That evening, as I was passing his room, his roommate told me that this boy wants to come for Bhajan today to the bhajan hall. When I went into the room, this boy told me that he wants to attend the bhajan. I told other boys in the room to open all the windows so that he can hear the bhajan as the prayer hall was adjacent to his room. I told him to sit in the room and listen to the bhajan but not come out and strain himself. I put one more student next to him for company and went for bhajans. The moment bhajan was over, I student came running to me and said that vibhuti has manifested in that room. As this boy was not permitted to enter the dining hall where the bhajan was going on, this boy took an ordinary plastic chair, kept it in the room and put a sitting mat as foot rest to Swami as the floor was cold. He took an accordion and he and the other boy were singing bhajans to their heart's glory. In the middle of the bhajan, to their utter amazement they found vibhuti manifesting right in front of their eyes on the chair and on the sitting mat. When you live with the feeling that God is always there with you, He has amazing ways to connect with us.

It was 23 November 2014. Sai Kulwant hall was jam packed and we were sitting in the Hall where usually the teachers sit in front of a particular pillar. I got a thought, "Swami, we have come for your birthday celebrations but where is the birthday boy." It was a flash of a thought and I forgot about it. The governor of Karnataka spoke to us on that day and his thoughts enthused us a lot. There was a meeting scheduled in the Institute and I was particular to have namaskar and then only go for the meeting. It took some time and I started walking. As I was walking out, I had swami's prasadam in my hand which was *motichoor ladoo*. I was avoiding sweets of late so I thought I will give it to someone else. I found a student of ours and put it in his hand. I went off to the meeting and it was a very busy day. That evening I met this

student and he told his part of the story. This boy was not able to tell me that he doesn't like this particular sweet. He was wondering what to do with this sweet when a gentleman comes and asks him, "Can you give me a prasadam, I didn't get prasadam?" The boy took the prasadam and put it in the palms of this gentleman just in front of the same pillar. This gentleman looked at the boy and smiled. The next moment this man dematerialized into thin air. This boy was fear stricken when he narrated this incident to me and said, "I have seen a ghost today." I replied, "My dear, in the whole of Prasanthi Nilayam there is only one person who has the capacity and the willingness to play such pranks with us and His name is Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba." The moment I told him, his fear changed into ecstasy, excitement, sadness, sorrow. He said, "Swami can't do like this, if He comes in a form like this how will I recognize? I had so many questions to ask Him, I was not able to ask Him anything." I replied, "You can't choose how Swami is going to bless you. You can't put terms and conditions on Bhagawan, He has blessed you, be happy."

That night when I went to the room and started contemplating about what happened to this boy, it struck me that the same morning I was thinking to myself, "Swami, today is your birthday, where is the birthday boy." This is the feeling which I got as if Swami is telling me, "Where is the birthday boy, just next to you? You gave the *ladoo* to him, I came and took the *ladoo* from Him." This is the Swami that we know and experience.

Are we real Bharatiyas? To be a Bharatiya is to fall in love with God and to lead a life which is God-centric. What is the essence of Bharatiya culture? Many people can define it in many ways but how did Bhagawan define the essence of Bharatiya culture? He once told us, "The essence of Bharatiya culture is to experience unity in diversity." If you look at the divine family of Lord Shiva, it is a family of contrasts and contradictions." Mother Parvati's *vahana* is the lion which is the arch-enemy of Lord Shiva's *vahana* which is Nandi the bull. Ganesha's *vahana* is the rat which is the arch-enemy of the serpent which is the necklace on Shiva's neck. The *vahana* of Subramanya is the peacock which is the arch-enemy of the serpent. On Shiva's matted hair we have the Ganges and in the centre of his brow is the Agni. It is a family of total contrasts but is a happy, peaceful and harmonious family. What is the secret? They all have this experience that this is a divine family. The moment you identify with divinity, there is no division, it is only unity.

In the early nineties, a terrible scam hit the Indian financial markets. Everyday newspapers would scream about the scam and there was lot of confusion. I recall, that under the inspiration of one of our professors, the final year undergraduate students came up with a programme trying to demystify scam and like every student programme, they wanted to invite Swami also. This was the beauty of students' and Swami's relationship; it was never felt that we are different and He is different. They came to mandir and invited Swami for the presentation which was to be put up in the Thursday moral class. Swami didn't come that day, but the elders and authorities of the university witnessed it. One of them went and told Swami, "Swami, if MBA students had put up this programme it was understandable but final year B.Com. students putting up a programme of this nature is amazing."

When Swami heard that, He said, "Is it like that, then I also want to see the programme." Though all of us had seen the programme the following Sunday, a special screening of the presentation was organized in the college auditorium and even our students of the high school were also present. After the presentation was over, the senior students and also the junior students from the school requested them to give a copy of the presentation as they all liked it a lot. In the evening, the boys presenting the programme were seated in mandir. Swami came up to them and said, "I don't want you all to even think of that man." The boys thought that Swami didn't like the programme. Sometime later, one of the boys got a chance to have a private audience with Bhagawan and in the interview room, this boy took courage and said, "Swami, you didn't like our programme that day, isn't it?" Swami replied, "It is not like that. All twenty-eight of you of the class unitedly worked for the programme and made the presentation. That unity which you exhibited had brought Me then to see the programme." Everybody was wondering, why the Lord of the universe is interested in a financial market scam till Swami revealed that His interest was not the programme but the unity with which the students worked for the programme. Hence Unity is divinity.

To love the Lord is to love His way of life and the path which He came to show, which is that of Dharma. Every avatar comes for the establishment of Dharma in age after age- *Dharma samsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge.*

What is the dharma of man? The nature of fire is to burn; the nature of salt

is to be salty. If sugar were to lose its sweetness; it can't be sugar. It is their dharma. In the same way, what is the dharma of man? The dharma of man is to have unity in thought, word and deed- *trikarana suddhi*. If you have the *trikarana suddhi*, you are on the path of dharma, if you don't have, you have deviated from the path of dharma. This path of dharma is exhibited by every avatar. For example, when Sri Rama was getting married the priest was chanting mantras and was asking Sri Rama to repeat after him. There comes a mantra where in dharma, artha, kama and moksha both will be together. At that critical juncture, Sri Rama became silent and He is not willing to chant. Swami explained why he did this, "He knew that being the prince of the land, he may become the king and once he becomes the king, if ever there is a conflict of interest between his duty as a king and his duty towards his wife, his duty as a king will supersede this duty towards his wife." Hence anticipating such a situation where he might send Sita to the forest, he didn't take that vow. That is why we say that Rama was a man of one word.

That kind of integrity, we saw in Bhagawan Himself. Once the Italian Prime Minister came to Prasanthi Nilayam for his sixtieth birthday. He landed here in the Hill View Stadium before even going to Delhi to meet the Prime Minister of India. Swami sent us to the stadium to give him a grand welcome. We held roses in our hands, folded our hands when his convoy passed by extended a warm welcome. In a private audience with Swami, he got sixty gold coins to offer it to Swami. Swami was not interested in this and asked him a simple question, "Have you declared it to the Government?" In those days, gold control laws were very stringent. As being the Prime Minister of Italy, he has diplomatic immunity, he said, "No Swami, I have not declared." Swami replied, "If you have not declared it, how do you expect me to receive it." That Prime Minister started shedding tears and said, "Swami, first time in my life, anybody has taught me like this." Swami continued, "When you go to Delhi, tell Rajiv Gandhi, the then PM of India, what I have told you." When he came out of private audience, a journalist who was waiting outside posed a question, "Sir, you had your first audience with Sri Sathya Sai Baba, how do you feel?" He said, "In life one never stops learning." The national newspaper 'The Hindu' reported this the next day on the front page. Swami lived the essence of Bharatiya culture.

When Bhajans are sung Bhava (feeling), Raga (tune) and Tala (rhythm)

should come together. Incidentally Bh Ra Ta makes the name of our country Bharat. When bhajans were sung in Sai Ramesh Hall in Brindavan, Swami's favourite pastime was to see who is singing and who is not singing bhajans. One day in Trayee Brindavan, Swami called three students by name and told everybody, showing them off, "These three students sing bhajans nicely." From that day onwards, the warden permitted them to sit everyday near the jhoola. Hence you have to sing with feeling, and clap; when all the three come together then Bhagawan is pleased.

Hence this unification of thought, word and deed is there in every aspect of life, even in bhajan also, we need to practice it. The essence of Bharatiya culture as Swami has taught all of us is to develop that kind of unity. The incentive to practice that is the love for God because wanted us to do it. The simplest mantra for any Sai devotee is this- Will Swami like this or not? Will Swami approve of this or not? If we make this the guiding light of our lives, our lives will certainly be redeemed.

Years ago, in a message to the students' spiritual study circle that we used to have at Prasanthi Nilayam, Swami said, "The two eyes for my students are Swami and the spiritual atmosphere that pervades this place. Those who understand this are like the people with good eyesight, wherever they go in the world, they will shine. Those who don't understand this are blind. *Sesha* Sai means one who rests on *sesha* the serpent, Sathya Sai means one who rests in *sathya* the truth. Those who live their lives without understanding *sathya* are blind."



Interactive Session: Chinna Katha Analysis

Team Members

- » Dr. R Sai Sathish, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Chemistry, SSSIHL
- » Ms. U Suma, Associate Professor, Dept. of Management & Commerce, SSSIHL
- » Dr. N Sivakumar, Associate Professor, Dept. of Management & Commerce, SSSIHL
- » Sri B Chandrasekhar, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Management and Commerce, SSSIHL

Expert Panel

- » Prof. (Miss) Madhu Kapani, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Economics; and Director, Anantapur Campus, SSSIHL
- » Dr. T Ravikumar, Associate Professor, Dept. of Chemistry and Warden, Brindavan Campus, SSSIHL
- » Dr. R Raghunatha Sarma, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Mathematics & Computer Science, SSSIHL

Bhagawan's Chinna Kathas are very unique. While stories by themselves are interesting to everyone alike from a small child to grown up person, the uniqueness of Bhagawan's Chinna Katha lies in the fact that they are not only interesting but carry a very deep meaning. These Chinna Kathas touch our minds and hearts because it is possible for each of us to relate to these stories and more importantly to relate our predicament with those of the characters in the story and thereby assuming a very practical significance. The theme that has been chosen for this year's Chinna Katha is truth. Swami talks about truth in three different aspects. He says it can take the form of

Nijam, Sathyam or Ritam.

The four campuses of the university presented their Chinna Kathas and discussed and shared their understanding on this reality of truth. There were three parts to each presentation- depiction of the Chinna Katha, discussion among the students of each campus to bring out the subtleties of the story and its practical application in day to day life and finally some insights from a panel of experts regarding these stories.

Anantapur Campus

Anantapur Campus presented a Chinna Katha entitled 'A philosopher's folly' in the form of a puppet show.

There was a small kingdom in which strangely enough all people were quite happy and very healthy. In the course of time, both the ruler and ruled grew proud of this rare good fortune and claimed it to be a reward of their personal righteousness. Since all of them were healthy, there was no physician in the kingdom. One day, a physician came to its capital city and was happy to find that there was no other physician to compete with him in his profession in the whole kingdom. But whenever he entered into conversation with the people and enquired after their health, they would say: "Oh! We are *brahma jnanis*, no illness can touch us. We are the fortunate few chosen by God and blessed by Him with health and happiness. Why do you tarry here, better go elsewhere to earn your living?" The physician however did not want to leave the city and was also hopeful that this snobbery of the people will not last long.

Once the king suddenly fell ill. The physician was summoned to the royal presence. He was pleased that God had given him an opportunity to display his talent. He treated the king with reverence and great attention. The king was slowly but steadily improving. However, he said: "Sir, I really thank you for your treatment but can you not cure me quickly? I am not used to lying down like this for days together". The physician wanted to teach the king and the people a lesson. He said, "Oh king, there is a quick cure, but I am afraid, I may not be able to get what I want for preparing the medicine." The king said, "You need not doubt the capacity either of my ministers or my people. They will be ready to procure anything you may require. They are all *brahma jnanis*."

They will not bother about any type of strain or sacrifice on their part to get their beloved king cured. Come, tell me what you want.” The physician said: “My Lord! I am glad that you are so confident. I require ¼ pound of flesh from the body of a *brahma jnani* - that is all.” “Oh! How simple!” exclaimed the king. The king immediately sent word to his minister and commanded him to get at once ¼ pound of flesh of any *brahma jnani* in the city.”

The minister returned very late in the evening, very sad and dejected. The king asked eagerly, “Why so late? Come on, where is the flesh?” The minister pleaded, “Oh! King, I am sorry, I could not get what you wanted. When I announced to the people of what you need, everyone said: “Oh, I am not a *brahma jnani*. Do you think that *brahma jnanis* will be found in cities such as this? How can we say confidently that we are all *brahma jnanis*?”

The king was surprised to hear this and looked at the physician pitifully. The physician said: “Oh king! do not feel sad. This is the way of the world. One may claim to be anything but to actually live up to that high ideal is extremely difficult. You are now recovered. Nothing is wrong with you. I need no human flesh. I planned this little drama, only to let you know the truth. Pardon me.”

Summary of the discussion of the team

- » The physician is like a Sadguru who comes at the correct time to remove the blindfold of ignorance of the seekers of truth.
- » Swami explains this concept of Nijam, Sathyam and Ritam with the example of man’s journey in life. He says, “When he is born, he is called as a child, at the age of 10 he is called as a boy, at age 30 a man and at 70 he is known as a grandfather. The constantly changing aspect is Nijam the fact but the person who he is never changes which is Sathyam.”
- » The practical applications of this concept is very important. Truth is eternal and there is a truth in each moment. That eternal truth strings together all these moments. When we as people live in the moment and focus on the moment alone, that eternal truth opens our gateway to eternity. Bhagawan Baba says, “Past is history, future is mystery and present is omnipresent.” Hence we have to be in the moment, to be true to the moment so that we can truly live the truth in the moment which is only possible if we keep our mind focused, not letting the mind wander

away either into the past or into the future by having a dispassionate attitude towards our action or the scenario. This is only possible if we surrender to that supreme lord and are open to Him. This will result in unity of thought, word and deed which is called Sathyam.

Muddenahalli Campus

The Muddenahalli Campus team did a role play of the story ‘Sathya Bruyaath, Priyam Bruyaath.’ At one point of time, Lord Shiva wished to test an ascetic. This ascetic was a great renunciant. He had taken two vows; not to hurt others and not to speak untruth. He was performing penance with all determination to fulfill these two vows in his lifetime. Lord Shiva assumed the form of a hunter and chasing a deer, He made the deer appear in front of the ascetic. As the deer was jumping and running, the ascetic opened his eyes and saw the deer. As soon as he opened his eyes, he saw the deer running for its life getting into a bush. Shiva in the form of the hunter came over there. He said, “Sir, I came here chasing a deer. Did you see it by any chance?” If the ascetic says he has not seen the deer, it would amount to untruth. If he says he has seen it, the hunter will ask him about its location. If the ascetic points to the deer in the bush, the hunter will cause pain to it. In that case, he (the ascetic) would be guilty of not keeping up his vow of not harming any being. At that instance, the ascetic prayed to God. “O God, please give me a vision, a thought, such that both these vows of mine will not be broken.” For the one who prays with a pure heart, God will respond within seconds. If the prayer is only a lip service, He will not respond even in years. For the one who prays from the heart, there will be immediate resound, reflection and reaction.

A brilliant idea flashed in the ascetic’s mind by God’s Grace. The ascetic said, “The one that has seen cannot speak; the one that can speak has not seen; what can I do? O hunter, the eyes have seen the deer, but they cannot speak. They do not have a mouth. The mouth can speak, but it has not seen. How can it speak about that which it has not seen?”

By such a tactful answer, the ascetic not only upheld his adherence to Truth but also protected the life of the deer. In this way, the ascetic escaped from the situation. Lord Shiva appeared before him in his true form and blessed the ascetic with liberation. Therefore it is said, Truth is the life of the tongue.

Righteousness is the life of hands. Non-violence is the life of the heart.

Summary of the discussion of the team-

- » *Sathyam bruyat priyam bruyat na bruyat satyam apriyam*- Speak truth in such a way that it should be pleasing to others. Never speak truth, which is unpleasant to others. Never speak untruth, which might be pleasant. This is the path of eternal morality
- » Truth is absolute but takes different forms based on *desha, kala* and *paristhithi* (place, time and circumstances). Truth manifests in front of someone who has unwavering faith and intensity towards god. If we take the example of Archimedes, he was possessed by the question as to how things float on water. Due to his intensity his whole mind was focused on this question and he started living with the question. This resulted in the answer i.e., the principle of buoyancy flash in his mind.
- » The ascetic was meditating for years together to know who he really was. He understood the truth that he is neither the one who saw the deer running and nor the one who told the hunter what he saw. With this deep understanding, the ascetic gave such a profound answer to the hunter.
- » We have to tune our mind to the source as a radio is tuned to a particular frequency to listen to a channel. If we tune our mind in such a way, truth will manifest itself in all that we think, speak and do.
- » The best way to tune our mind to the source as told by Bhagawan is the unity in thought, word and deed. This will result in a pure, unwavering and intense mind like that of an ascetic.

Prasanthi Nilayam Campus

The Chinna Katha 'The predicament of King Janaka' was enacted in the form of a mime play by two students.

Millennia ago, in a land forsaken of hunger, poverty and woe, ruled a king with a beard as whitely as the winter snow. It so happened that one fine evening with the kingdom celebrating and merriment overflowing, emperor Janaka found his eyelids uncontrollable drooping and he went into slumber.

He dreamt that rival kings had joined forces and invaded his dominion and

captured his capital and that, to save himself from them he ran into a forest. Fleeing from his foes, he had no food for days together. He was too exhausted to move. But, hunger dragged him on. When he came to the outskirts of a tribal village, he saw a man washing his plate after taking food; he shouted to him asking for a few particles. The man gave him a small morsel, but, as bad luck would have it, a crow flew in at that moment and snatched it away! In that pathetic plight, he began to scream in agony. And suddenly, he woke up!

Even as he opened his eyes, he saw that he was surrounded by his queen, his maids and personal attendants. They were awaiting his slightest indication so that they could rush to serve him. He saw large trays and bowls of the choicest fruits. His cook too was in a corner, and he would surely whip up mouth-watering delicacies at the slightest wish of the emperor. But Janaka was in a daze. He looked at his queen and asked, “Is this real or is that real?”

Since the question was with reference to his dream, the queen did not understand what he was saying.

“Beg your pardon my Lord...”

“Is this real or is that real?” “I do not understand.... Can I help you in some way? You appear flustered...”

“Is this real or is that real?”

And the emperor’s questioning continued. He spoke nothing else; did nothing else. It became evident that his thoughts were pervaded by nothing else except the unfathomable question,

“Is this real or is that real?”

At a loss of ideas of what had to be done, the queen summoned the wise sage, Vasishta. She intuitively knew that her husband was suffering not from any physical or mental ailment but a spiritual doubt. A spiritual doubt can be answered by a Guru and Guru alone. Sage Vasishta approaches the emperor with a smile and, immediately, Janaka asks him, “Is this real or is that real?” The sage replied, “Neither is true. The one that witnessed them (and thus was present both in the waking and sleeping state) alone is true.”

Summary of the discussion of the team

- » The concept of remaining unchanged is the basic premise of truth. Truth never changes with space, time and circumstances.

»

- » In this story, both in the dream state and the awakened state the only constant is the observer. Experiences might be different but the witness is the same. I firmly believe that the witness is the truth.
- » This witness or truth is known as Ritam. Sathyam is something which we apply in our day to day lives which if simply put is thought as love. Given that everyday situations are constantly changing, the way we express ourselves varies. Sathyam varies, Ritam on the other hand is immutable. It is a state of existence which is eternally true. If vast expanse of the ocean is Ritam, then the waves and undulations are Sathyam. If the sun is Ritam, then the sunlight is Sathyam. Ritam is the conscience and Sathyam is the voice of the conscience.
- » Ritam is the eternal truth which is a state of existence whereas the truth which has to be said and followed is Sathyam. For example, God is eternal but the life of an Avatar is definitely bound by the circumstances. Expression of the eternal truth Ritam is the life of an avatar which is Sathyam.
- » During a nightmare if you just observe that it is just a dream, you can observe everything around you calmly. In the same way, in life too we are prejudiced by our narrow and limited understanding. If we know Ritam, we can regain our true nature.
- » We have to realize that we are not human beings on a spiritual journey but spiritual beings on a human journey.

Brindavan Campus

The story was presented with a contemporary role play where a judge has to face a dilemma of convicting his own son in a case of betting and unlawful misappropriation of public funds. The judge refers to the following Chinna Katha of Bhagawan for guidance and upholds the truth by convicting his own son.

Once, there was an argument between Virochana, the son of Prahlada, and Sudhanva, the son of the Sage Angeerasa. Angeerasa's son said that the debate should be conducted before a judge who should decide who was the winner in the argument. He said Virochana's father, Prahlada, should be the judge. Both went to Prahlada. They agreed that whoever lost in the debate should forfeit his life to the winner. Both of them prayed to Prahlada to act as the judge for the contest, being convinced that he would be totally

impartial and fair. Prahladha agreed to act as judge because he was pledged to uphold truth, without any other consideration.

After listening to the arguments, Prahladha declared Sudhanva as the winner and his own son, Virochana, as the loser. Unable to control his joy over the verdict, Sudhanva embraced Prahladha and said “Prahladha! It is because of unflinching upholders of Truth like you that the world shines in all its glory. If there were no meritorious people on earth, how can there be light in the world? Prahladha! Because of your adherence to truth you gave the verdict against your own son.”

Prahladha knew that whoever lost the contest should pay forfeit with his life. But that did not deter him from pronouncing the verdict against his son. There is no greater Dharma than Truth- *Sathyaanaasthi Paro Dharmah*. Prahladha was not swayed by any sense of paternal love. He shed no tears. He watched the outcome of his judgment with a sense of fulfillment. Recognizing the utter dedication of Prahladha to Truth, Sudhanva declared, “Prahladha! Your devotion to Truth will restore the life of your son. I am not claiming his life as the reward for my victory. I am giving back your son’s life to you.”

Summary of the discussion of the team

- » Upholding of truth is the highest virtue
- » It is the foremost duty of man to uphold truth, lead the good life and share his joys with others. There is no greater Dharma than Truth.

Panel of Experts

- » Among the five human values, Truth is considered as the highest human value connected with the intellectual domain of our personality. It represents the zenith of intellectual perfection and emotional blossoming of an individual. What is the unique mission of man who is a combination of maya- illusion and Madhava- God? It is the discovery of truth which is God. How can this truth be realized? Man has to put sincere efforts to cross maya and attain *trikarana suddhi* and realize truth.
- » Swami once raised this question in Trayee Brindavan- What did Harishchandra gain by adhering to truth? One of the students answered that he became Sathya Harishchandra. Swami retorted, “Is that all, just getting one more tag to his name for all the troubles he has gone

through?” Swami answered, “Harishchandra who was ruling over the kingdom of men started ruling the kingdom of atman the self.” This is the gain by practicing truth.

- » Swami said that practicing Yukti (knack or intelligent strategy) in the name of God is also yoga known as Yukti Yoga. In the Mahabharata war Dharmaraja’s chariot never touched the ground due to his adherence to dharma. When Krishna tells Dharmaraja to say ‘*Aswathama hatha kunjara*’ and Dharmaraja utters these words as an apparent lie to defeat Dronacharya his chariot wheels touch the ground. We all think it is due to the untruth spoken by Dharmaraja as Aswatthama the son of Dronacharya was alive. But Bhagawan clarified, “It is not due to the untruth spoken by Dharmaraja but a slight tinge of doubt in his heart that should he actually speak what Krishna told him to speak.” A great devotee of Bhagawan Sri Ramabrahmam garu was having a marriage in his family. Swami came and told him to tell the other party that marriage will not take place. Ramabharamam garu told Swami, “Swami, I have already given word, I should stick to it.” Swami said that it is His command and it should be followed. This true devotee of Bhagawan went and told the other party and marriage will not take place which was not received well by the other party as they were not Swami’s devotees. Consequently, a mishap took place and all realized that how gracious Swami was to forewarn him about it.
- » During a Summer Course, there was supposed to be a video show which didn’t happen due to a technical snag. Swami came onto the stage, stood next to the screen and referring to the famous statement of Adi Sankara - *Brahma satyam jagat mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah* (Brahman is the only truth, the world is unreal, and there is ultimately no difference between Brahman and the individual self) said, “When you experience so intensely, how can you say that it is false. The difference between *sathya* and *mithya* can be very beautifully illustrated by the example of a film- the screen is *sathya*, the images which come on it and go are all *mithya* as they have a momentary existence. Hence it is true but not true. Without the basis of *sathya*, *mithya* doesn’t exist.”

Swami taught us very beautifully how difficult it is to speak untruth with one incident. This incident happened late 1970s in the safe room in Brindavan. Few of us including our professor of accounts were standing with Swami.

There was a student who was brilliant in studies and was a top ranker but didn't know Telugu. Swami was asking him questions in English and Hindi like where have you come from, what is your name and so on. Swami turned to the professor and said, "Is he your student?" Professor replied, "Yes Swami." He then told the professor in Telugu to tell a lie that he doesn't study well and immediately asked him a question in English, "Does he study well?" As commanded by Bhagawan the professor replied, "No Swami." This boy was aghast that his professor was telling Swami something which was a blatant lie. Swami asked the student, "How many marks did you get in accounts?" The boy replied, "I got 20 out of 20 in this test and 19 out of 20 in the previous test." When Swami turned towards the teacher, he said, "May be true Swami."

The boy was very agitated by the statements of the teacher. Swami then prompted the faculty member in Telugu to tell that the boy is not regular in class. He then asked the professor in English, "Why he is not getting good marks?" the teacher replied, "He doesn't come to class." The Swami quickly rejoined, "How can he get good marks, if he is not attending class?" the teacher replied, "He might have copied Swami." Then the tables turned. Swami looked at the professor and said, "If he is copying what are you doing?" Finally, Swami said, "You see, how difficult it is to maintain untruth. You must have to tell the untruth one after the other and you should also have a good memory."

This incident happened when Sri Deve Gowda the then Chief Minister of Karnataka came to Bhagawan and invited him for the 50th birthday celebrations of his guru. Bhagawan accepted the invitation and attended the function. In the function Mr. Deve Gowda spoke first followed by a discourse by Swami. Swami started the discourse by saying, "I totally agree with what your Prime Minister said." All were shocked after hearing this statement as it is apparently a slip of tongue. There were news items in the newspaper next day- 'Sai Baba doesn't know the difference between Chief Minister and Prime Minister.' A few years later in a totally unexpected manner Mr. Deve Gowda did become the Prime Minister of this country. Hence if you have truth as the basis of your life, whatever you speak becomes the truth.

Divine Discourses on Nijam, Sathyam and Ritam

What is *nijam* (fact)? Fact is to state what one sees at a given point of time; for instance, stating what dress has been worn by an individual at a given point of time is a fact. Let us say you have come here wearing a white dress. I have seen you wearing a white dress. This is a fact. But let us say that as soon as you return home you change your dress and put on a blue bush coat. Then what Bhagawan has said earlier would not be a fact now. Speaking what you are seeing at a given point of time is *nijam* (fact). When it changes later, it is no more a fact. Therefore, narrating whatever you see or experience at a given point of time is a fact at that instant.

What then is truth? You have been changing a number of shirts and banyans (vests / undershirts) over a period of time. But you have never been able to change your physical body. That which does not change is truth. *trikaala bhaadhyam sathyam*: that which does not change in the three dimensions of time (past, present and future) is truth.

But in this world, in an ordinary sense we consider *nijam* (fact) and *sathyam* (truth) to be one and the same. However, they are different. They do not mean the same. What is seen by the eye is a fact. Now you may be wearing a shawl. Tomorrow you may not wear a shawl. So to state that you are wearing a shawl is a fact only for the time being. It is not a fact for the next day.

Hence, if there is something that remains the same the next day, the day after, for all the days to come, in all the three dimensions of time, i.e. the past, present and the future; that is the truth. Truth is that which does not change or move or waver but remains permanent across the three dimensions of time. That which changes, wavers or gets manipulated from time to time is not truth, it is only a fact. That which is seen at a given point of time is a fact. That which is seen forever is truth.

Bhagawan tells us often: you are not one person, but three. What are these three? They are:

- » The one you think you are, symbolized by the dress worn by you- this is the physical form.
- » The one others think you are, i.e. the mind. The mind cannot be seen by

anybody. Based on your actions they decide whether your thoughts are good or bad.

- » However, there is one which is beyond these two- that is *ritam* (absolute reality)! The one you really are; this is related to the atman (self).

You are the embodiment of the body, the mind and the atman. The body changes from time to time but the heart never changes. The (spiritual) heart is ever permanent that permanent heart symbolizes *ritam*. It is the vedas which labelled this as ritam, it is that which is changeless and attributeless.

The Power of Truth – 2 July 1996

Today the main reason for facing so many difficulties is due to neglecting the eternal truth, hence always follow truth. Then you will be victorious in all your ventures, victory always obliges the truth, it will not favor anything other than truth. Truth will not submit to physical might, goodness, money power, intelligence or man power. Truth will not submit to anything. Truth will pave way to victory. There is nothing in this world that can win over the eternal truth, only truth will be victorious. Apart from eternal truth nothing can achieve success. God is only one, but the pundits express it in different ways. If we follow truth, truth will triumph, truth will triumph, and truth will triumph.

Truth can easily solve any complex problem. There is nothing in this world that truth cannot achieve. Truth can turn earth into sky and sky into earth. Hence we must always follow truth. Truth is god. If we forget truth, there is no life at all.

For ignoring this eternal truth, the present day world is facing a lot of sorrow, many hardships and sufferings. If truth is ignored even the highest office cannot achieve success. The highest office cannot carry with it the eternal truth.

However high the academic qualification may be, it does not carry with it the eternal truth. What is the reason? All this education is worldly in nature. We all are involved in worldly matters. All these are outward paths.


The eternal truth follows an inward path and philosophy. It is eternal and permanent. When we experience this eternal truth, we can achieve success.

Students! Whatever be the circumstances we face, let us face them bravely with the eternal truth. Whatever be the consequences, we must abide by our words. If we give a promise, we must abide by it until our last breath. Vamana came and asked king Bali for a charity. King Bali promised to fulfill the request of vaamana. But Bali's mentor Sukracharya advised Bali not to concede to Vamana's wish. Then, king Bali responded, "Guruji, you may be the teacher. But I will not go back on the given promise. Is there any higher sin than going back on the promise given? Having given the promise, going back on the given word, is the worst of the sins. I have given my promise, let anything may happen, I will keep up my word." Therefore, we must follow such pious life full of truth. In this gathering, even if ten members follow truth, that is enough, we can save the whole world.

It's easy to speak truth – 7 July 1996

A boy said in his talk, "*satyam vada*, and *dharmam chara*"- speak truth and follow dharma. He said, it's not so easy to follow truth, it's difficult. It is wrong. There is nothing easier than following the path of truth and righteousness.

Swami came at four o'clock and started the discourse a little early, this is satyam. Speaking the truth as it is, is so simple and easy. There is no need to think over. There is no need to worry in speaking the truth as it is. But, if you have to speak untruth, you need to plan a lot. You need to make the untruth sound like truth, you need to have the knack and think a lot to make it sound as truth. After you do all that, with that knack you turn yourself into a crack. So, did you understand how difficult it is to speak untruth. Satyam is easy.



Quiz on the Life of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Dr. S Subramanian (& team)

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Management Studies, SSSIHL

Quiz has always been an effective tool in the teaching-learning process for many centuries. The formalised structure in which quiz competitions and programmemes are conducted in schools, colleges and universities has always fascinated many generations of students into the ‘art and science’ of quizzing.

Quiz programmemes have always been an important part of the Summer Courses at SSSIHL. While they were held in the Divine Presence of Bhagawan during many Summer Courses in the past, there were occasions when quiz programmemes were even conducted during Bhagawan’s visit to the Hostels at Prasanthi Nilayam and Brindavan and in the Sai Sruthi Mandir at Kodaikanal. The objective of these programmemes was always the same- to make the students aware of the rich and varied heritage of Indian culture and to acquaint them with the life and teachings of Bhagawan Baba.

In line with this sacred tradition, there was a lively inter-campus quiz programmeme during the Summer Course. This year, the theme was the **Life and Teachings of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba**.

The quiz consisted of multiple rounds of incisive questions, not just on the life of Bhagawan Baba, but His teachings, and many touch points of His life in terms of the humanitarian projects that He initiated and the philosophy and learnings for all humankind. Some of these were very creatively depicted- through video clips and Chinna Kathas- stories and parables that carry deep and meaningful moral messages, for example.

Along with the students, even elders enthusiastically participated in the event by answering questions passed by the participating students.

The quiz brought before the students, cherished memories of the wonderful times they were blessed to have, in the years gone by, in the immediate physical presence of their Revered Founder Chancellor- Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.



Valedictory Address

Dr. (Miss) S Kanaka Durga

Professor (Hon.), Dept. of English Language & Literature, SSSIHL

In the encircling gloom, you are the splendor, in the fuzzy network of thoughts you are the shining sunlight, in the sweeping current of flood waters you are the life saving raft, in the biting freezing cold you are the warmth of the heart, in the sweltering summer heat you are the cool shade.

The Summer Course reminds me of an analogy out of many - a bouquet of flowers, a colourful rainbow emanating from the white ray or a *shadrasopeta bhojanam* meaning a sumptuous diet with all the six types of tastes. The Vedas proclaim the existence of five sheaths starting from *Annamaya kosha* to *Anandamaya kosha*. When the Avatar comes in our midst we are able to make a long jump from *Annamaya kosha* to *Anandamaya kosha*. The Summer Courses are designed to awaken and unify the body, mind and atma relationship.

Every square meal starts with starters and stimulants. I consider the welcome address and the keynote address as the starters and stimulators. The divine discourses are the *annam parabrahma swaroopam*, i.e. the rice which is the basis of all. The panel discussions, bhajan workshop, chinna katha analysis, quiz programmeme, talk on the message of Vedas and the study circle presentations are the ingredients which make this meal interesting. The Vice-Chancellor's address was a curtain raiser as he emphasized the need for students to derive maximum benefit from the three-day Summer Course designed by our Revered Founder Chancellor Bhagawan Baba. He reminded all of us of the faith, confidence and strength required for our future pursuits which can be learnt from Indian Culture and Spirituality. The panel discussions were of two-fold nature. One is focus on the two epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—which are like the two bundles of Indian culture—and their relevance to modern times. They give a clear direction to the students in pursuit of their work and studies. The alumni panel discussion is a beautiful idea as it provides students with different facets of facing challenges in their professional, social or domestic fronts.

The panel discussion on the Mahabharata was a well expounded presentation based on three major characters namely Bhishma, Gandhari and Vidura to understand how to take right decisions in one's life. The presentation was well substantiated with Bhagawan's discourses and particularly with the concept of JOY. The panel discussion of the Ramayana consisted of choosing a few important characters and epitomizing the quest for healthy human relationship and resultant values that a healthy existence needs. The alumni panel discussion was the demonstration of the application of Bhagawan's teachings and the life in our Institute which the students were exposed to. It emphasized that if the foundation of a student in Bhagawan's educational institutions are strong any infrastructure can be built on it. It was very well proved by the alumni in their expositions and experiences about Bhagawan being their soul guide and guardian under all conditions. The alumni consider Bhagawan as their guiding principle in order to meet some tricky situations in the outside world. The quiz and the Chinna Katha presentations were very unique and singular. The Bhajan workshop highlighted the genesis of Bhajans and showed us how Bhagawan is the motivator, propounder and promoter of the ideas of Bhava, Raga and Tala. It gave us some interesting insights into the meaning of Bhajans and the unique situations where the Bhajans were composed. The talk on Vedas enlightened us on the explanations of Bhagawan on the inner meaning and true import of the Vedic injunctions. The inner meaning of Sri Suktam, Durga Suktam and Narayana Suktam was very well expounded by the speaker. The whole talk on Vedas was rounded up with the dictum 'Help Ever Hurt Never'. The music programme by the music college was ennobling and elevating. Study circles were very good learning exercises for the students where they corroborate their experiences in the light of Bhagawan's discourses and clarifying their doubts in the process.

I am reminded of two experiences from my life at this juncture. Before I joined the Institute in 1974, I was in Hyderabad when Bhagawan came for a visit to Shivam in Hyderabad. I was sitting with the public. Swami beckoned to me saying, "Anantapur, come here." I was puzzled hearing this name of mine. One *sevadai* came and asked, "Who is Anantapur here?" I was startled but Swami was still signaling to me. He called my mother also and gave us *laddos*. Swami while putting the laddoo in my hand said, "I have not called you to give laddoo, I have called you from the sun to the shade." This statement had lot of implications. I later understood that Anantapur was not merely a

geographical identity. It is a spiritual training ground.

Around thirty years back, some teachers came for darshan to Prasanthi Nilayam from Anantapur. The Lord called us for a short interview. He started giving a discourse. Suddenly in the middle of the discourse, He looked at me and said loudly, “You live at the atmic level.” I ducked, thinking that it was for a person behind me. Swami said, “*Pichhi* (madcap) it is meant for you only.” Only after Swami assumed His *nirakara swaroopa*, I understood the total import of it. These three days teach us that we have to delight in and dwell on the thoughts of our Lord Sai alone. Our strength lies only in holding to His lotus feet relying on Him supremely for everything in our life.

Paranayam Sessions



Campus-wise evening sessions sharing of
Experiences with
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Dr. Neelam B Desai

Senior Consultant & Head of Department, Department of Cardio Thoracic and Vascular Surgery, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS), Prasanthigram

At the outset just let me tell you that I am in a profession dealing with surgery and surgery in the ancient times belonged to the breed of barbers. So they are expected to work and they are not expected to be delivering speeches but I shall make a humble effort. I am present amidst a young vibrant group of energetic youth who are going to be the future of tomorrow, who are going to be Bhagawan's mission-carriers.

Twenty-five years ago when I joined my profession to become a cardiac surgeon there were only two female surgeons in the department. At the time, to be a surgeon and then too a lady cardiac surgeon was not a very welcome thing in the community because it is a very male-dominated society; not only in our country but also in the world when it comes to surgery. We used to wonder that tailoring or stitching are a lady's profession so why is it different when it comes to surgery. But of course, we used to never have those answers. Once my colleague told me, "You know, to survive in our field, we need a Godfather." So I was wondering, that what she is saying is correct, but where to get one. Least did I realize that somewhere down the line not only would I come across may be a Godfather or a Godmother but verily God Himself who will take me along in my career.

I feel very proud, privileged and honoured to have been chosen by Bhagawan because Bhagawan handpicks ordinary mortals like me and then gives them the required qualification. He does not choose the qualified. He qualifies the person He has chosen as time progresses and I feel that that's exactly what He did with me. My two mothers had major roles to play in making me what I am today. My physical mother who gave birth to this physical body, who nurtured it with good food and above all nurtured it with very good thoughts. And, second but not the least, is my spiritual mother, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai, who shaped me all these years. My mother instilled in me the idea of work and the spiritual mother transformed that work into worship.

My mother used to get a compliment from her father-in-law, "Even if you

bury this lady, she would still get up and start doing her work.” What a compliment! This virtue of hard work was sown much earlier in life for me by closely watching my mother. She would say, “People will like you not because you are so and so but because of your hard work. You are always appreciated wherever you go for your work and you would be also recognized by your work.” Bhagawan also stresses on this virtue of hard work. I was a Bal Vikas student then went on to be a Bal Vikas guru and then a convener. I had to leave this as I was pursuing a medical career. I vividly remember telling my Bal Vikas teacher, “I don’t know whether I will ever come back after leaving Swami’s work. She said, “Don’t worry; you are definitely going to come back.” I never knew how I would come back.

It was the 65th Birthday of Bhagawan and I had decided to attend. During the Birthday He gave a profound speech where he said, “The rich can go wherever they want, but what about the poor, where will the poor go for their treatment? For this reason, I have decided to build a hundred crore rupees worth Super Specialty Hospital where every treatment which would be given to the patients will be free- be it cardiac surgery, be it kidney problems or brain problems. I have decided that within a year’s time, this hospital will be built and it will be for free.” So when I heard this I was overjoyed because I was pursuing my cardiac surgery that time. Then, as I was returning to Bombay that time, I very vividly remember this as it was during the dark night and I was staring across and was thinking when and how will I reconnect and come back to this hospital. Will it ever be so? And I still feel as if I was starting exactly at the same spot where the hospital is there right now. That kind of a feeling I get.

Then I go back and then it’s the month of October 1990 and my boss and I, we go to attend one conference in Delhi- it was a Chest and Cardiac Radiology Conference...and there you know I have this thing of wearing a Shirdi Baba ring...I always wear that. So we had gone to meet Mr. Prof. Venugopal, the one who started the department of Cardiology at the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Medical Sciences, and he saw that ring in my finger and asked me if I am a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. So my boss knew that I am a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba. My boss asked, “Do you know that a hospital is coming up?” “Are you planning to go there?” I replied that I will come. He said that in November there is an inauguration and he will be

coming from Delhi and I should join from Mumbai, to meet up at Bangalore. But as destiny would have it, time was not right for me to meet the Divine Master. There was a heavy storm and the flights were diverted to Madras. So my dad ends up saying that we are not going. So when I reach the airport, I called Prof. Venugopal and told him that I would not be able to come for the inauguration but would surely come later.

To this date, I cannot understand why I could not make it up for the inauguration but I think the time was not right. So in May 1991, I came to Parthi, worked for thirteen days and came back. Those thirteen days we worked very hard, wherein we worked for 16-17 hours and slept only for 2-3 hours. I would be resting in only one room in the hospital, seeing no sunlight. As I was returning back, I decided never to come back to this place again. My mother intervenes and said, "Why don't you just send an application?" and I ended up sending an application.

In the month of November, I got a phone call from Mr. Rajiv Mahajan, who has been associated with the construction and making of the hospital. He rings up and says that there is an interview for which I had to go to Parthi. I was instructed to be seated and had to go to the portico when signaled by him. I was so naïve and I didn't know what an interview meant though I have been a Balvikas Guru and visited Parthi before. When he waved, I walked towards the portico, the door opens and there seated right in front of me is Bhagawan. It was an interview with Swami and not with the director of the Institute as I expected for my appointment. It was my first physical interaction with Bhagawan where he asked me if I would join the hospital and I said "Yes Swami," but I would come later in the month of February as I had promised my boss that I would continue my third year. That's how I came and joined the hospital in the month of February. My journey started when I entered here as an absolutely raw material, the raw student who has hardly done a few surgeries. A qualified surgeon and I were the only members of the department and within two months he left the department and the only qualified Cardiac surgeon was I, who had to run the show. I expressed my plight saying that I was confident only in closed heart surgeries and not in others.

The next day when I went for darshan, Swami blessed and instructed me to

start closed heart surgeries. I was petrified, because if closed heart surgeries develop a complication, they have to be converted into open heart surgeries of which I was not confident. Since it was His command I performed three to four closed heart surgeries in a day. This continued for three to four months and by Bhagawan's grace, there were no complications. I gained more confidence to perform open heart surgeries. It was in the month of August when Bhagawan went to Brindavan. I decided that I must seek his blessings before I start performing open heart surgeries. The moment swami saw me from far he said "Start open heart surgeries" and that's how he blessed me. I get another senior colleague, who is much more experienced. There are two operation theatres and as said by Swami earlier during darshan, in one of the theatres, a lady surgeon would perform and in the other a male surgeon would perform. This was exactly what happened as I handled simple closed heart surgeries whereas my colleague handled the complex cases. One fine day, my colleague left and again I was left all on my own. Mr. Venugopal asked me to start performing bypass surgeries, but I was reluctant to do so. Swami once again intervened and sent me to AIIMS, Delhi to observe the surgeries being performed by Mr. Venugopal and his team. Then Swami sent a message asking me to perform kids' surgeries under the guidance of Dr. Iyer, a renowned pediatric cardiac surgeon and spend two months under his guidance. On her return, I pleaded with Swami not to expect me to perform bypass surgeries, to which Swami graciously replied, "For you observation is enough, rest all I will take care of."

The journey began by performing bypass surgeries. We are the first ones to begin performing the Beating Heart surgeries in India and in the first hundred cases, none of them got converted into open heart surgeries which is a record for us. In the early days when I had just begun to perform open heart surgeries, I remember how He encouraged and motivated me. I vividly remember that during the Guru Poornima celebrations, when Swami visited the hospital, He was taken around on a chariot cum car. Shri Indulal Shah was seated beside Swami when Swami proudly introduced me stating that I am a good Cardiac surgeon operating on kids' weighing 3 to 5 kilos which was not true as of that date. True to his words, within a short span of time I operated on a 15 days old kid weighing 2.5 kilos. Once I handled a case of blue babies which is a very serious case wherein the pure and the impure blood get mixed and the baby was unable to walk and was hence carried by

his mother. However, the surgery was a success but the protein levels in his body had dropped so low that the fluid continuously poured out from his chest.

Swami enquired about the condition of the patients, to which I had mentioned about the child who was a five-year-old kid, weighing eight kilos, who could be discharged if the fluid stops. Swami with his immense Grace materialized vibhuti and the kid was discharged. After a few months, I saw the same tiny tot running who was earlier unable to even walk by himself. This was one of the many miracles which happen in the hospital. Swami takes pride for our simple efforts and places us on a higher pedestal.

Swami reveals his omniscience in several ways. He once told me that my entire family, including my brother would settle at Parthi. I did not believe in His words as my brother was well settled in Mumbai, but when my brother visited the hospital, he told my father that he was willing to relocate to Parthi forever. This was how my entire family settled at Parthi. Swami never imposed anything on me; rather he asked me once in an interview If I was happy to work here, for which I replied in the affirmative. Gradually by His immense Grace, I became Head of the Department from a senior resident and a junior consultant.

The surgeons who visit from other countries are astonished by the variety of Cardiac surgeries performed at our hospital. One of the surgeons from AIIMS was wonderstruck by the speedy recovery of the patients in this hospital which was impossible elsewhere and asked me for the factor responsible for this to which I replied that the vital factor is the 'Sathya Sai factor'.

We are fortunate enough to be born as the contemporaries, in the era where the living and loving Paripoorna Avatar walked amongst the masses, who has chosen the common man and who has showered his love and compassion. We should not lose this opportunity. Even his physical absence is not affecting us, he continues to shower his blessings upon us. When Swami was physically present we wanted to inaugurate a third theatre and it so happened last year when our department got renovated and I put Swami's picture on a chair and took it around. We can continuously feel His presence. There are a few children with tender hearts who still feel Swami's presence in the hospital. We

can be grateful to Swami by leading an exemplary life with duty-mindedness so that others would identify us to be an instrument of Swami's mission. His mission will be fulfilled in spite of us but just not because of us. It's just an opportunity given to us by Bhagawan to serve him.

I would like to conclude by quoting my two favourite people that is Emily Dickinson the poetess and secondly Bhagawan himself. As Emily Dickinson says and I quote "If I can stop even one heart from breaking I shall not live in vain. If I can ease one life the aching or cool one pain or help one fainting robin unto his nest again I shall not live in vain."

And last but not the least My Dearest Swami, Let me serve you wholeheartedly. The bird with you the wings with me, the foot with you the path with me, the eye with you the form with me, the thing with you the dream with me, the world with you the heaven with me. So are we born and so are we free and so we begin I in You and You in me. Sairam.

Ms. Vimla Singh

Teacher, Sri Sathya Sai Primary & Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam

After completing my education, I prayed intensely for a good job. My sister and I saw an advertisement to teach in Kenya. Being adventure-loving, we decided to go as a couple of sisters to the interview and we got the job. Not only that we also managed to get our youngest brother also a job in the same school the following year. Mother was happy as the three of us were together.

Nairobi, 6 February 1980, 11:00 p.m. – an unforgettable day in our lives. A cousin sister lived with us. That night her mother and sister had dinner with us and were waiting for uncle to come and pick them up. My sisters and brother had gone to bed earlier and were fast asleep. I heard uncle's car outside and opened the door and asked uncle to come in for coffee. Uncle said, "No, please send aunty quickly, Nairobi can be dangerous at night." Just then, out of nowhere, a man appeared in front of me. He held a gun pointing up and started firing. Later we came to know that it was an automatic gun, which released several bullets in quick succession. Uncle shouted out to me, "Just push him hard and quickly lock the door." I in turn told uncle to surrender and not to resist, as these people shoot to kill, if provoked. I went inside but I heard them take a big rock and smash the rear windscreen and shoot at uncle who got a bullet on his shoulder, after which they escorted him inside the house. When they told all of us to put our hands up, uncle was bleeding profusely. They were a total of three gangsters- one watched us at gun point, while the other two went inside, woke up my brother, sister and cousin sister, who were in shock, but all agreed to co-operate and handed over all the valuables to the gangsters. They took uncle's new car and fled after about fifteen minutes later. Neighbours, quietly watching this drama from inside their houses, came in and consoled us. Uncle was rushed to the hospital and they called in the police when they saw the bullet that had injured uncle.

The police came and made a report of what happened. From the room where we were seated with our hands up, police recover 28 bullets embedded in the walls behind us. It is said, "*Jaa ko rakhe Saiya, maar sake na koyi*". Just imagine a small room and 28 bullets shot at point blank range and the seven

hostages in the room remained unharmed. The Lord always responds to heartfelt prayers. Never underestimate the power of prayer. That room where this incident occurred was the very room in which we all used to sit together and pray, so none of us got injured in the room. The watchman got killed outside and uncle too got injured outside the house. Later, we wanted to mark the day on the calendar, it was the 6th of February 1980 and under that date, in the calendar it said, "Appearance of His Divine Grace." So He did and saved us.

I consider myself specially blessed because I was born in a family where devotion to God was more important than even breathing. I love bhajans and all the good opportunities I got in life were a direct reward of bhajans. Prayer is talking to God and bhajans is singing to God. God likes both. We spend so much of our time and energy talking to friends and family, but one day I hope we will all realize that God is our only true friend. He is always there when we need Him. Here I must add that God responds to all names only the call should be from the heart. Up until this point I did not know Swami and I did not have any picture of Swami in my altar. I had briefly heard of Swami and vibhuti manifestations in homes of devotees but did not accept Him as God, but I believed in Shirdi Baba.

When I arrived in Japan, by God's grace, from the first Thursday I was able to attend bhajans and devotees told me, "Swami has sent you here." I thought to myself, "How is that possible, I have never met Swami. How can He know me?" The Yokohama Sai Centre had a Bal Vikas Teacher, who got relocated to America just one week before my arrival. The devotees believed Swami had sent me to replace her, but I knew nothing about Bal Vikas or any of Swami's teachings, but because of their strong Faith I was compelled to procure all the necessary materials and prepare to take over the Bal Vikas of Yokohama Sai Centre. In addition to my regular Chemistry teaching at the school, there were so many duties to be performed that left me with no time for anything else.

One day I got a call from my youngest brother in Kenya to come over as soon as possible as he was ill. I told him I had committed myself to the work in connection with the All Japan Sri Sathya Sai Convention and could only come after a week via Parthi after taking Bhagawan's Blessings. I sent him a

photograph of Swami and some packets of vibhuti and prayed intensely to Swami for my brother's recovery.

When I reached Puttapparthi, Swami called me for an interview, in which Bhagawan created a ring for me and also gave me more than 500 packets of vibhuti, saying, "Bal Vikas, Bal Vikas, Bal Vikas, Go! I am with you, in you, around you." Deeply touched and overwhelmed by His Love and bountiful Grace, I arrived in Delhi to take the connecting flight to Kenya, where I was informed by my sister that recently there had been a military coup in Kenya and the army had taken over the airport. There was news of rampant killing and lawlessness and it was foolhardy to go to Kenya at that point. Since Bhagawan had blessed me, I decided to go ahead as planned and take Bhagawan's Prasad of vibhuti to my brother.

I reached Nairobi at night, collected my luggage and headed for customs in deep apprehension. I saw some army officers with guns at the custom's desk and one of them were shouting angrily, which unnerved me greatly. Shivering with a pounding heart, struggling with the suitcase lock, I was praying to Swami, "Where are you, why don't you come and help me." To my surprise, one of the officers picked up my suitcase and put it back on my trolley and signaled me to quickly make my exit, as the fearful man had temporarily moved away. He said, "It's not safe here, leave as fast as possible. They are shooting people without reason." Thanking Swami for His timely rescue, I reached home safely. Needless to add that, by then Swami had already cured my brother. I shared Swami's teachings with all the people who witnessed the miracle of my brother's cure and enthusiastically my brother and others started Bal Vikas, seva, study circle and bhajans, etc. in their city.

Swami says, "Miracles are my calling cards." Miracles that Bhagawan performs bring us close to Him. Bhagawan never fails us. Bhagawan always takes care of all our problems when we commit ourselves to His work sincerely. The vibhuti packets Bhagawan generously gave me were more than enough for all. Even today I have some of those packets saved up for those persons who are involved in Bal Vikas work.

During this last interview, Bhagawan materialised a ring with a Ganesha carved exquisitely in coral stone. Swami passed the ring for me to examine

closely, then took it back and holding it between his thumb and forefinger, blew on it thrice. He gave it to me to examine it again. Now it was a Navratna ring. ‘Swami’s breath too is creative, I thought to myself. Why did Swami allow me to waste time to studying Chemistry?’ I did not know then. But I do now – it was to fulfil my destiny in Primary School, which is my Karma Bhoomi. Swami makes no mistakes. He reveals His plan when the time is right. Have implicit trust in His judgements and plans for you; Swami can achieve anything.

In yet another incident, Swami revealed to me His omniscience when He said something to some of us in a Japanese devotees’ group interview. The group left, but only I stayed back in Parthi. Later speaking with a devotee on phone, I found the person was quoting Swami differently from what I had heard. I started silently asked Swami why He allowed such a misunderstanding. A few days later, Swami called me again for an interview with another group of Japanese devotees. As Swami was bolting the interview room door from inside, He asked me loudly, “So what was that phone conversation?” I was dumb struck at Swami’s omniscience, but I told Swami what had happened and Swami removed the misunderstanding. I learnt that when Swami says, “I shall protect you as the eyelids protect the eyes,” He really lives up to it, provided you let Him. We must have implicit faith and trust in Swami.

Once during the All Japan’s Sri Sathya Sai Convention, we were experiencing some disharmony and that was holding up the preparations for the convention. I prayed to Swami to help us. Later, that night I had a vision of Swami in a locked car in a parking lot and from then on everything went on smoothly. A few days later I arrived in Parthi and Swami graciously called a few of us for an interview. My monkey mind started doubting whether I had really seen that vision of Swami, in Japan that night, so I mentally asked Swami for a sign. I had a garland for Swami and as a token of ‘Yes’, I only asked for a petal. Swami took the garland from me, broke about 5 cm. length of it and tossed it to me. I still have that piece in my pooja. Swami fulfils every desire. “Ask and it shall be given,” He says.

Bhagawan had given me the indication that I would come and settle in Puttaparthi but He would let me know when the time is right. After keeping me waiting for five years, once while taking *padanamaskar*, He said, “Come.”

I resigned from my job in Japan and landed in Parthi. Swami called me for an interview within a week and asked me what I wanted to do. I said I wished to teach His small children at school. Swami seemed very pleased with the answer and created a golden chain and pendant for me and placed it around my neck. Today fifteen years later, I thank Bhagawan for this wonderful opportunity of serving His tiny tots, and the joy of working with spiritually-evolved colleagues. Jai Sai Ram.

Ms. Anantha Lakshmi

Teacher, Sri Sathya Sai Primary & Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam

Offering my most humble pranams at the Divine lotus feet of Lord Sai. Respected elders and my dear sisters, Sairam to all of you.

Bhagawan Baba, you are the radiance in the sun, the glow in the moon and the perfect light in each one of us that makes us do everything thinking to blinking. Lord, we trust and firmly believe that we are in your immediate presence – Dearest Sai. Lord, grateful indeed are we to You for giving us this golden chance of learning directly from You.

I was blessed to be born into a Sai family. Right from the time we began to think, our parents reinforced the thought that Baba was our very own and we need to relate to Him as we to them. Thus began our tryst with divinity.

However, when did this relationship with Baba really become close and intimate? That happened when I was in VII Standard. Our father was on a transferable job and we were posted in Assam. It was here that I faced an ordeal. In order to get to the next grade (VIII Standard) I needed to clear a paper in Assamese. It was a compulsory subject. I had no flair for languages, no inclinations towards it. The academic year was from January to December and we are somewhere in July. Mastery of the language within that short time was beyond me and I turned to my beloved Baba and spoke to Him about my plight. Things started happening the very next day. The students' union went on an indefinite strike and all the schools were closed. The bombshell however fell when the strikers called off the strike and we were back in school with the timetable for the annual examination looming large on us. The impending doom had struck. Once again, I turned to Baba, intensified my prayers and wept before Him seeking Divine intervention. And the most incredible thing happened. The Ministry of Education issued instruction that all the students should be promoted to the next class without exams! This incident left an indelible mark in my heart. It taught me some profound lessons.

1. Trust and love the Lord

2. The Lord can make the impossible possible, and
3. Baba showers His unconditional love on me, you and all.

After coming into the Sai fold proper – joining His education institution and the Sri Sathya Sai Primary School, Bhagawan taught me the nuances of right living. Here is a glimpse into divine revelations through seemingly mundane instances.

Every word, every gesture, every action of His conveyed immortal messages for mankind.

The first and foremost lesson I learnt at the feet of my Mother, my Master, my Lord is, 'Revere your parents.' It happened on a darshan day. My mother had lovingly purchased a cotton saree with a pretty print especially for me. I was not fond of cotton sarees as I could not manage them. So I most defiantly refused the gift and even asked her to return it to the shop. The first darshan (which was around 6.30 am) was over and this incident transpired then. My mother (hurt that she was) handed my responsibility to Baba and directed me to go back to the mandir for bhajan darshan. Believe it or not, Bhagawan had condescended to gift Primary School teachers that very morning with rich cotton sarees with His own hands! The icing on the cake was when He asked me "Pehenega? Pure cotton saree hai!" The dart went home. Baba and our parents make a team. We can't dream of closeness to Baba if we run parallel to our God-fearing, loving parents.

Baba would often send our father on Sri Sathya Sai Drinking Water Project assignments to Mehboobnagar, Medak, Chennai, etc. Once, although the work was very urgent, Baba stalled my father's trip to Madras (now Chennai) in December. He instructed him to go after Sankranti, Prize distribution and used an enigmatic word "Surprise!" What was the surprise? We were receiving big gifts from Baba on that day and Baba wanted my parents to feel joy seeing their daughters receive this unique benediction from Him. Baba is doubly pleased when we make Him and our parents happy. Such is His compassion.

The second lesson that was learnt is 'Have purity of thought, word and deed'. Once, during an interview I prayed thus, "Be with me always Swami." Baba

then asked me a simple question, “Where am I?” I came out with the Vedantic truth – “Everywhere!” He then remarked, “Bangalore jata hai to ek kone main bait kar rota hai. Ek bolta hai, ek karta hai!” Disharmony of thought, word and deed distances us from the Lord within.

I have the habit of exhorting the children to submit the doership to the Lord; and I have myself fallen short on several occasions. Finding me unbearable with my inflated ego, Bhagawan once chided me, “Weight less karo!” A loving facet of the Lord was revealed on one sacred day. It happened during Sports time. Baba was gifting us with Parker pens. The charitable me piped out to Him that there were some duty teachers who had missed out on this gift. He instantly flicked another pen to me, saying, ‘Yeh tumhare liye hai!’ And of course gave the pens for duty teachers. So the lesson learnt is, ‘Feel oneness with all and You will find yourself in His heart.’

The most important essence of commencing with Him is to hold Him with our thoughts. It so happened that once, a member of the Alfred Nobel family made a visit to Parthi. He was aristocratically attired, sitting on the verandah. He had evidently not seen Baba and wanted to find out more about His divinity. I was sitting in a strange place – diagonal to him. My heart planned fast and my body cooperated. In unison, the body, mind, heart and soul worked with only one thought, ‘Baba, You must materialise vibhuti for me, in clear view of Mr. Nobel, so that he sees creation coming from the Creator. Only this thought remained, everything else fell into oblivion and the creator responded. Usually Baba would grant vibhuti *prasadam* only for a purpose. But that day, for no apparent reason, Baba materialized vibhuti, the power of thoughts.

My mother had to undergo an operation. Baba had vetoed the operation for her on several occasions- but this time it was not so. I put it to Baba. Baba gave *prasadam* for the operation. I however continued to hold the thought “Baba I am worried about amma, until finally Baba a few yards away turned back looked at me and said “Hey, Don’t worry your mother. She will become alright. I am there.” After hearing these reassuring words from the master, I rested in a surrendered state of peace. Baba responds to our feelings.

After Baba gifted us with sarees, we were overcome with gratitude and my

sister and I said in unison, “Thank you Baba” to which Baba interfaced “No mention.”

In one of my first direct interactions with Bhagawan. I spoke to Him thus: “Baba You have made the Sun, Moon, stars, sky and everything.” To which Baba responded in a reverted manner, “What about you? Who made you? Bewildered face-to-face with God, I really submitted. “Baba You made me but You deluded me. I am caught in the world of maya. Help.” Baba raised both His Hands in Abhaya and proclaimed “My helping Hands are always there everywhere all the time.” Sisters, believe me, Baba is within our reach. He is right here with us, in us. All we need to do is to access Him with all our heart all our body all my mind and He responds.

24 November 2011. Our mother’s condition became a cause for concern. She had stopped responding to external stimuli. It was then that I accessed Him (with His will and mercy). I sat still, did a little bit of countdown, and visualized Baba against the backdrop of His awe inspiring creation. I was filled with peace and my body was trembling, have stood on end and consciousness opened up. I quickly asked, “Baba should we apply for seven days’ leave?” The inner voice said, “Not needed.” “Baba then one month?” “Not necessary.” “Today?” The cryptic answer came, “Don’t go, stay back.” My sister however felt it was my mind speaking and resumed school. I stayed back and contacted the inner self again. This time with a conflict that my sister had gone off to school, the inner voice spoke again. “External guidance – she will be back, fifteen minutes. Sure enough Warden aunty and Principal aunty sent her back time exactly fifteen minutes. Mother merged into Baba on that day, 24th November 2011 at 3:30 p.m.

Bhagawan Baba can be accessed 24/7. We can hold Him with our thoughts 24/7. We can have Him for ourselves 24/7. He can do amazing things for us. We need to keep three postulates even in our hearts. Baba loves us. Baba knows us and we are very important to Him. Ever ever ever grateful to you tend for speaking through us and listening through us for You alone are; none else.

Kum. K Uma

Alumni, SSSIHL

I offer my humble pranams at the lotus feet of our most beloved mother Sai. Respected elders and my dear sisters, Sai Ram to all of you.

It is my great pleasure and privilege to share my experiences with all of you today.

I was introduced to Swami at a very young age and was a Bal Vikas student. My parents used to attend Samithi bhajans and seva activities in Bangalore. Various events in our lives brought our whole family to the lotus feet. I would like to start by sharing a couple of experiences that I had before I enrolled as Swami's student that showed Swami's omnipresence, omnipotence and His compassion for His devotees.

In 1980, on the first day of Dasara, my father came to Parthi with some friends. Unknown to my father, my mother and I also started by bus to Parthi but due to some *bandh*, we were stuck in Kothacheruvu. Those days, there were no cell phones and if we did not reach Parthi before darshan, my father would not know that we have also come and would start back without us. As we were worrying, a jeep with two men stopped in front of us and offered to drop us 2 km from Parthi as they were going to a traveller's bungalow. My mother told them that it will be difficult to go to mandir from there. So they offered to drop us in ashram itself. As we entered the ashram, they stopped in front of the West 1 block and told me that my father was just going. As I ran to my father, my mother just turned back to pay them but neither the jeep nor the men were seen anywhere. We realized that this timely help was from Swami, otherwise how would they have known who my father was and timed it so well so that we do not miss him.

The next incident is about the Divine intervention in my father's life. My father had a blood clot in the brain and in the early 80s there were not many hospitals or doctors who could treat it. He was having right motor epilepsy and was told that if he does not get operated within a few days he would not

survive. Added to this, there was no guarantee of cure with the surgery. As the only resort, my parents came to Parthi and my father was brought to the darshan ground with the help of two people. Fortunately, Swami called him for an interview and asked him to get up. My father could get up without any help and walked up to the interview room. In the interview, Swami traced the origin of the illness but told him not to get operated. He gave vibhuti packets and assured him of his blessings. And true to Swami's words, gradually my father got cured and was also weaned away from the medicines completely.

When the administrative block of our Institute was under construction I was here in Parthi with my parents. Devotees were given a chance to serve. They used to carry stones up the hill and I was also in that group. During this seva, I prayed to Bhagawan that I should also be able to study in His institute which eventually Swami fulfilled and I stand here proudly as a Sai Student.

Though I had prayed for only studying in His College, Swami had planned a bonus for the small services I had the chance to render in Parthi and elsewhere. In the interview when Swami had blessed my father and cured his epilepsy, Swami had also told my parents that I should join Sri Sathya Sai Primary School in VIII Std. I was not willing to join as I had to leave my parents who were sick so I did my entrance very badly but Swami selected my name as He knew what is best for me. In those days, Swami would personally tick the names of the students from the list. That was the year Swami inaugurated the high school section and needless to say, we got wonderful chances and a lot of attention from Bhagawan as any new ventures of Swami usually get.

On my birthday in my VIII Std., I was sitting for blessings with a tray of chocolates and dried fruits as it was the custom in the school at that time. Swami came out of his room and stood on the slope in the ladies' side. From there he called me. When I went up to Swami, He put *akshata* on my head and blessed the dried fruits, and gave a chocolate in my hand. Then Swami asked me to take *namaskar*. I did not know what to do with the tray as I was standing on the slope and if I place the tray down it will slip down. So I looked at Swami and showed the tray. Swami like a loving mother did not get angry but took the tray from my hands, held it till I took padanamaskar and returned it to me with a smile which saved me from getting a scolding from the concerned teacher later on. Students' relation with Swami is so pure

and tender as like that of a mother and child. He just reflects our sentiments.

Swami was also very concerned about the health of the children. He used to send multivitamin tablets to all the children in the primary school when He noticed many children were having deficiency. Once, Bhagawan had told our Kitchen aunty to give raw beetroot slices in the mornings. Like a loving mother he would enquire if the children had breakfast and how many idlis or dosas they had.

After my X Std., I joined for Intermediate course in Swami's college at Anantapur as XI and XII Std. had not yet started in Puttaparthi. During that period, Swami inaugurated the new hostel, new college, new dining hall and guest house, and so visited Anantapur six times and during all the visits I had the opportunity to recite the Vedas in front of Swami. During one of the visits, the Veda group was waiting in the front part of the auditorium. I went out near the Physics lab to drink water. I saw that Swami had already come out from the common room and was walking along with the then principal madam, Dr. Hemalatha. Before I could get back, Swami saw me and called me. When I went near Him, He instructed me to start. Bewildered, I asked him what? Swami commanded me to recite *Srisuktam*. I started reciting and walked along with Swami. When we reached the front part of the auditorium where others were waiting, Swami pushed me to one side gently as He went inside to inaugurate the then new computer room. By this not only did He give me a unique chance to recite *Srisuktam* before the Divine mother herself but also cured me of my hip bone problem. My right hip bone had an extra growth and had been a cause of great worry to my parents.

Before I applied for a degree, I wanted to get the application blessed by Swami, so I took it with me to Brindavan, where Bhagawan used to be during summer vacation. When I held it out for Swami to bless, He took it with him in spite of me asking Swami to give it back. The whole day I cried and did not have food and I asked one sevadal in charge uncle to request Swami to give it back as I would not get admission without applying. Swami did not listen to him 2-3 times, but again when that uncle told him that I was crying very badly Swami told him to tell me that He would have himself sent the application to the Administrative Block. However, to allay my stupid fears, Swami sent the application back to me with vibhuti packets. When I was

called for the college admission interview, the then registrar informed me that Swami had told him to give me seat and also had told him about the whole crying episode.

From my childhood I was very scared of thunder. Once when I was staying in South block I during my holidays there was very heavy rain and thunder. One thunderbolt fell somewhere in Parthi so it was very loud. I screamed loudly in my sleep. The next day Swami came near me, put his hands near his ears and told me that even after plugging my ears with cotton I could hear you scream loudly. I told Swami that I was very sorry for disturbing Swami but I couldn't help it as I was very scared. To that Swami told me why do you get scared, isn't Swami always with you? He made me realize that day that Swami is always with me.

In my second year during my degree, one day I was sitting under a tree in front of the hostel and reading Sai Satcharitra. As I was reading the chapter in which Shama was cured of a snake bite, a snake fell from the tree in front of me. I just screamed Sairam and was too shocked to get up and run. I just closed my eyes and was telling Sairam. The snake went over my right thigh and then got down and went up the tree. By that time some of the girls sitting nearby called the workers and got it killed. It was a Russell's viper and was kept in the Zoology lab for many years. Swami not only saved me that day but also removed the *naga dosham* which I was told that I had. On my birthday that year, He took *akshatha* from my plate and kept it as a heap whereas He threw chocolates from the other girls. That day in my dream Swami told me that He had removed the *naga dosham* from me by keeping the *naga dosham* in the form of an anthill.

During summer vacations my parents and I would go for Swami's darshan to Kodaikanal or Ooty wherever Swami would go. During one of those visits to Kodai, we were three students from Anantapur and were not given any place inside the bhajan hall and were asked to join the general public. So we wrote a letter to Bhagawan and sent it with the caretaker of Kodai. When the letter was given to Swami, He immediately instructed the *sevadals* to allow all three of us inside and to give us place in the first row every day. We had very nice *darshans* and got many *prasadam*s directly from Swami's hands. During that visit on Ramanavami festival, my mother who would offer *panakam* at home

could not do so as we were staying in a hotel. As Swami came near her she offered poppins and told Bhagawan that he should accept the poppins as *naivedyam* as it was Rama Navami. Swami selected different color poppins from my mother's plate and gave it to us in the bhajan hall. It shows that Swami sees only to the devotion and accepts accordingly.

Swami would give a lot of attention during the Summer Courses to the students. He would come round in the dining hall during lunch and dinner and make sure that we eat properly. He would give special items with mangoes almost every day. During one such session I had the good fortune of being served carrot curry from the divine hands. After the Summer Course when we returned to Anantapur, Swami would load our buses with tasty pickles, soya nuggets, sweets and vegetables.

Even before I finished my M.Sc. degree in Home Science, Swami had kept a seva opportunity ready for me. Security duty for girl's alumni was started on 1 Jan 1994 with the blessings and guidance of Bhagawan. As a mother takes special care of the baby till it is able to stand up on its own similarly, Swami took special care of the security girls in the beginning giving us padanamaskar, vibhuti and sarees on many occasions. We were also given the chance to attend the Summer Courses and trayee sessions. He used to identify security girls in the darshan line and give us some message to pass on or to call someone, etc. Sometimes He would ask us to collect the letters from behind and pass it to Him. I also got an opportunity to handover sarees to Bhagawan when He was distributing sarees to the graduating girls.

Bhagawan had allowed us to do the security duty even in Brindavan during His stay there. Swami told the authorities that accommodation should be given inside the ashram itself. He said that as the girls are doing security duty for Swami, it is His duty to give security to the girls. So we were allotted rooms in the same premises where Swami's residence Trayee Brindavan is.

During Swami's 70th birthday security girls were asked to vacate the rooms as the owners were coming. As we were helpless we approached one of the senior devotees to request Swami for our accommodation. He told that he will ask Swami if He had not yet retired to His room. When he asked, Swami gave the keys of the whole building of N5 which was not even inaugurated

then.

Once Swami told me to call for an interview two foreign sisters who were wearing Swami's photo on their ear rings. After searching all over we found them at the end of Sai Kulwanth hall. I realized that day that it is not necessary to be only in the front. A devotee sitting at the farthest end also receives Swami's grace and attention.

In the year 1998 I developed cervical spondylitis and was advised by the doctor to wear a collar and not to lift any weight. When I returned from the hospital after consulting the doctor, I was given duty in the old ladies' side that day. When Swami came for darshan, He started distributing woolen blankets to the old ladies. Swami noticed me doing duty there and told me to pick up and pass on the blankets to Shourie aunty who would pass on to Swami. I picked up 15 bundles of blankets with each having about 10 to 12 blankets which were very heavy. After the distribution was over I realized that my spondylitis pain had gone completely. Only a Divine doctor could think of such a method of curing the problem.

In Brindavan, Swami had given an opportunity to offer many decorative items to Him which was made by us. Once when we had sent a lampshade which He told to keep it in his room, and he was using the hanky case which was made by us. For the festivals celebrated in Bangalore we were given a chance to do the decoration for the pillars and the stage in Sai Ramesh Hall and Swami would proudly tell the elders that it was done by his security girls and would send word with them that it is very nice.

Swami had called the security girls also for an interview before He conducted a mass marriage in Sai Kulwanth Hall. Bhagawan gave us all *payal* which he said was the latest fashion available.

I would now like to share a couple of experiences that reveals the connection between Shirdi Sai and Sathya Sai. In 1986, with Swami's permission, we started to Shirdi. My father was very sick at that time. As there was no power, the lift was not working in the station and he could not climb up the steps in the station to the other platform. Suddenly, a Muslim person who was short and with a small towel on his shoulder held my father by his shoulders and

lifted him up the 35 steps within 5 minutes which even two people could not have done and told that we will meet in Shirdi and disappeared.

I used to read Satcharitra and keep Rs. 35 as dakshina every time which I would send once a year to Shirdi. Once in trayee session I suddenly got an idea that I should give the dakshina directly to Swami. So as Swami was going back after trayee session I took out 35 rupees from my purse but was scared because Swami had just then scolded the lady before me and had given back a draft that she had offered to Swami. I was worried so I did not stretch my hands but Swami knew for what it was offered so as He came before me, He looked at me and asked me for it. I put the 3 ten rupee notes and one 5 rupee coin on Swami's hand. Swami took it with Him to His room and proved that He is the same as Shirdi Baba and accepted the dakshina offered with love.

Finally, I would like to end with how we happen to be residing in Prasanthi Nilayam. Swami had promised to give us a room in the ashram on 18th August 1982 and on the same date in 2008 Swami allotted a room to me. I was living in Parthi and my old parents in Bangalore. Finally, one day I took courage and requested Swami in the darshan line for a room. He listened to me and asked me where I wanted. When I requested Swami for any ground floor room as my old parents could not climb up. Bhagawan was very loving and gave a ground floor room in South Block I which is so close to the mandir. Swami kept up his promise and blessed at the right time. Lord's delays are not denials.

In 2010, with Swami's permission we had been on a pilgrimage to Haridwar, Rishikesh, Badri and Kedar. Though everyone advised me not to take my father who was 82 and mother who had a leg problem on such a tedious journey, we proceeded as Swami had given permission. Needless to say Swami made sure that we did not have any difficulty and we had very nice darshans at all the temples. Due to Bhagawan's grace I could fulfill my parents wish to see Badri and Kedar.

As Lord Krishna has assured in Bhagawad Gita chapter 9; śloka 22: To those who worship Me alone, think of no other and who are ever devout, I provide gain and security. My own life is an example to this śloka. As I am doing

security duty in His mandir, He is taking care of my parents. He has given a new lease of life to my father who was very sick. My mother underwent knee replacement operation for both her knees and it was Swami's grace that she could start walking and recover very fast unlike some patients.

Swami is still showing His presence here and fulfilling the prayers of us all. There are so many cases where devotees pray and write a letter and keep it on the Mahasamadhi and have got their wishes fulfilled or have been cured from very incurable health problems. I have seen some innocent children telling their mothers that they are able to see Swami when they do namaskar at the Mahasamadhi.

Before I end I would like to inform all my sisters that security is an opportunity given by Bhagawan Himself for all the alumni of this Institute to do seva in the immediate presence of our Lord. So I welcome you all to join us whenever you are free.

With these words, I profusely thank Prof. Madhu Kapani madam for this opportunity and pray Bhagawan to bless all of us to feel His Omnipresence in this divine abode and to help us to continue in His Divine mission.

Thank You
Sai Ram

Sri Shyam Kumar Sundarakumar

Alumni, SSSIHL

Om Sri Sai Ram. Offering my love at Bhagawan's Lotus Feet. Respected teachers and dear brothers, my voice is choking because this place, this hostel...It is literally like a home coming and being part of the satsang is a wonderful opportunity that Swami has given me. I thank the Bhagawan and the teachers for giving me the opportunity.

Where do I begin? It is one of the pieces that we played as part of the brass band. In front of Bhagawan as a part of students and later as the alumni band also. Where do I begin to tell the story?

In fact, if each of us starts writing down our experiences with Bhagawan, I am sure each of us can come up with something like Bhagwat Purana separately. Bhagwat Purana somebody. Vyasa wrote the Bhagwat Purana and as he it, he covered all the Avatars and here when each of us attempts to write our experiences and our memories with Bhagawan, each of us can come up with a separate Bhagwat Purana itself.

Exactly 20 years back, I was part of the freshers group. In 1995, I joined the Brindavan campus and we had a Summer course. And I am so grateful to Bhagawan...As I was sitting in the mandir today and Sahani Sir was reminding us of the mangoes and ice creams and all that...wonderful memories welled up.

Let me start with how I came to know about Bhagawan and about this wonderful institution. When I was a very small kid, my grandmother was a devotee of Bhagawan. I had seen a picture of Swami with a garland and the face was looking very different because it was the first time I was looking at someone with so much of hair. So grandmother said, this is Puttaparthi Sai Baba and then there it stopped. Two years after that, Swami had visited Chennai and I had darshan of Bhagawan from a very long distance. That's it. It was in the year 1991 near my house there was a person who wanted to start Sai bhajans and he saw Swami's photo in our house. Except my grandmother,

none of us at home had any belief in Bhagawan. And then he said why don't we have bhajans! And that's how I came to know about Bhagawan and properly I joined Bal Vikas in my 8th grade and after that, the way Swami had shaped me... I was a good student in school. Let us look at the Institute's curriculum that we have...every aspect of the student is moulded. It's just that you have to give yourself.

Once when Swami was addressing Bal Vikas gurus in a small interview... Swami looked at somebody... That person was not a guru yet. Swami told her, why don't you become a Bal Vikas guru. She said "Swami, I do not have the qualification, I do not know anything. What will I do as a Bal Vikas guru?" Swami said, "Madam, I don't want your qualification. I want your availability. If you are available for Bhagawan, He will shape you." That's exactly the thing. When we are in the hostel, any opportunity that is given to us, we have to whole heartedly participate in it. Even if you are not participating in it wholeheartedly, the fruits of participating in it wholeheartedly comes to you because of Swami's grace. The same thing in Bal Vikas...I had a lot of opportunities in terms of learning Vedam and all that..

During a Summer Course in 1993, just before the Summer Course, I had come for seva...I was doing service in Prasanthi Nilayam, in the ashram. Since Swami was in Brindavan, it was a norm that we travel to Brindavan and Swami used to give us Pada Namaskar. And we used to go back to Chennai.

At that time, I came to know that one of the seniors in Samithi had joined SSSIHL. That was the first time during that Summer 1993, I came to know that there is a university here. And after seeing the way Swami was blessing the students, I was interested in coming and joining this institution. And by Bhagawan's grace, I joined in 1995.

Incidentally, when I was in IX Std., one of my Bal Vikas classmates, he was not that good in academics. So his parents requested me that we both do a combined study regularly and that I teach him. We would meet in their house at night and study together. Right in front of Swami's photo, we both used to sleep. We used to have Nagar sankirtan everyday.

My Bal Vikas guru used to wake me up at 4:30 a.m. So however late it used to

be the previous night, we used to go for Nagar sankirtan. Everyday morning as we used to get up, one of them, either his grandmother or father or mother or sister of himself, they used to narrate a dream when Swami appeared.

Most of them were sleeping in bedroom. And I was sleeping right in the altar and I am not getting a dream. One day, I was very upset. I could not concentrate. I told that boy...Brother, I want to sleep. You please go ahead and study. That night, I had a wonderful dream in which I was actually playing in white shirt and pant...I was playing in a ground with other people who were also in whites and...there were two parts of the ground...there was lower and upper with some line of trees in between...Somebody came and rushed to me and said Swami is calling you. Immediately I rushed. They took me to the place where was Swami was standing. There was a shed under a big tree and there it was it. Something was written on the stage and Swami was there. Tightly he gave me a slap. That's it! I woke up.

Outside, cycle bell was ringing. My Bal Vikas guru was waiting for me. I didn't know what happened. I had this habit of writing a diary. So I wrote it in my diary what happened that day. This happened in my 9th grade. I joined the college in 1995 and during the Summer Course, every morning, we used to go from the hostel to the college attend the sessions in the morning and evening sessions in Sai Ramesh Hall. This happened after the Summer Course was over. The first day we were going for jogging. When I went for jogging, there Gopi sir was the PT master. He made us all assemble, especially the freshers. And at that point in time, I realized that this was the same place that I saw in my dream three years ago. "Aim high, score high - Baba" was written on the stand and that was the stand right under which we were standing. And...I am sure most of you wouldn't have seen that Brindavan ground that had two levels. It was in my final year B.Sc. that it was levelled up. Earlier it used to be two levels. So Swami had indicated to me that I was going to join his institution. But I didn't know what it was till I joined.

And the slap thing...when I narrated to my sister over the phone...she said definitely Swami is going to slap you one day. I was like...Why should I get slapped? My Bal Vikas guru used to say...you are one of my favourite students. So why should I get a slap! What happened was...Swami was in Brindavan for nine days...All the nine days, after the Parthi boys left, we

had Trayee sessions. And first year boys used to get an opportunity to sit in front. Now, I had this habit...being in Bal Vikas...I see most of you also... doing this...

So playing something on the hand or something like that. So one of the days Swami sat and then asked me...Vanaga Tamil Teriyuma? (Do you know Tamil?) I said, "yes Swami." And then Swami called out one of the brothers who had just then passed out of M.Com. In those days, the final outgoing batch even after the college started were allowed for Trayee sessions. So he got up and Swami said...he will speak like Manika Vaachakam. He was brother Rajgopal. There is one brother working in ashram. His name is Srinivasan. His brother Rajgopal. He was speaking and he spoke in Tamil. After him, there was another gentleman. I don't remember who he was. And as he was speaking, I was looking at him and he was standing this side and Swami was right here. Just four people away from Swami. I was doing this and suddenly something flew. And Swami used to have a jasmine ball like thing. Sevadals used to make it and keep it on Swami's jhoola. Swami had thrown it and... as he came here...I realized and got up...Swami said, "Don't do this!" And then I realized actually...the slap actually turned out to be a ball or flower that came to me.

Later, when I was...after this dream, Swami didn't show any presence at all. When I was in XI Std., there was another boy with whom I used to study. So after one of the days in Samithi, after the bhajans...we had a speaker who was saying, "At any point in time, whatever time it may be...midnight... wherever you are...you just pray to Swami. Ask him to show His presence to you. He will appear in front of you in some way and He will show His presence."

This was told that night and I used to take care of Samithi sales stalls...so I packed everything...I had to take it to a different place...came home and had dinner. It was 9:15-9:30. I took my bicycle. I was going. At that time, my grandmother said "You are going in the night..." Near my house, there were fields. I had to cross through fields and go. So, she said, "Be careful....you are going in the dark alone." I simply casually remarked her telling, "Swami is coming with me...Why should I be bothered?" It was a casual remark, not from heart. Just a lip service.

As I was going...on the way...in between the fields...suddenly I got a thought. Today that uncle told that Swami will show his presence whenever you would like to see it. I just prayed to Swami, “Swami, will it happen now?”

It was 9:30...no lights around...no house around...I stopped the cycle. Then there was a wonderful smell of vibhuti. A typical Prasanthi vibhuti...those days...it used to have a little bit of fragrance. Now you see that fragrance is different. But, what I knew as Prasanthi vibhuti was different. So, that same fragrance came. It lasted for almost 30 seconds. And then I realized that Swami is with me and proceeded. This is how Swami showed His presence and said, “I am always with you. Do not worry.”

After I joined the college, like I told you...I had this habit of studying late night...And we know the hostel rules. 9:30...milk bell and 10 lights are off. And Brindavan hostel was known for being strict those days. I did not know how to study because...during that time...8 to 9:30 study hours time...I was not able to study. It was in the night time...I was not getting to sleep. I wanted to study. What happened in my first mid-semester, I performed miserably. In physics, which was my favourite subject, I just passed. I was completely upset. I did not know what to do. At that time, one of the teachers...incidentally from the Physics department, he happened to speak to us after giving out of the papers...one week after that...He just casually said let us have parayanam. And in hostel we had a parayanam session with him. He told us, “whenever we do any activity...we offer to Swami at the end and before we start the activity, Swami will make sure that the activity is done properly.” So at that point in time, even if I am taking a gulp of water or if I am taking down notes, I used to pray ‘Saeeshwararpanamastu’ and do it. And the way it changed...that semester results came in. And we had come here after exams to Prasanthi Nilayam for Swami’s 70th birthday. Vacations were not there till birthday. From November 25th onwards, we had vacation for ten days. I went home and came back to Brindavan.

Results were ready. We were rushing in the evening to see the notice board of college. On the way, Warden sir was coming after his games session in the evening. He remarked to one of the senior brother walking next to him, “This fellow also got the O grade ra.” How bad I had performed in mid-semester completely took a turn and of the twenty people in my class, in B.S.c first

year, only three of us got 'O' grade and I was one of them.

I remember that evening...after the parayanam session happened. I was feeling very upset. I sat down and started writing a letter to Swami. Next day, I went to the ground in the morning, went to the auditorium...I hid myself in the step somewhere and then I cried my heart out writing to Swami, "I do not know Swami, I love this place so much but I am not able to study properly. You have to somehow make me do it..." And I still remember...tears were rolling down as I was writing down. And I posted it and right after that Swami ensured that I had good grades.

There is another incident that I would like to share. This happened to one of my classmates who is currently a teacher at the Muddenahalli campus. He fell very sick in this very hostel in Prasanthi Nilayam in his second year. And he had to take leave from the college classes. So he was just sleeping here. One of his roommates was a sick ward pantry boy so he had prepared lunch for him. And it was 11:50 or so. This boy was sleeping happily. In the dream Swami appeared. It was the interview room. Swami was sitting in the corner on His chair. This boy was sitting right in front of Him. And this boy told Swami, "Swami, I am not feeling well. I have never been so unwell all my life. Please Swami, do something."

Swami waved his hand and created a green twig. And then Swami broke into two pieces, threw away one and took one portion and put it in his mouth, made it very soft, gave it to him and said, "eat." It was exactly at that point in time, his co-room leader came and woke him up and then said, "brother, your lunch is ready." And he got sandwiches for him. It was bread butter jam. So the moment he woke up, it was just a swift moment from dream to reality. He woke up and he started searching for the twig. He took the slice of bread, there was jam, second- jam, third- jam. There were six slices. Between the fifth and sixth there was this green twig. He put the twig in his mouth and after that he was cured. Even till day, he had never had sickness of that nature till now.

Just before coming here...on June 1st...There is a Sathya Sai school in Chennai. They had invited me for a talk. They had two-day Summer Course on June 1st and 2nd. They called me for the similar evening session and they wanted me to talk about the joy of living in hostel. So I was asking a few boys

there who had their 2nd or 3rd year in their hostel at that time. I was asking them, 'what is hostel'. One of them got up and gave a wonderful answer, "Hostel is a place where we can find more number of brothers than at home." Such a wonderful place is this hostel. There are lot of things that we learnt from this hostel.

When I entered SSSIHL, the only qualification I had was my XII Std. certificate and the three or four years of Bal Vikas I went through. I had learnt Vedam and bhajans and all that. After coming here, the way the hostel had shaped me and the kind of faith that was reinforced in me was enormous and the amount of opportunities in the physical presence that we had. Wonderful!

Incidentally, I joined for the B.Sc. programmeme. Few of my classmates were there from I Std. and in their XII Std. they wanted to thank Swami for all the education that they had received. What they had done was that during the winter vacation that year, some boys had stayed back and Swami had gifted them with His robe. So immediately a thought came up. Okay, let us all put some money. One of the students had his father as the tailor and they had sample robe also. They wanted to stitch a robe for Swami and give it to Swami.

It happened in the month of February or so. They had got a robe; a wonderful robe stitched for Swami. And we knew the cloth that Bhagawan wears...It is not at all costly. Very cheap. One of the boys was a tailor himself, there was no tailoring charges as well.

Each boy must have spent 5 or 10 rupees for getting the robe ready. They had sent the robe along with the lunch that day from the hostel. It was a Thursday. So, from hostel, the food had gone. And even before the last class was over, the principal got a call that Swami is waiting for the XII Std. boys. Immediately they need to rush to the mandir. As they ran to the mandir, Swami was waiting in the verandah and was saying, "Go inside, go inside." So happy. Swami has accepted our robe and He is going to bless us all. As always, Swami was the last person to enter the interview room. Bolted. Turned around, showed the robe that was next to Swami's chair and asked, "How much did you spend?" Nobody opened their mouth because they wanted to gift to Swami. Swami

says, “You go to Tirupathi and offer hair. See how much hair I have. Do I need that? You go to any temple or puja room, you offer beetle leaves, fruits and flowers. All those are my creation. You want to offer all those to Me again? All these are going to fade away or get decayed. What I want is your heart.” That was the lesson Swami was driving that day. Swami said, “Did I ever ask you to do all this?” Then Swami went inside, got a bundle of hundred rupee notes, went to each and every person and gave hundred rupees. (Not sure about the denomination) Most of them did not want to accept it from Swami. Because, if they accept it from Swami, it would be as if they got it compensated. They did not want that. So, they did not take it.

Swami just dropped it on their laps and then moved past. Then, Swami looked at them and said, “You people do not know how fortunate you are. Am I asking you all this? All the Gods are waiting for getting darshan, sparshan, sambhasan. You have got that opportunity.” Then Swami showed the interview room wall. Water was flowing from the wall. Swami said, “You think that it is inanimate. You think that it is a non-living thing. That is crying. It has emotions and you people do not even understand as much as this wall understands.” When we used to come back as alumni and gather at Swami’s Lotus feet, when few of our senior ones go to Swami and say to Swami that we want to offer this to you, in a sense of paying back to what has given to us. It was much more than the education. Most of you would have come here thinking that you are going to get the secular education. But you will be standing corrected after you leave. You may not even understand it immediately after you leave. But when you are in your work life, when you are in family life, you will understand the kind of learning, what is the kind of knowledge, what is the kind of personality that Swami has made out of you.

I joined Brindavan and our kuladevatha (family deity) is Eshwara, Lord Shiva. So, since I have learnt Vedam, I always wanted to chant Samavedam. There is one small portion that I have learnt Samaganam and also little bit Rudram that I learnt. I always wanted to chant in front of Swami. And the first chance that I got was during the first year Summer Course itself. I was the part of the student group and we ended up chanting the same piece. It was not my choice. Again, Swami has chosen. This way, whatever may be, how ever small your wish may be, Swami would take care and fulfil it.

I always wanted to be in the music group. Unfortunately, when I was in Brindavan, I did not get that opportunity. But the moment I came to Prasanthi Nilayam, we had the music aptitude test. Shailesh Sir, few of the seniors were the part of the music aptitude test. And at that point in time, Sir was asking, "We will hymn a tune or play a tune on harmonium and you have to hymn back." They asked me what else can I play and I said, "I can play kanjira." So, I played kanjira and one of the brothers were playing on Tabla and they told me to follow. And after that, the brother came and told me, "Why don't you ask Shailesh Sir and join the Bhajan group for playing the kanjira?" My wish got fulfilled after I had come to Prasanthi Nilayam and I got this opportunity.

After that, those days, what used to happen was, seniors and teachers used to select a list of people for the music group and the band group. And their profile cards would be taken to Bhagawan. And Swami used to select finally from there. The day the selection was done and the day the name was displayed on the notice board, the same very day evening during darshan Swami called out, "Who are the new band boys?" After that, I was here for four years. Never it happened that Swami called, "Who are the new band boys?" It was that year Swami called us and spoke to each one of us and asked wherefrom each of us has come and what we were going to play. And then Swami called the then band leader and told him to take care of us and all that. So much of care Swami takes.

After I joined Swami's institution, for vacations I had been to my home. On one of the elders in our Samithi, she was telling me how such a wonderful place Swami's Institution is. It seems, one of her relatives, a boy got admission in Swami's institution probably in early 1980s. But, he was not interested in continuing here. And he did not what to do. He wrote a letter home saying that, "I want to come back. Please come and take me back home." Parents were adamant and said that he had to study there. And slowly, within a month's time, the boy has developed so much of love for this place. I am sure that many of you might be feeling homesick if you are staying away from home for the first time. I will tell you, the day you leave this place, you will be very very sad. I was just sharing this with brother Sai Giridhar just outside.

The day I left the college from the hostel, I had to leave little bit early as I had some commitments at home. I was crying, crying and crying. It was the same

Shyam in 1995 June, I was crying as I was missing my parents. Brindavan was empty. Swami had left 9th of June and nothing was around. I felt so homesick. The same Shyam at the end of seven years did not want to leave this place. I am sure that will be the lasting impression that this place will have on you.

After I passed out of Swami's institution, I took up a job in Polaris Software Labs and incidentally, we were around 5-6 of us from the Institute. Three M.Tech. boys and three MBA boys. We had joined Polaris. All of us in the same unit under one particular person who was our unit head. And, in a particular quarter, in all the projects, we had a reward ceremony called, 'Going an extra mile award.' 'Gem award.' And that particular quarter, all six of us got that 'Going an extra mile award.' And immediately, our unit head decided, "We will go to Prasanthi Nilayam and take Bhagawan's blessings."

So, all of us travelled to Prasanthi Nilayam. That day, Swami very lovingly allowed us to sit along with the current boys. Otherwise, you know where the old boys get to sit. It is in the garage. That day, Swami even distributed a robe. Swami spoke to all of us telling that we have commitments towards our organization and that we need to fulfil it properly. It was around that time that I was invited by the district president to address a gathering of devotees in our district. As I was sitting and recollecting that day about what is to be spoken, because I myself chose the topic as 'living with Bhagawan is the true education,' I realized, learning here is something. When we go out, many of the people, even in my own interview, after all the technicalities are discussed, they were asking me, "You were in such a closed environment, in a protected environment, how are you going to perform in the real world?" We did not know at that point in time. We just answered saying that, "We know that we will be able to do Sir. It was a mini workshop in the hostel and college. We know that we will be successful." Exactly that's what happened.

In fact, all of us in the corporate life, we go through lots of ups and downs and more would be on ethical point of view. Ethical dilemmas would be there. Right in our first year, we were working for a particular US client in Polaris. And that customer along with his team has visited Chennai and we had a party. It was on the premise of good performance of the entire team. We had a party. It was in a 7-star hotel in Chennai. As is the norm in the corporate, alcohol was served. All of us abstained from alcohol. We asked

for juice and we had juice. It was at that point in time, one of the senior members of the delegation from the customer came to us and said, "I am your customer. If I offer you, you have to take it." I tell you, at this point in time, you might feel about how you will retaliate at that situation. We do not know how we retaliated. The customer was so satisfied. And after that, he actually commented to our unit head telling that, "These guys are really strong in their character. I am glad have these as my vendors."

After working for Polaris for around three and a half years, I got opportunity to join another company headed by a Sai devotee. The organization was Dun & Bradstreet in Chennai. And even there, we had a very large group of Sai students. Incidentally, we used to have bhajans on Thursdays. In which corporate environment you were allowed to have Bhajans? We used to meet in the board room before all the other employees gather and we used to do bhajans and chant Vedam. We used to have Vedam classes also in the office. And we had a lot of opportunities. After I joined D&B, my responsibilities increased in terms of work. I was just a software developer when I was in Polaris and here I became a team lead and I was also told to do design for various systems. We were a product company and I was told to do design for various products. It was going very tough. Exactly at that point in time, an alliance got fixed for my sister and that work was also on priority.

It was round this time, the convenor of our Samithi decided to move away from the post because he was travelling abroad on business for long term. So, he had requested me, "You being a Sai student, I am sure that you will be able to take it up. Why don't you take it up?" I was in dilemma. I spoke to my parents. They told very clearly, "No. Nothing doing. You have lot more to take care, especially now as that you have moved to new organization, you have more responsibility." That evening we had meeting in Samithi. It was in a fix. Nobody was ready to take up. At that point in time, I did not know what to do. I took a small chit of paper. Torn it into two pieces. I wrote yes on one and no on another. Put it in my pocket and prayed to Swami and then just lifted. Swami said, "Yes." So, I agreed to become the Samithi convenor. Because it was more of a compulsion at that point in time as no one else was taking up. This was in 2005. After that, it became very hectic. It was very difficult to manage. I was performing badly in office. I was not taking care of anything in the Samithi. Everything was in chaos. At home, I was not able

to manage with work at home. And somehow things were happening. This was in 2006 Jan. In 2007, somehow I managed one year and I want to tell Swami in physical presence that, “Swami, I would like to come out of the Samithi convenorship. I am not able to manage. I do not have the time.” It was on 1st Jan. We had the alumni meet here. We had the programme and the very next day, Swami called all of us inside the bhajan hall and we had the interaction. Swami came in between the lines, blessed us and gave vibhuti. I wanted to ask Swami about the same question. Swami was coming just to me and everybody was enquiring about Swami’s health.

One of them said, “Swami, we are not able to see you like this...” Swami said, “Close your eyes. No need to see.” Another person said, “Swami, it is so painful for us to see you like this.” Swami said, “Oh, you are interested in solving your pain than my pain.” Such random answers were coming. I really did not know how to ask Swami about this. I also said, “Swami, please cure yourself soon.” Swami smiled and gave vibhuti and passed. After that I realized, “I got the opportunity. I did not ask.” I felt very bad. The same year Swami came to Chennai in January for Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam. I got the opportunity to be in the place where the Yagnam was going on as part of the back office media relationship team. Swami used to come almost everyday and bless us. On the last day, the day Swami was leaving from Sundaram to back to Parthi, we were all gathered in bhajan hall, primarily the Sai youth. Most of us were Sai students. In the hall, because it was a small gathering, I had a place behind and it was sparsely populated. We were all expecting Swami to come through the front door. Swami came from the back door and I was the only person in the vicinity. I thought, “This is the right time. I will get up and tell Swami that I don’t have time to do your work Swami. Please.” I knelt down and Swami told the brother who was pushing the wheel chair, “Aaa. Akkada Po.. (Go there).”

The moment I wanted to open, Swami said kurcho (sit down) and moved off. He very clearly wanted to come and speak to me. The moment He came near me, he said kurcho and went off. I felt very bad. I missed this opportunity also and Swami had left.

Just outside Sundaram, I met one of the senior members of our Samithi. He has been a devotee since late 1950s. I told him, “Uncle, I wanted to tell Swami

that I don't have time. He did not give me the opportunity." He immediately chided me and said, "Shyam, you should not tell Swami that you don't have time. That is very negative way of approaching. You should tell Swami to give you the time to do the work."

That immediately dawned in me and the next day I wrote a letter to Swami, praying Him, "Swami, give me time to do your work." Suddenly after Ati Rudram Maha Yagnam, because Swami has just visited, many old timers in Samithi who had not been coming to Samithi for 4-5 years and who used to do lot of work earlier, they came back to Samithi the next very Sunday. Each one came to me because I was the convenor and said, "Shyam, I want to take this up. Is that ok?" Since then I was a convenor for 4-5 years. After that there were 2-3 convenors also now. In this manner way, Samithi activities started progressing in all the wings...we have a service wing, spiritual wing and an educational wing in the organization. In all the wings, literally there was a revolution. And incidentally, I was the same Shyam who did not have time, here Swami created the space. In project management, we call it as 'Man hours' or 'Man days' or 'Man weeks'.

If it was Shyam to do all the work, then Shyam has to not be a part time office bearer. He has to be a full time office bearer in Samithi. What happened? Swami created that space. If Shyam spends five days in office, there are 5 members of the Samithi who were taking care of the things. Saturday and Sunday Swami is available. This is how Swami created time. He is kalathithaya namah. I have been able to do lot of work. Incidentally, after Ati Rudram Mahayagnam in Chennai, the number of activities in Tamil Nadu also increased in leaps and bounds. After that, I got lot of opportunities to go, train balavikas gurus across Tamil Nadu. Subsequently, in 2008 I got married. Luckily my wife is also a Sai devotee and she is also a balavikas guru. So, she came in and took over lot of activities from me and Swami made sure that His child does not really... I used to have a block in my mind that, "I don't have time." So, Swami created lot of space and removed the block from my mind.

Back in 2008, in Chennai, my office used to be completely in the outskirts of the city. Now, it is one of the main parts of the city. I used to come by bike. I did not have a car and so, I used commute to office bike. It was a tough time

when we had a lot of project goals to meet and I was struggling. It was around 1 O'Clock or 2 O'clock I used to come from office driving on my bike. I used to go 9 in the morning and come back at 2. I generally avoid taking food from outside home and hostel. So, I did not want to have food outside. So, I used to come back home and have food. My wife was worried on a particular day. She had bad dreams that night. She slept off at 10 o'clock and woke up at 11 o'clock with bad dreams like something happens to me on the way. She felt very bad and she called me and said, "Please take care. I got some bad signs." I said, "Don't worry, Swami is with me." That night happened to become the longest night. That night I came back at 2 O'clock from office.

After I reached home, she was actually reading Sat Charitra. She was worried about me and the moment I landed, she served me food and she was staring at me. Suddenly she took her phone and clicked a snap of my forehead. And then, we saw... I have the habit of putting vibhuthi, kunkum, chandan. That day, as she took the picture, kumkum and chandan had become to a clear shape of 'Om,' written in Sanskrit. She was surprised. That day, we realized that Swami is there with us wherever we are. It is not to tell that I had some powers. Literally, not that. It was that Swami was showing His presence there and saying that, "Child, I am with you. I am guarding you.'

Incidentally, because of the IT industry, I travel to abroad. I generally do not tend to be abroad for quite long time because of the same food reasons. I hate my own cooking also. That is another thing. So, whenever I travel... I had been to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Japan, Sweden and UK. Whenever I travel, the next would always be empty. I have this trouble of going on air. In-flight experience is not so really good for me. Somehow Swami used to show His presence.

Last summer, 2014, I had to travel to Sweden. Before travelling, I generally do a lot of study. Not about the culture of locals, but to see if there is a Sai Centre nearby. Because, during a stay of one month, weekends would be free, and for at least one session we can go somewhere and attend bhajans or something like that. I searched on the website. Sweden organization is not very active. So, I don't know what to do. I was put in a remote village. So, I did not know what to do. I was feeling sad. As I got into the flight...all the international flights have a display in front of you where you can watch

movies or listen to music, and all the announcements come in there. I wanted to sleep as I was very tired. I had late stay in the office also that day and I was in the flight.

There was a small boy sitting next to me. That boy was so interesting. I think that was his first time on a plane. So, he was amused with the inflight entertainment and all that. Suddenly he went and found 2-3 Tamil movies and he put on a Tamil movie. The movie starts with a Shirdi Baba picture. I was like, "Wow, what a relief." As the flight has not yet started, I messaged to call my wife saying that "Swami has showed His presence and see Shirdi Baba." I not even completed my sentence and the next still (in the movie) was Shirdi Baba's face dimming and up came Sri Sathya Sai Baba's photo. On an international flight, you see 'Sathya Sai photos!' Even if they was no empty seat, Swami was ensuring that Swami was with me. On the return journey, my flight was from Copenhagen, Denmark and then Frankfurt, Germany and then come back. In Copenhagen, as I boarded the flight, it was a short flight. I was looking for signs, 'where is Swami.' There was no in-flight entertainment because it was not a long haul flight, but it was a short haul flight. So, I don't know what was going to happen. I just peeped through the window. Now, incidentally, what happened was in that flight also... I generally book aisle seat because of my bulky physique. Sitting in the window seat was not very comfortable. I sat on the aisle seat. Other two seats were empty. So, the entire row for me and so I went towards the window and peeped out. Suddenly something orange flashed. It was airport security car which was completely in the colour of Swami's robe. That was another way of Swami assuring you that I am with you. It was a safe flight as well.

There was one incident that I want to narrate. How much of care Swami has for all of us. Once it happened in Trayee. It was one of the morning darshans. It was outside Trayee. We noticed that when Swami was collecting letters... Morning Swami used to walk among the devotees and evenings, He used to sit on the throne on the stage and He used to go from there to Trayee. That morning, Swami was walking amongst us. The way Swami was holding His kerchief and holding letters, Swami was actually closing off the index finger of His right hand. One of the brothers had to give Arati that day evening. When he got up to the stage, he found that Swami was actually struggling. Because we use this index finger to light the match. Swami has to light the

match and Swami was actually struggling. This boy has noticed that Swami had a bandage.

This boy, Dr. V Praveen who is currently working in Super Speciality Hospital in Whitefield, noticed this and after we entered Trayee, Swami asked, “Emi Samacharam? (What is the news?)” At Trayee also, on the Jhoola Swami would put His hand and very comfortably He put the kerchief on His finger and covered it. Immediately that boy got up and said, “What is wrong with your finger?” Swami said, “Emi ledura (nothing).” And then He was showing the left hand and said, “See... it’s all fine.” This boy said, “No. Swami. Your right index finger.” Swami said, “Emi ledura.” And then Swami showed, “Avunu, What happened was, I was actually searching for a nail-cutter (or razer) in my pouch and as I put My hand inside that, there was a blade that was open. It cut through my nails and the finger. And I did not want to have bandage...” Subbhapaiah, who was one of the cooks for Swami. He was worried and he said, “No Swami, we will give you bandage. They will put waterproof skin color bandage and it will not be visible.” Swami said, “This is what happened. Nothing. Don’t worry. It will be alright.” That day what happened was, we had two rooms. One was the Jhoola room and another was the central hall. Ladies were allowed that day. In fact, P Susheela amma and few other dignitaries were sitting inside. Swami was talking and He said, “Emi ledu. Emi ledu.” Then somebody asked, “Swami, Noppi unda (Is there pain)?” Swami said, “No ra. No problem ra.” He was trying to divert saying, “Aaa.. inka emi samacharam....” All of us said, “Swami, please cure yourself.” Swami said, “Vadhu Vadhu (No. No.)” and one of the teachers asked, “Swami, when we have problem, we come and pray to you. If you have problem, to whom will we go and pray?” Swami said, “Again you have to pray to Me to cure Myself.” Then we all shouted in one voice, “Swami, please cure yourself.” Swami showed us the finger and it was blood stained and said, “Ok. Because as you all are asking, I will do.” He did something like this and that and He removed the bandage and He actually wanted to throw away the bandage. One of the brothers, brother Bharadwaj was there. He jumped and grabbed that bandage also. He still has that blood stained bandage with him. Swami’s finger was completely alright.

The episode does not end there. The very next day, Swami called one of the senior ladies. She was from Singapore. Swami called her and said, “You

speak.” She started speaking. She said, “You boys don’t have any sense.” That’s how she started. “You don’t have love for Bhagawan. Swami is giving so much of Himself to you, can’t you give nail-cutter to swami?” In fact, in all her innocence she was speaking. Swami was immediately upset. Swami said, “Noru musuko (close your mouth). Nobody should talk about my boys,” and made her sit. In that full season of Swami being in Brindavan, none of the ladies were allowed to enter the Trayee session. Swami protects us so much.

What is that we give back to Swami? Can we ever repay? Incidentally, one of the brothers asked Swami, “Swami, I am sure it is the merits of our previous births and the births of our ancestors that we got his opportunity to be with you and do all this.” Swami said, “You are wrong. Just the first darshan is because of all that merit. Rest all is my Grace.” Swami is showering so much of grace on us. So, what do we do. What Swami expects us? When we go to the outside world... This is something which keeps my character very strong. When I go outside, if somebody looks at me, they don’t see me Shyam Kumar. If Sathya Sai Organization, they look at me Sai Student Shyam Kumar. If I am in normal life, they look at me as a student of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. So, if I slightly drift away from the path, what would happen? That is the feeling which keeps my character goes strong and my attachment to Swami continues and this bond of love continues to flow.

I would like to conclude. Thank you and Sairam.

Sri Tribhuvan Sachdev

Alumni, SSSIHL

Om Sri Sai Ram. Offering my most prayerful salutations at the lotus feet of my most beloved Lord, Bhagawan Baba, who is verily present with us at this very moment.

Respected teachers and my dear young stars of tomorrow, trust me, it has been very nostalgic right from the day, right from the time I stepped into Prasanthi Nilayam, right from the morning, till this whole day through. And, as I walked in this evening inside the hostel, the vivid memories of eight years spent at the Lotus feet of Swami, they came on coming back to you, they kept on coming back to you like a movie would do.

I really do not know where to start from. So, I will just request Bhagawan and pray to Bhagawan that He guides us so that we interact and we have a nice session about what we had a chance to witness Bhagawan in those golden years as we call it.

You would be surprised, now these days when I come to Puttaparthi, I find it is beautiful, it is lavish, it is green, the trees, you will find everything so beautiful. Your hostel also beautiful. The flooring, the outside bit, the lawns, everything. It came as a big revelation to me. Because, when we were staying in Puttaparthi, it used to be absolutely barren. Totally brown it used to be. There was not a single tree in sight. And in those days, Swami used to tell us, "Don't worry. One day I am going to convert Puttaparthi into Ooty. And you will see that the climate is gradually going to change." And, my God, from 1979, it is almost now so many years which have passed us by, and I see that the climate is actually changing the way Swami had willed it to be. There is so much of greenery around. When you look at the mountain, where your university is there, you find not a single piece of brown can be seen. It is absolutely green. But, in our good old days, when we used to be here, it used to be totally brown. There was not a single tree in sight. So, all these years, the Puttaparthi has turned really beautiful and it is turned more beautiful because of the stars in your eyes. You all are the stars of tomorrow. You are the

chosen ones. Just imagine, there is such a huge lot of youth in this total world. Out of that, you see the youth which is there in India. Out of that youth in India, a handful or handpicked, chosen out of all those great difficulties of written examination, interviews and what have you and with great difficulty you get into these hallowed portals of Puttaparthi.

So, you cannot imagine at this moment sitting here, because you are so young as I was once upon a time. And trust me, I was not so bad looking. I was like you with lot of hair on my head. And of course, the time has taken its toll. You find less of hair and more of experience. Okay. But then, when I look at you, I find myself, I visualize myself sitting in all of you, sitting with all of you here and looking and hearing to all the great persons who used to come and speak.

Tonight, let me confess to you, we are not going to have speak about philosophy. Not going to give you any Gyan. We are just going to live those beautiful moments with Bhagawan which verily bring us close to Him.

So, let me start with this. I was also once upon a time, a teenager like you. And it was my parents ardent wish that I come and join in Puttaparthi or Bangalore. More so, Bangalore. And trust me, I was just not wanting to come and join Swami's college. Ultimately, I realize that if I come here, I will have to wear white clothes, I will have to be good, I will have to be in good company, I will have to go for bhajans, I will have to do seva... I mean, who wants to do bhajans at this age. I mean, you are supposed to be listening to rock music, go to a rock concert, go to discotheques, take a bike, go with your friends zooming at a high speed... Who wants to be good in the age of 15, 16, 17, 18. So, I told my Mom and Dad, "Look, I know that it is your ardent wish that you want me to come and join Swami's college, but trust me, I am not just made for Swami's college. I am not just ready to go there." So, it took them two years. And more so, one year wherein the kind of, you know, they kept on brainwashing me, requesting me, cajoling me, and telling me that we want you coming to this college. You see, you study there for some time. If you don't like, you come back. But, you go there.

So, after some time, I realized, "Since my parents wants me to come and join this college, why not we try? Let us see." I had a brother younger to

me. So, both of us. And those were those days of long hair, bell-bottoms, in 70's how it used to be. And we used to look like half hippies in all around. And we came to the college. And very surprisingly, the more we landed up in Bangalore, I saw that there were lot of boys going around wearing whites. They kept their heads low. They walked very gracefully. If somebody would stop them and talk to them, they would speak in beautiful and impeccable English and they would be so humble. And they all had a vibhuti mark on their foreheads. And I thought and I compared myself to them and I asked my Dad, "Dad, who are these boys here? They are looking so nice." Angel-like expressions on their faces. Okay. We all are angels. Remember. So, angel like expressions on their faces. So, my dad said, "These are the students here." So, I started comparing myself with them and I realized, there was something indefinable. Indefinable lacking in me. I could not define. I could not pinpoint what was lacking in me. But, I realized, I wanted to be like that. But, as luck would have it, there was come problem in Bangalore University. I had 10+1 and those were the days, when 10+2 system had come in from CBSE. So, those children who had done their 10th class could seek admission in PUC. And those, who had done their 10+2 could join seek admission in the undergraduate courses. But, since I had done 10+1 system, the Bangalore University rejected my application and principal Narendrahu who was then said, "Sorry Sir, we cannot have your elder son studying here because of these affiliation problems." My younger brother, who was not so intelligent in his studies, and I thought, I was very intelligent, you know. He was getting just 51-51% and the day he used to get 50%, there used to be celebrations in our house that "Thank God, he has not got third class." It used to be like that. So, with that 51-52% he got into Brindavan and we were all happy. And I was amazed that, "Me with 61% could not get in and this guy with 51% got an admission." So, one big puncture to you from Bhagawan that, "What do you think of yourself?"

Now. My father happened to know Prof. Kasturi. You know who is Prof. Kasturi? The biographer of Bhagawan, who has written 'Sathyam Shivam Sundaram,' 'Loving God,' so many books about Swami. The first person who stayed here with Swami and wrote His biography. So, my father happened to know Prof. Kasturi. We went to see him in Adugodu, in Bangalore, where he used to stay then to visit him. So, while we were in Bangalore, me and my brother, my parents, they all went there and we were sitting down on

the floor and talking to him. He was sitting on the chair. So, while talking, my Dad said, “Unfortunately, my elder son is not getting admission here and my younger son has got admission. The Principal says that you can get your elder son admitted into 11th class again.” That means, I will have to go two years behind in my career. I had already done my 11th, I was eligible for undergraduates, but here, Principal told that you will be eligible for 11th class again for PUC 1, so why don’t you seek admission in PUC 1. So, I refused him. So, my dad was communicating it to Prof. Kasturi and he said, “What is your advice Sir? What should he do?”

I still remember that look, that shine in his eyes, that glee on his face. And Prof. Kasturi looked at me very lovingly and he said, “If Swami was to give me admission in this age of 75, in the PUC 1, I would still readily take admission. So, why don’t you also take admission in PUC 1?” So, my immediate conclusion was that this man is probably... I am telling you very honestly what I thought. I said, “How can he think like this about youth losing two years? Does he not understand? I am going to be two years behind in my career. Two years behind in seeking a job. Two years behind settling down in life...” So, I said, “No. Thank you. I agree that you could see admission, but I would rather not.” Then my father asked him, “What could be the best next possibility?” He said, “In Puttaparthi, (in 1979) Swami is going to start a college in the next one month. Why don’t you try your son’s admission in Puttaparthi?” So, I was, actually feeling happy that I am not going to get admission but gradually I realized that there was no go. Prof. Kasturi informed that there is a college in Puttaparthi and you can seek admission there.

So, I was promptly taken to Puttaparthi and with great difficulty, with lot of affiliation problems, this that and what not, I could seek admission. But, I had to still put almost a month outside the campus, wait for the clearances to come. My parents left me high and dry and they went back and they left me fending for myself. But that one month which I spent on my own was really a very good one month because I got into understanding, what Puttaparthi stood for? What that early morning *suprabhatam* meant. What that nagarasankirthan meant? What Swami’s darshans meant? It was such a big revelation that without realizing I found myself running Swami’s car. Those were the days Swami used to go after bhajans in a car. Why? Because the college was under construction, the hostel was under construction. There

was so much of construction activity going on. There was no sign of university. But Swami used to go out and people used to run after Swami's car to have His darshans. And like a mad fellow, even I used to run after Swami's car to get one glimpse not realizing what is come over me and why is it that suddenly I want to be with Bhagawan!

Finally, that day dawned and I got admission in Swami's college and I saw... You see where you all sit now. That was the place where the devotees used to sit and all the boys had the privilege to sit right inside the verandah, where all the VIPs and VC and everybody sits. That was the place where all the boys used to sit. So, that day I realized, I got myself parked there and as I looked around, I felt a sense of pride in myself that, "My God, I have ultimately come to Bhagawan." And on the first day, what I noticed was, Swami was very playful, Swami was very jolly, happy go jolly, happy go lucky God. He was not in a serious kind of mood. "Sit Down. Bolo Bhaccha...Kya Chahtha Hai." No No. Not that kind at all. That was my impression about Bhagawan you know. The very first day I realized, he was so happy go lucky, so down to earth. He would go, pinch somebody's cheek who was fat, he would go and put a tappu on somebody's head, he would call somebody 'Dunnapothu', he would call somebody something.... So, I was amazed looking at Swami's love. And you know what was most amazing, which I found very amazing at that time was, Swami would come and ask a guy something in Telugu. So, obviously you know that this boy probably knows Telugu. And then, some person Swami would speak in Kannada. Other boys, He would speak in Hindi. Others, He would speak in English. So, I would wonder, "How would Swami know which boy speaks which language?" Now, if I look at you, all of you look to me and appear to me just like ordinary boys. It does not say that Mother tongue Telugu, Mother tongue Tamil, Mother tongue English, it does not read. But, Swami used to read very well.

So, it was two or three days and I was observing very closely about how Swami would talk to the boys and I thought in my mind, "Swami when are you going to come to me, you are going to get foxed. Because, I look like a Telugu guy but I know only Hindi. I don't know a word in Telugu. So, how are you going to talk to me?" I thought I was very intelligent. Swami came. I saw a dark complexion boy sitting there and I said, "This guy should be a South Indian and I think Swami is going to speak to him in Telugu." Sure enough,

Swami came and spoke to him in Telugu and he asked back something which I could not understand anything. Then Swami moved ahead. There was one more dark complexion boy, very dark. I thought, "Okay. He is also a South Indian and Swami is going to talk to him also in South Indian." To my amazement, Swami came to him and spoke to him in English – "Where did you come from, Sir?" How lovingly Swami said! "Where did you come from Sir?" He got up on his knees and said, "Swami, I am from United States of America." From the accent itself, I could know, "My God, this guy does not any Indian languages. He speaks only English and Bhagawan knew that he knows English. So, Swami asked in English." Then third boy he moved to and as he was moving towards me, I was smilingly, giving 70mm smile knowing that, "Boss, Swami is going to ask me in Telugu." As soon as Swami came to me, he looked into my eyes, and very lovingly he asked me in Hindi, "Tum Kaha se aaya? (Where did you come from)" I got up on my knees and I said, "Swami, Indore se." Swami immediately responded, "Yes, Yes, you are from Indoor, not from Outdoor." So, the first time I learnt the way Swami beautifully puns and I understood and I felt such a huge surge of devotion, such a huge surge of love for Bhagawan and I felt, "Swami in spite of all my bad points, you have accepted me? In spite of all my ego, you have accepted me? You say that I am from Indoor, not from Outdoor." Swami I am truly blessed. And I touched His feet and He looked at me and gave me that most beautiful smile which Swami used to give, charging me fully and He moved on.

Then I learnt that for Swami language is no bar. He can speak to any person in any language and that person understands. I never understood Telugu quite a lot. But, every time Swami would call us for an interview, and He would speak in Telugu. I don't know how, somehow I would understand what he is wanting to say. At least that, you know, the whole basis of it. What exactly Swami wants to say, we would understand. How we understood? We never quite really realized. You know, those were the days, when lots of these Americans and Europeans and people used to fly in chartered flights to India and hordes of them. And if there was a Christmas time, trust me, in 1979 and in the 1980s, Christmas used to mean...it used to be only foreigners. There were no Indians to be seen. So many foreigners used to be there.

And there was a huge surge of Italians coming over for Bhagawan's darshans.

So, I realized, we saw, there was a group of 30 to 40 Italians, they all landed up one day. How we recognized them was, because those days, darshan lines were only three lines. And what those Italian people were doing? All of them were wearing blue colored scarfs which read 'Italia'. So, it was understood that these people were from Italy. A new group has come, almost 20 gents, 20 ladies and they all were sitting and Swami was going to talk to them as Swami would do. Swami used to give lot of interviews to the foreigners who used to come there then. That night, we had our duty in the stores. We have departmental stores in the hostel now. Early, there used to be one Kerala stores in the ashram where we used to go and serve. All the boys used to do, take turns to do duties. That evening, it was our duty to go and help Mr. Khaaldas, who was also doing door duty to Swami then. In the evening, we realized that the whole Italian group came there. When all of them reached there, we realized that they did not speak a single word in English. They would enact and say, "We want tooth brush, we want a shaving foam..." We would ask for ten rupees, they would give us hundred rupees and say 'Sairam. Sairam.' Beyond that, they did not know. So, we realized, "My God, they speak only Italian. They don't speak Hindi, they don't speak Urdu, they don't speak Tamil, they don't speak Telugu, they don't speak Kannada. So, how is Swami going to talk to them? And they know only Italian."

As we closed the stores and we were walking to our hostel,... In those good old days, our hostel used to be where Brindavan boys stay now. And our college was the Easwaramma school. There our classes used to be conducted because this hostel was under construction and college was also under construction. Nothing was ready but Swami has started off with a Sankalpa that the college should start. That was how the college started. You will not believe, in the hostel, in a small dormitory, 70 of us used to be packed in like sardines. All of us used to be there. 70 of them in one floor, 70 on the second floor, 70 on the third floor. And there used to be 3 or 4 bathrooms. So, early in the mornings, there used to be a big jostling, who would go in first, who would go in next. So, it used to be a great experience about time management. We learnt our first principles of time management in our old hostel there. Because, amenities were less, but then we had a lot of Swami. Swami used to say it, "When I give few amenities, I give more of myself." And that is what we got. We may have faced lot of physical hardships when we were studying here. But then, I tell you, Swami used to compensate for everything. Today

I had the great good privilege to have dinner in the hostel and I tell you, I must congratulate your warden, and all the teachers here, what delicious food you guys served. And, had you gone into time match and come back into our times, I doubt if you guys could have had that kind of food. Without casting aspersions on anybody, we used to have bullet proof Idlis, leather utthappams, flying saucer chapathis, elastic bonda... This is how, we used to name them. In fun, of course. It was not so bad. In fun, we used to say, so that when we laugh at yourself, the trouble wears itself off. That was how we used to look at it. Swami used to be very very careful. He would ask us, "What you had? What did eat? Was the food good?" And in spite of all that, we used to hammer away it out to glory. Food means, it has to be hammered.

I remember, one day, Sunday every morning it was our duty to make sure that all the boys are fed properly. Because, Swami used to come in very early, at 7:30 in the morning or 8:00 in the morning. So, at times, some of our senior boys, while serving breakfast, we used to get late for darshans. So, we would say, "Okay. Let us serve breakfast. After that, whatever is left remaining, we will hammer it nicely. And then we go quickly change and go for darshan." So, it used to only around bhajan times that we used to reach. One day, as we sat, my classmate who was there with me who was a fat fellow, Swami used to call him 'Bheemudu', he was serving there in the kitchen. He came and sat down. He used to play Tabla. Swami came straight to him and gave him a dirty look. And he understood that Swami was looking at him like this as he was not there for darshans. Then Swami came again second time after the interviews got over and looked at him. "Hmm. Where were you?" asked Bhagawan. "Swami, breakfast serving," answered the boy. "Okay. Okay. What was the menu today?" asked Bhagawan. "Swami, Podiyalu," answered the boy. "Okay. How many puris did you eat?" asked Swami. He just looked at Swami with a guilty face. "How many. Cheppu?" Swami asked. He could not say. Swami looked at all of us and said, "You know, this fat fellow. He had 25 puris." That fellow put his head down and everyone laughed just as we laughed here and Swami went away. As soon as He left, he said, "What yaar, see, we got late. Swami is getting upset..." Then, he quietly says, "Actually, I had 25 puris only. Swami knew about it and that's why he told." That means, Swami knew that if we have 25 puris, Swami was the one who was taking the count. Nobody else took the count. Warden was not there. We were not there. So, with such small small details, Swami used to confront us on daily basis.

Coming back to our Italian friends, as we were walking back, we were speaking amongst ourselves, and one of my friends asked, "What is Swami going to talk with these devotees when He grants them an interview?" One of our boys said, "Well, they speak neither English, not any Indian language. It is going to be a uphill task. I don't know how Swami is going to manages." And we were all young, fresh like some of you who are probably just a year old or two-year-old here in this place. And we were also toddlers just about a year or two years old. So, the elderly amongst us said, "Look. Amongst the whole group, there would be one person who would understand English. Swami will give His discourse in English and that person would translate it into Italian. Simple. Elementary my dear Watson." We said, "Oh. Yes. That's fine. That's right. That is how it would be." When that intelligence dawned on us, we felt very happy. "Oh. This is how, it would happen." And as luck would have it, the next day, all of us, the boys who were working in stores, they had a chance to sit in the front row. Just as you boys are sitting here facing the ladies side that day in the verandah, we were facing exactly, leaving a small passage for Bhagawan. Why we used to leave a narrow passage? Because, then, Swami would come and bump into us, His legs would touch us, we would softly touch His hands, we will touch His robe without His knowing. So, we purposely sit and leave out only the narrow gap. Then Swami would say, "Move. Move." And we hardly move and give Him only this much place to Swami and Swami would also loving stand and then he is talking to this person but then putting His feet into the lap of another person. And nobody knows. Only that boys know and He is just looking at Swami and Swami saying, "Do. Do. You are doing Padaseva....." Where will you get a God who comes verily and puts His lotus feet into your laps and tells you, "You do. Carry on. Don't worry." And then He is talking to the person very seriously and nobody knows that with one arrow He is hitting two aims here. You would not know.

This is how Swami used to do. That day also, Swami started His darshan. At 4 o'clock, that silver handle door opened from Swami's room, which used to be near the bhajan hall then. Swami walked out. He would first take a left turn and go to the ladies side. So, He got from the portico and went to the ladies side. All the ladies in the Italia, blue colored scarf were sitting there. They all offered letters to Swami. Swami kept on blessing them but did not accept

any letters and He kept on walking. As He came to the gents side, there was a dasavathar gate where water van is standing these days. He signaled that the men people will sit from here. Swami saw this Italian group sitting. He looked at the leader of that Italian group and He asked, "Italy?" He shook his head, "Yes Swami." It understood that Swami was asking whether he was Italy. "Go Inside," said Swami. Now he did not understand. Swami said, "Go inside." He still did not understand. He kept on shaking his head. He thought Swami was talking to him something. And Swami moved on. There was one gentleman Mr. Craxi who used to stay here with Swami. He was the Italian Prime Minister's younger brother. Bettino Craxi. He came from behind and told him in Italian, "Swami wants to grant an interview to you and your group. Please go inside." When he spoke to him in Italian, suddenly they got a jolt. They all got up and started running towards to interview room. So, the gents sat on the upper verandah which was closer to the bhajan hall and the ladies sat facing the boys. From where the ladies sat, there was hardly 7 or 8 feet gap. And that day, I saw Swami came from the lower verandah from the sands. That time there was no Sai Kulwant hall. As Swami came on the upper verandah, I was sitting right here where my brother is sitting here and the ladies were sitting here. And Swami went to that lady and I with my own ears heard Swami speak something which was not English, not Hindi, not Telugu, not Tamil, not Kannada. It sounded something like Italian speak. It had that connotation. Then I saw that lady started weeping and fell down at Swami's feet from what Swami spoke to her. And then Swami put His hands back and came straight looking at me. Then He said like this, "Outside I show that I don't know anything. But inside, I know everything." That's all.

A great message to all of us. He did not say, "See, I speak Italian. Could you understand?" No such thing. He just came and gave a message that He wanted to give and what is the message? "Outside I show that I don't know anything. But inside, I know everything." And that is what it happened. And after that, they all went inside for an interview. After half an hour they came back and then we asked and they said that Swami spoke to all of them in Italian in that interview. Throughout the interview, they spoke to them in Italian. And you know how the interviews used to begin then? Swami was a perfect host. What He would do is, He would stand outside, open the interview room. Then ask ladies first to go. After the ladies are settled in, He would ask the gents to go in. After everybody is settled in that small little interview room

of Bhagawan, Swami would find His way inside, put on the light, put on the fan and then go and sit on the chair. And after sitting on the chair, Swami would start His discourse. If it is someone who understands Telugu, Swami would say, “Emi Samaacharam? (What’s the news?)” Somebody would respond to it and then Swami would give a pravachanam or a discourse in Telugu. If somebody who understands Hindi, Swami would say, “Kya Khabar hai? (What’s the news) Batao” And then you tell Him the khabar (news) and Swami will take your khabar after that. So, this is how it used to be. In English, Swami would say, “What news?” And after that, Swami would talk. So, this is how it used to begin. But they all said that, that day Swami spoke to them in Italian throughout. So, this is where we learnt that languages were really not a barrier for Bhagawan.

Let me relate to you. In the hostel when we were studying, it used to be very hot. The temperature used to be 42, 43 degrees. There were no fans, no greenery and we were supposed to go and study for our afternoon classes sometimes in the ladies canteen. That had a black Kadappa slab then. So, you can image the heat pouring in and black Kadapa slabs to sit on. My God, what a condition your bums must be getting into, if you get to sit there? So, we used to go and pour water, sprinkle water on them so that we can sit comfortably. But then, Swami used to say, “The more physical difficulties I give you, the more I give myself.” And it was so true. Swami used to wait for all the boys to come for darshans. And the moment boys would come, he would go inside the boys, He would be like that Krishna with all that Gopis and Gopikas and He would talk to them, ask about your parents, ask about your brother and sister, ask about your home, ask about your studies etc. There was nothing that was hidden from Swami. It used to be only Swami, Swami, Swami and He used to come and talk to us day in and day out. The day He would not talk to you, you would sit with long face. “What happened?” “Today Swami did not speak to me.” This is how it used to be. So, imagine what kind of love Bhagawan gave to us in those times.

In those good old days, whenever there used to be a big function, either during Birthday times or Dasara times...in Dasara there used to be *Veda Purusha Maha Yagna*. In this *Veda Purusha Maha Yagna*, Swami used to have a 10-day long festival, where in the last 7 days every evening, Swami used to have a cultural programme. There were Pandit Ravi Shankar coming

and performing, Shiv Kumar Sharma coming and performing, Hariprasad Chaurasia coming and performing, M S Subbalakshmi coming and performing, P Susheela Devi coming and performing. But, the final day used to be left and kept reserved for the students where in the orchestra programme would be given. In between, on the semi-final day, Swami would keep it for a drama or something.

So, when we joined for the first year in 1979, Swami was about leave for Brindavan in August. He told the warden, "This October, I want the boys of Puttapparthi should put up a play on the life and teachings of Paramahansa Ramakrishna." And so, the search for Ramakrishna started. Everybody was wanted that, who would play Ramakrishna. This was absolutely new hostel. All boys were hardly one month and two months old, nobody knew about English, nobody knew much about dramatics, nobody knew much about singing, but then yet, Swami was finding talent where there was none. Then, all the dramas selections were done. Only Ramakrishna was not finalized. They were looking at all the boys who would speak English well also and who would emote well also. I had some kind of a stake in dramatics. In the sense, I had national award in my school which I had earned when I was in my school in dramatics. So, I thought, let me go and appear for this role. So, when I went inside, all my wardens were sitting. They said, "Yes, can you do this role? We will give a script here. Please read the script." The script was so lifeless. In that Ramakrishna Paramahansa says, "O Mother, where art thou. I am looking for you. You are not there." I read it. I said, "My God, what is there? How can I tell them that I am such a good actor by just reading this?" So, I told them, "Sir, I have won a national award playing the role of Samrat Ashok. Would you want me to do some soliloquy in that?" They were duly impressed. Soliloquy is one word only a dramatist would know. Soliloquy is where the hero of the play is totally alone on the stage and he talks to himself. Why he is talking to himself? Because, inner thoughts should be known to the audience. So, when you think inside – 'Oh My God. Such a long time I have to prepare for my exam.' I would not know what you are thinking. But, in drama, you have say, "Oh my God. It is 9 O'clock. I got my exam tomorrow. What do I do, when will I study?..." You will do all that on stage. That is one thing I did. After I finished that, all the jaws were down and they were just looking at me and suddenly Mr. Anup Jalani, who was my Warden, he started clapping. Then one by one, everyone started

clapping. They all got up and what an honour they gave me! They said, “You can actually act like that.” I was surprised by that kind of response. I said, “Yes. Yes. I can do that Sir. Don’t worry. I will try to do my level best.” So, they immediately informed Bhagawan that, “Swami, we have found a fit person to do the role of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.” Now, Swami came after about twenty days or so. And all those twenty days, I was trying to practice that role of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. So, the moment Swami came, Swami asked, “Who is this boy, who is doing the role of Ramakrishna Paramahansa?” With little bit of fear in my mind, I got up on my knees. Swami looked at me and spoke something in Telugu and he asked me to sit down. I sat down and immediately asked the boy who was sitting next to me, “Swami kya bole? (What did Swami say?)” He said, “That you are fit person for this role.”

Suddenly, you know, I looked at round and ego on top, “Swami also acknowledging me that I am a very good actor.’ Now, we moved a little ahead. We were told that, “Swami would call us inside for an interview and Swami is going to give briefings on how you have to act.” My God. We were in electric shock and said, “Really?” “Yes, when you act, you do the rehearsals, Swami is going to come and see it,” was the response. So, we went into the Poornachandra stage, the green room behind, and Swami would come every evening and virtually spend two hours with us. Bhajans would go on and devotees asking, “Swami, darshan do, darshan do...” Swami was happily directing the drama every day. And that was the time, I realized – ‘Everybody is praising me. Swami also on and off praising my acting. But, I am not finding satisfaction in that role.’ I found that something was lacking. I could not put in my heart and soul in the play.

Next day, I prayed to Bhagawan, “Swami, too much of ego. I thought that I was a very good actor. But, Swami, how can I enact the role of a man who has seen God, how understands God, who has realized God but yet he has got childlike innocence in his face. How do I enact that. I am unable to do it. Swami, please help.” Sure enough, Swami came in the morning and He gave me a book on Ramakrishna Paramahansa and He said, “My child, for the next 3 days, don’t go to the college. Lock yourself into a room, read this book and try to imagine that you are Ramakrishna Paramahansa.” Now, for the next 3 days, I sat inside the room, I read that book on the life and teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I started imagining how Ramakrishna

would talk to his devotees, how he would talk to Swami Vivekananda, being God realized how he would behave in the particular manner. And all those mannerisms started coming into me by Swami's grace. But yet, there was one more litmus test I had to pass. And that test was, there was a song and in the song the *bhava* of Ramakrishna Paramahansa was supposed to be enacted. You know, Ramakrishna Paramahansa was supposed to enact all those *bhakti bhava* which he had. There was a time when Ramakrishna Paramahansa thought that he was Lord Hanuman and he looked at mother Kali as lord Rama. So, people say that his mannerisms were like that of a monkey and he was developing that power like lord Hanuman and he used to jump around when he used to talk and he used to have that *bala* like Hanuman while he was talking. Then, there was another time, he used to think himself as Surdas. Thus, at another time, he used to think upon himself as Radha and when he used to think upon himself as Radha and mother Kali as Lord Krishna, he used to have mannerisms of a lady. So, then, there was song in which all these three or four emotions had to be enacted. There was a song by MS Subbalakshmi – 'Pyaare darshana deejo na, tum bhin rahe na jaay...' So, promptly, a boy would play that song I had to enact on it. And every time I practiced it, I used to be a laughing butt of all jokes. All the professors used to laugh, my warden used to laugh because I could not act like a lady. Obviously, I was born as a boy, and to act as a lady, first time you are supposed to act as Radha and how do you act as a 'Radha'? I mean, you have never seen Radha acting in front of you and how do you feel as an emotion as a lady would do. So, every time that part came, there were giggles all would do and they would quietly look at me. And I would get very irritated thinking, 'What is this?' One day, I got very upset with my warden. I met my director and told him, "Sir, you please tell me how to do this. How does a lady dance, you please come and tell me." He said, "No no Tribhuvan, you are doing fine." "Sir, then stop laughing please. Don't make fun of me when I am doing it," I said. Obviously my ego was getting hurt and that day, that role had to be enacted for Swami.

So, image, that beautiful song was playing, 'Pyaare darshana deejo, tum bhin rahe na jaay...' And now, you have to come like a lady and then look at Swami and then enact like a lady. I probably acted like...you know how it looks...at least it seemed that way. So, there were giggles all around. And Swami said, "Vadhu, Vadhu. (No No) This is not how it is done. See, when a lady comes

with full of love for Bhagawan, she is lost, she doesn't remember. So, you must come softly and then move and turn..." And I was looking at Swami. I said, "Swami, I will try again." Swami said, "Yes. Try again." Again I did it. Swami said, "No. No. Not like this. See, you have to bring that emotion. Think that you are Radha and look at this Krishna sitting in front of you. Just think like that and do it." This time I did it thinking that I am Radha. Probably, it was even worse. Swami said, "No. It is not done like this. I will tell you, how it is done." And Swami got out of His chair. He said, "Play (the music/song)." I saw with my jaws dropped. Swami came... Pyaare darshana deejo, tum bhin rahe na jaay... 'This is how it is enacted.'

Soon after Swami did that, He saw Prof. Kasturi with his mouth wide open. He saw me with mouth wide open, the warden, the director, all... There was no clapping. There was no sound. All the mouths open. Swami hit his face with handkerchief and sat on the chair and said, "Do. Do..." That was such a glorious moment. I was not able to get that right feel, that right emotion and what could Bhagawan do? He got up and said, "I will tell you how to do it." And, the Lord of the Universe, who is there in every man and woman, He told me how Radha bhakthi would be and how she would act. Trust me, when I did that, I got lot of blessings from Bhagawan.

Soon after that, Swami was little embarrassed by that act which He did. Then, He looked at Kasturi and He saw Prof. Kasturi who had tears swelling up in his eyes. He was looking at Swami and crying. All of us were wondering, "Why is this old man crying?" Swami looked him and said, "Kasturi, what happened?" He said, "Swami, in Sathyam Shivam Sundaram, I wrote that you acted the role of Rishyendramani. But, today I saw you acting like Rishyendramani Swami. And I know, in that age you must have done that role of Rishyendramani and saved the villagers from all the embarrassment. Do you know the story of Rishyendramani? But, we did not know. Swami asked us the same question, "Do you know the story of Rishyendramani?" Only one or two of us said yes. Then Swami said, to hide His embarrassment more or so physically, "Kasturi, please narrate them the story of Rishyendramani." Then Prof. Kasturi came and sat in the front and he related to us how this dance problem got into when Swami was a small child and how the villagers approached Him, and how He donned the role of dancer Rishyendramani from Chennai, and He won so many accolades, and how the collector came

to acknowledge Swami's beautiful performance, all that he told.

So, these were such golden moments which are etched in our memory and when I look back, it does not look at 28 years or 38 years. It looks like it is just the other day, Swami was there. If I go out now, I feel Swami is just going to come down again and help us and sit down. There were a spate of dramas which Swami used to direct and Swami used to be the perfect Director. What a director Swami used to be! I mean, who could have imagined that how a lady would do for a person like me who was acting like a non-sense role. He taught me how to do it just the right way. This is what the greatness of Bhagawan.

There are so many things one can go on and on. I will narrate to one very beautiful incident which did not happen in front of my eyes but I heard about it. There was a quiz. Whenever Swami would go away from Puttaparthi to Bangalore, Swami those days used to stay one month in Bangalore and one month in Puttaparthi. So, whenever Swami would go away, we used to feel very sad. We used to feel very left out. So, we would pray to Swami, "Swami, please come back fast." We would write letters to Swami and Swami would respond to all of them. Swami would send some times replies through the warden, through one of the teachers who would come down. Once we had a quiz in the college. And, there was a question which was asked to us. "Do you know of any incident wherein Swami gifted His new Impala car to a small child?" Why I am telling this incident is, you will understand how Swami used to go to His devotees. Even before colleges came into place. This was in late 60s and early 70s when Swami used to travel from place to place visiting so many devotees. He would come to your home, have food there, bless you, bless your entire family, bless your neighbor, bless the whole town, bless the whole city and then go on and move on to the next city. There was one devotee of Swami who was in Andhra. I don't remember exactly to which town he belongs to. He had made a new house and it was his ardent wish that Swami would come and inaugurate his house or at least bless his house. So, he did not have any puja. He did not have any vratam. He kept on waiting ardently that one day Swami would come and then I will enter into the house. And then, he got news that Swami is going to pass by his town. So, he came to Puttaparthi and requested Swami, "Swami, would you please come to my house and bless it?" Swami said, "Okay. I will bless your house." On

that appointed day, Swami came. Those days, Swami had white colour Impala car. In the 1970s, the Chevrolet Impala used to be 'the' car to be owned by anybody. One of the devotee had gifted that Impala car to Swami. He came in that beautiful car of His and Raja Reddy was His driver then. They both along with few other elders who were there with Bhagawan, they came into his house. And as he took them around, room to room, Swami blessed every nook and corner of the house. There was a small child in the family. He was so excited about seeing Swami in his midst that he caught hold of Swami as a child would do to his father or grandfather and was saying, "Swami, can I show you my room?" Once or twice he said that. His father chided him. Child would not hide his enthusiasm. He again caught hold of Swami, "Swami, can I show you my room?" Ultimately Swami relented and said, "Okay. Take me to your room." So, he took Swami by his hand, took him there in his room and he said, "Swami, this is my room. This is my cot where I sleep. This is my table where I sit and study. This is my cupboard where I put my clothes. And you know Swami, there is a small car. Here is a small car (He had a small paddle car at home). Swami, can I tell you a story?" Swami was excited about a child. Look at the childlike innocence. He said, "Swami, can I tell you a story?" Swami was very happy. He said, "You want to tell me a story." He said, "Yes Swami." Swami said, "Okay. Where should I sit?" He said, "Swami, please sit on my car." Swami said, "I cannot fit in your car." "No Swami. Please sit on my car," said the child. Swami sat lightly on the bonnet of the car. Why? Because, humble devotee is pleading to Swami.

And what did the child say? Swami, can I relate to you the story of Sai Geeta? "Oh, you want to tell me the story of Sai Geeta? Okay. Tell me. What is the story of Sai Geeta?" asked Swami. "Swami, you know, one day you brought a small little elephant from the jungles of Nilgiris and you named it 'Sai Geeta'. That Sai Geeta is a very naughty elephant. Sometimes, it go away and run away. Bhagawan has to send someone to call her back. So, Swami has instructed that 'without my permission, you are not supposed to go to Chithravathi river for taking a bath.' But elephants you know love water. One fine day, Swami was busy giving darshan, so she quietly sneaked out of her shed and she ran towards Chithravathi river. And there, Chithravathi river was full of water. She dived inside the water and she was slushing water all around with a trunk and shouting 'Jai Sai Ram,' remembering Swami. And suddenly a wild wild big alligator came and grabbed her leg. Sai Geeta tried

her level best to pull herself out of water. But, she could not get out. The more she tried to get out of water, the alligator would pull her back. Now, she realized that it was the end of story, she started shouting for help, 'Sai Ram, Sai Ram...' loudly. That time Swami has finished his interviews and He was coming outside and He heard Sai Geeta shouting 'Sai Ram, Sai Ram' He immediately told Raja Reddy, 'Raja Reddy, bring out my car.' Raja Reddy immediately brought Swami's car. There was a gun hanging in Swami's chamber. Swami took out that gun and told Raja Reddy, "Raja Reddy, drive the car." Then, Raja Reddy took the car in full speed to Chithravathi. Swami got down and there he saw that crocodile was trying to pull Sai Geeta inside. Swami took out the gun, aimed at that crocodile and one shot, gone the crocodile. Sai Geeta was saved. Sai Geeta came running to Bhagawan and said, 'Sorry Swami. Sorry. From now onwards, I will always listen to you. I will not go to Chithravathi for taking a shower like this.'" This was the story he said.

Swami caught hold of his stomach and started laughing like a small boy. Swami asked, "Who taught you the story?" He said, "Nobody taught me Swami. I heard the story of Gajendra moksham in my Bal Vikas class. But I realized that you also have an elephant. You are also God. When devotees call you go running to save them. So, I thought this is the more apt story which can be told in Bal Vikas and not the story of Gajendra moksham." Swami was so happy and so thrilled and Swami blessed him, materialized vibhuti and gave him and then Swami said, "What do you want?" He looked at Swami. Swami said, "Cheppu (tell). What do you want?" He said, "Swami will you give me really what I want?" Swami said, "yes." "Don't go back on your words," said the boy. Swami said, "No." He said, "Okay Swami. Then I want that new car Impala standing outside to be given to me." And as the devotees love would be, Swami called Raja Reddy immediately and handed over the car keys to be given to that child. I think, that child was so truly blessed to have had this kind of opportunity to be with God, relate his own story, in his own imagination, in his own way.

And there was a quiz held and this question was asked to us and none of us could reply. So, now you know what a beautiful story which nobody knows. It was not being related anywhere. It was not being mentioned anywhere. And I am sure, some of your senior wardens who are there present would know it.

I would like to relate to you one small story of Swami's love. How Swami's love pours out when He wants to do something. It happened in this very hall. Would you like to listen to it? Those were the days when this altar was situated in that direction. The hall was two-third of the size. Not as big as this one. Swami had only inaugurated this building. We had a milk warming ceremony inside, Swami came in. I still have the photographs with Swami standing in front of the gas and heating the milk and making sure that it boils and falls down. And then, it was brought down. So, all those things which were done. I would just like to relate you how it used to happen.

Swami would ask us, "How is your teacher?" Just imagine. Swami would ask us, "How is your teacher?" And we would say, "Swami, English teacher chala bagundi. (Very good, very nice teacher)." "What about Telugu teacher?" "Swami, very good Telugu teacher." "Maths teacher?" "Very good Maths teacher." There was one particular teacher who was really not up to the mark. He was a professor from a university and to teach undergraduate students, it must have been a difficult to him. Because, he was prone to sitting down and teaching. There was a classic in English we had- Samson Agonistes, by Milton. It was a big thick poetry. And to interpret, English levels used to be very high in Sri Venkateshwara University. We had Julius Caesar and Othello, Milton, Paradise lost, all these kinds of books. Novels we had to have in our English course. So, he would sometimes sit down on a chair and talk about Samson and his agony and what all happened and everything. Some of us, who were really not attuned to this kind of teaching could not follow much of it. One day, Swami asked us, "How is that teacher teaching?" We all shook our heads, "Good." "What good? Most of you sleep when he starts teaching. I will take him to task," said Swami. We all got scared, "My God, let the teacher not think that we are complaining about his teaching skills. Next day, what do we see? The teacher was taking class and we were studying in Easwaramma School and there were two doors in each classroom. Swami quietly came from the back door and came and sat in the class. Nobody knew. The students of course did not know because there were hardly 12 or 14 of us and the class was big. Swami came and sat in the class. The teacher was also engrossed looking down and teaching. Suddenly when he looked up, he saw Swami sitting there and there were no words. He started trembling and started shivering and he started blabbering. Swami said, "Aaa...continue... continue...I am listening. I am becoming a student in your class." And then,

we all turned back and saw Swami sitting in our class. There were the kind of pranks Swami used to play that he would tip-toe and come and sit inside the class and see what you guys are doing.

There was one more thing. Those days, it so happened, we had to go and stay in mandir. So, we used to travel from Easwaramma School to the mandir, which was the hostel. One fine day, it was a hot summer afternoon and one of our boys was not wearing chappals and he was walking. Swami happened to come back from Gokulam. He stopped the car. He said to the boy, "Where are your chappals?" He said, "Swami, I did not wear them." "Okay. Come. Get in the car," said Swami. He was promptly parked inside the car and sat like a big John inside the car. In the mandir, when they all came, he got down from the car, Swami blessed him and we all realized and thought, "Ohh... if we don't wear chappals, you get to sit in the car." That day onwards, half of the class stopped wearing the chappals. One day it so happened, Swami was going by four or five of us. All the rogues of the class, they were there, they were walking down to the mandir. Swami stopped and he looked down. "What? No Chappals?" asked Swami. Then we all looked thinking that Swami is now going to put us inside the car. "No place in the car. Keep walking," said Swami. These small small anecdotes here and there just show that there was no privacy, no secrecy, there was nothing hidden and He would ask somebody, "Why are you doing this?" They would say, "Well, I am doing it for my Lord." Imagine, can Lord be made happy if you don't wear slippers in the hot afternoon? But, we would do it. Why? Because, one day, some day, I will get opportunity to sit inside the Swami's car because Swami will feel, "Papam. This hot summer afternoon, in this 42 degrees temperatures... Let me take him." This is how it used to be. And Swami used to, more than so many times, used to answer our prayers like that.

Though lot of many firsts to our first batch...we were the first batch in Prasanthi Nilayam, we were the first residents of this hostel, we were the first students who got an opportunity to go and dig up this place to make it play worthy. It was full of bushes and shurbs and we used to play football, most of us used to get injured and Swami would come to us and give us mangoes and sweets, and everything the day we were injured. So, this is how it used to be.

One day, when Swami was to come, what do we do? We went up and climbed

the mountain and wrote the name, 'Hill View Stadium' and from that day it became 'Sri Sathya Sai Hill View Stadium.' All our follies which we used to do, all whatever we did, Swami would certify that and little did we know that it was Bhagawan's hand behind it because He was in the process of making history through this first batch students of His.

Has anyone of you challenged Bhagawan? Swami loves to accept challenges. I will quickly windup with this one episode here. There was this ardent devotee of Bhagawan in Delhi. She was a Bal Vikas teacher. A very faithful teacher. A very loyal teacher. She was an ardent devotee. She would take Swami's name morning, noon and night. She had one little problem. That problem was- her husband did not believe in Bhagawan. Now imagine, a wife is an ardent devotee of Swami and husband is not believing in Bhagawan at all. In fact, he used to come and insult Bhagawan, humiliate Bhagawan in front of her so that she would feel bad and cry. She would often tell, "Please, look, you should not insult my God." He had a few minor character problems. Minor problems in the sense, he would come drunk sometimes. When he would get drunk, he would use abusive language also. When he would use abusive language, sometimes he would hit his wife also. So, having said that, one fine day, he came drunk and he had a bottle in his hand. He looked at her and he told his wife, "Look, today my friend did not turn up. Will you have this drink with me?" She said, "Sairam. I don't do all these things and please for heaven's sake stop drinking. Don't do all this." He said, "No. No. I am going to have drink. How is going to have drink with me?" Then he looked around. Suddenly, he saw Swami's picture. He said, "Aaaa... Bhagawan is there." He poured a drink, and he looked at Swami and said, "Swami, cheers." And he had his drink.

Now, this lady was very hurt. How can he insult Swami by saying cheers like this? She said, "Look, you do anything. But, please do not insult my God." She kept on with her prayers, kept on praying, "Please bring him around." One day, he got opportunity to go to Bangalore. She requested him, "Look, you are going to Bangalore for your official work. Can you take me with you?" He said, "Why do you want to come with me?" She said, "I will go to Whitefield and have Swami's darshans." This man thought, "Paapam. Full day she sits and do bhajans and Sairam Sairam. Let me take her." He said, "Okay. I will take you only on one condition. You will not force me to come

to Whitefield.” She said, “Okay.” Now, office people have given him leave for four days and he was supposed to finalize the deal within four days and come back. He went the first day to his office and she proceeded to Whitefield. When she reached Whitefield, to her utter dismay, she realized that Swami has left for Puttaparthi just two days back. She felt very sad in her heart that, “Swami, how can you do it. You have come back to Puttaparthi and I am here in Bangalore. How will I get to see you?” This husband of hers, he came very happily in the evening. She was sitting sad in her room. Husband said, “You know something? I am in the verge of finalizing this deal. Tomorrow morning if I get the order, we will have two days off. So, we can go to Mysore, we can go to Ooty. Wherever we want we can get and then go to Delhi.” She said, “Look. If your deal comes through, can you promise that I can have Bhagawan’s darshan?” He said, “What do you mean to say? Did you not have darshan in Whitefield?” She said, “No. Swami left to Puttaparthi. So, what I request is, wherever you want to go, you will have to take taxi. Let us first go to Puttaparthi, seek His darshans and then we could go back.” This man thought, “Paapam. This lady is such an ardent devotee of Baba. If I get this deal...” He was very happy. He said, “Okay. Let me see.”

The following morning, he came back very happy in two hours saying that “the deal is finalized, it is closed, I have got the order, we are free now. Let us go.” She said, “Let us first go to Puttaparthi.” They reached Puttaparthi somewhere around 2 or 2:30 pm and he said, “Look. I am not going to come inside. You quickly go inside and have darshan and come back.” He thought, “Swami is standing there like Lord Balaji, you have to go there, have darshan and come back.” He said, “You quickly go. I am sitting in the taxi.” She said, “Okay. I will go.” She went inside and she was informed that Swami will give darshan only at 4:30. There were two hours more remaining. She came back and reported that “there are still two more hours remaining for darshan. Will you please wait?” He said, “This Baba of yours is wasting our time and life. Why should we wait for two hours? Does he not know that you have all this way from Delhi to have His darshan? He could have come and given you darshan if He is such a big God as He claims to be.” She said, “No. No. Please don’t say like that. Darshan time is at 4:30. He will come and give darshan at 4:30.” Fair Enough. Suddenly he found a friend of his standing in the line and he saw him. “Hi what are you doing in the car? Come man. It is darshan time,” saying so he pulled him. He said, “No. I don’t want to go for darshan,”

said this man. "Come. Come," and he made him sit in the darshan line.

Those were the days, tokens used to be given. The line which gets No. 1 token gets to go inside first. There was sand. As I told you, there were only three or rows used to be three. This man, in the line which he was sitting, got the first number to go inside and he got the first row to sit. His friend from Delhi who was there told him, "My God, you are so lucky. From last seven days I am sitting here and I never got the first row. You came just now and you got the first row. It is because of you, we got the first row." This man asked, "What will happen now?" He said, "We are in the first row. Bhagawan will come. Stand right in front of us and talk to us." This man thought, "My God." What if Bhagawan comes and talks to me? He knows everything about me. Okay. Let's see." he thought in his heart. Then, he happened to see his wife also sitting in the first row. And she was writing something. So, he asked his friend, "My wife is writing a letter. Whom do you think she must be writing letter to at this time? I am sitting here. Kids are with their grandparents. To whom must she be writing letter to?" His friend said, "No. No. When you sit here, when Bhagawan comes to you, whatever prayer or problem you have to offer, you write a letter to Bhagawan and give it. If Bhagawan takes the letter, we treat that Bhagawan has answered your prayers." So, he realized what this lady must be writing. She must be writing that Bhagawan this fellow is drunkard, he then comes and uses abusive language, then also comes and hits me, all those things. Now, this fellow got scared. He thought, "My God, this Sai Baba fellow when He comes here, and He will come. She will say that Swami this is the letter. He will open and see. Swami will ask where you husband is? And she will say Swami there... and I am finished. Swami will put His hands up and say, 'you rogue, you do all this...'

Now, this fellow started feeling so scared. He started remembering his own God whomever that God was. As my warden used to say, he used to pray in the model that, "Oh God, if there is God. Save my soul, if I have a soul." That used to be his prayer. So, he started doing that kind of a prayer. And suddenly at 4:30, the door opened and Swami walked out majestically. And as Swami walked out, He started walking straight to the ladies' side and He started walking towards his wife. And his heart started thumping and badly beating. He realized, "My God." She was getting prepared to get up and give a letter and he suddenly challenged Bhagawan from there, "Baba, If

you are really God, today you will not go to the ladies first, you will come to the gents side.” As soon as he challenged this in his mind, Swami suddenly turned midway. There were big cries from the ladies’ side, “Oh... Sai Ram...” They were feeling depressed that Swami was not coming towards their side. Swami turned and started walking towards the gents. Now, this is even a worse scenario. Walking towards the gents’ side is fine, but He started walking straight towards this man. Swami kept on walking. You know how Swami walks. Gliding softly as if He is literally flying in the air with His robe held. This guy was totally in unconscious stage He reached. He did not know what is going to happen to him. He expected that “Bhagawan will come and give me one tight slap and tell me – you rogue, you bugger...” Swami suddenly looked into his eyes, smiled and said, “Cheers. Cheers. Cheers.” Not a word spoken about his drinking habits. Nothing. He just said, “Cheers, Cheers, Cheers,” and moved on. This man started weeping like a baby. He said, “My God. You truly are God. I was scared that You would tell to the world that I am a drunkard. But, You safeguarded my purity. You safeguarded my identity. You told me something which I used to do in front of your picture, Cheers and you gave that cheers back to me.”

Swami then went to that lady, picked up her for an interview and asked her to call her husband. Now, he was little more confident. Swami took them inside for an interview and Swami said, “Look, this is the car of a householder. You are the front wheel and your wife is the back wheel. If both the wheels work and go in one direction, the car moves properly. But, if one goes in north direction and one goes in south direction, the tyre cannot move. You are truly a good soul. You are a very nice person. See, this lips are given to you to take the name of Lord Sai Rama. How can you smoke with these lips? How can you drink with these lips? These hands have been given to serve humanity. How can you hold the glass with this? My child, you are a very nice person. I bless you with a long life. I bless you with a good life, with a spiritual life. Leave these habits and you will reach Bhagawan very shortly.” What a beautiful way to change the heart of a person. He was totally transformed. Needless to say, he used to come for seva activities in Delhi very regularly. This is the kind of transformation that He brings around.

Swami only says one thing. Do we all pray? We pray. Alright. So, what do we pray? Especially, when do we pray most? Examination days, we remember

only God. Why?

When I was your age, I used to sit down after evening bhajans in Puttaparthi, in the ashram there. There used to be a meditation session inside the bhajan hall after which I used to get out. There was a Lord Ganesha statue at the Dasavatar Gate, where you now find the bigger gate. I used to bow down to Ganesha's statue and I used to pray, "Lord, I want Vidya and sadbuddhi." Why did I pray for Vidya and sad -buddhi? I prayed for Vidya because, I understand that knowledge is power. Knowledge is like that ornament, once you wear it, nobody can take it away from you. And, if you have the knowledge, wherever you go in the world, you will be respected and will be given and taken care of. So, I thought I must pray for knowledge. And why sadbuddhi? Because, if you have sadbuddhi, that means you will walk in sad-marga. You will walk the right path. You will think about Swami. You will think about the way He has told you. I used to constantly, for the last three months, I was praying for vidya and sadbuddhi. Swami must also haven been sick and tired of this prayer, "This fellow only keeps on praying, vidya and sad -buddhi."

One day in the evening, Swami said, "Today I want to give you a discourse. I want to come to your hostel. So, the B-floor of our old hostel, all of us immediately got it ready and Swami came. I got to sit again in the front and very close to Swami. That day, Swami's topic was, "Power of Prayers." How power of pray can move God to do anything for His devotees. Then He said, "All the people who come to Puttaparthi, they are like beggars. They keep on begging something or the other from Bhagawan. Somebody wants name, somebody wants fame, somebody wants car, etc...everybody wants to get something and become something. They keep on coming to Bhagawan and they keep on asking something..." Then he looked at me and said, "But there are some devotees of mine, (He pointed like this), who does not ask me for these worldly objects. You know what do they ask?" I looked at Swami with my hands like this, folded. "They ask me for vidya and sadbuddhi," asking me 'Know?' I thought, "Oh My God. I was praying to Lord Ganesha and I did not know that there is a hot-line between Ganesha and Bhagawan. The whole thing is getting transferred there." I bleakly shook my head. Then Swami said, "Why do you ask for all these worldly things from God? Why do you ask me for name, fame, power, wealth... vidya and sadbuddhi? Do

you know what you must ask in your prayer to God?” We moved closer to Swami. Swami said, “Remember children, don’t ask for any of these worldly things in your prayers. Ask in your prayers for me, me and me alone. Ask for Sai. Because, in Sai’s hand, you have name, fame, power, vidya, sadbuddhi, bungalow, car,...whatever you want is there in Swami’s hand. If you ask for name, you will get only name. If you ask for fame, you will get only fame. If you ask for money, you will get money and you will get income tax problems also. So, you do what you want? But, if you ask for God Himself, God will give you everything.” That was the greatest message which Swami gave to all of us. Trust me my dear brothers, honestly I am telling you, crossing my heart in the presence of Bhagawan, from that day, I have never prayed for anything else. Swami has put me to lots of tests, lot of tribulations, lot of difficulties, and I have always said, “Swami, I want You. Because, when I have Him...” What did He say? “I am a package to you. Everything is in My hand. If you ask for Me, I will give you name, fame, power, wealth, vidya, sadbuddhi, everything.” And more than all, He gives Himself.

And then Swami related the example of Mahabharata. Where He said, “When the war of Mahabharata was to be fought. Duryodhana and Arjuna came to Lord Krishna. They asked, on whose side will you fight this war of dharma yudha? Duryodhana took the army. Arjuna chose Lord Krishna.” What did Arjuna get? Arjuna got the Gita Jnana, name, fame, power, wealth, vidya, sadbuddhi, everything he got and he got Lord Krishna. So, my dear brothers, we can go on talking about His grace, about His love. I would love to come back again and have an other session with you on one of these days if time and effort permitting. Because, Swami is endless. We can go on talking about Him. This whole night if you permit me, I can go on talking and you can go on listening. But then, you have the Summer Course to attend to in the morning. You also have to get up for Suprabhatam, you also have to do everything.

One last word of advice. When I was there in your place, I used to wonder, “Why is this Suprabhatam? Why this Omkaram in the morning? Can’t we have at 8 o’clock? Why this 5 o’clock thing yaar?” But that is to enthuse the sense of discipline into your character. Till this date, all that I have learnt, has stood by me and I am grateful to Bhagawan with the bottom of my heart that He chose me and gave me an opportunity to be with Him. And would

you do, when you come back 25 years after you have gone from here. Because, then you would know what this place is meant for you. What it has done for you. So, my dear brothers, putting your heart and soul, pay attention to your personal sadhana also. And remember that you have to pray for Sai and Sai alone. When you pray for Him, you will get everything. Thank you so much. You have been such a patience audience. Thank you. Sairam.

Dr. Piyush Kumar Shrivastava

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I feel Swami had two ways of making people learn. One was by interacting with them and the other was by his silence. Most of it I have learnt by Swami being silent with me. I will just recall some incidents and will not conclude anything because Swami has his own ways of teaching lessons and by those incidents whatever lessons He wants to drive into each one of us we will get it. I will just recall some of the incidents that I happened to witness and also heard from my elders.

First let me narrate how we came here. I had a younger brother who was suffering from polio. My parents had taken him all around India, almost every single hospital that they came to know about. But to our bad luck, we had no solution for it. Once when we were returning from AIIMS Delhi, we happened to meet a sick gentleman on the train. He asked my father, “Why don’t you take this boy to Puttaparthi?” My father asked about this Puttaparthi? He said that there is one God man there by name Sai Baba and asked my father to take my brother there. So my father took down the address of Puttaparthi came back and wrote a reply post card requesting for accommodation when they come to visit Puttaparthi. Little did we know about the procedures prevalent here. We did not get any response.

In the meantime, my mother went to watch a movie which she had heard a lot about, to a nearby theatre. Incidentally the owner of the theatre, Sri Surendra Singh was a devotee of Sai Baba and an announcement was made that instead of the usual movie, a film on Bhagawan will be shown in the theatre totally free of cost. So my mother also went inside along with devotees who were there. During the film she saw Swami was moving around collecting the letters. My mother thought that it was some cash that was being collected. So she asked the lady sitting next to her about it. She replied, “It is not money but letters given by devotees to Bhagawan with their prayers. People feel that if they write their sufferings, sorrows and pass on to baba they will get rid of it.” Hearing this my mother just posed a question in her mind to Swami, “Swami I have a son who is suffering with polio, should I bring him to you?”

It may be considered a strange coincidence but at that very moment Swami happened to look straight at the camera and nodded His head.

The film ended and everyone was given one picture of Swami and two packets of vibhuti. My mother travelled forty kilometers back to our house with that photo and wanted to keep it at our home altar with our family deity Lord Rama's photo. Somehow my father and I were very reluctant about keeping that photo with other Gods' photos and refused to keep that photo in the altar. She protested and kept the picture.

Thereafter, she started doing bhajans. I was avoiding going near that picture of Swami. My mother noticed my disliking towards Bhagawan's picture. One day she approached me and said, what will make you believe in Him?" We had a jasmine creeper in the house which had never ever blossomed for the last four to five years. I said whatever instantly came to my mind- If there are flowers this night on this creeper I will believe it. All knew that it was an impossible task and it was a forgotten story. All of us used to sleep in one room with the windows open. At around 1:30 in the night there was strong fragrance was coming from one side. I woke up everyone thinking some one has come for a theft at home and followed the fragrance with sticks in hand. We landed in front of the jasmine creeper which had three flowers blossomed on it. None of us exchanged any words, came back and slept. Next morning, I got up, plucked those flowers and offered them at Swami's feet. This is how a little beginning was made in my life.

After a gap of four to five days, my father, mother and my sick brother left for Puttapparthi. In the meanwhile, I had a dream where Swami landed in an airport wearing a three-piece sandal coloured suit accompanied by Dr. Bhagavantam. When Swami was coming out of the airport, we were standing along the way. He stopped near me and I asked Swami, "Swami, I have one brother who is not well." He replied, "Yes, he has come to me." I got up and narrated this dream to my sisters.

When my parents returned from Puttapparthi, I asked them referring to my dream, "Does Sai Baba look like this?" They said, "Yes but He does not wear suit but wears a long robe." Then I asked, "Is there a person usually behind him who wears a dhoti and a kurta?" Then my father said- Yes. My

father knew Dr. Bhagavantam little closely because my father studied in Osmania University and that time Dr. Bhagavantam happened to be the Vice-Chancellor. I happened to see Dr. Bhagavantam three years later when I visited Puttaparthi for the first time.

After around three years, we all came to Puttaparthi when I was in X Std. Swami called us for an interview and told me to join His college after two years. We were in Puttaparthi for one month but Swami never even looked at me or even spoke to me. He would completely ignore me but by His grace, I never had any fear. My father after waiting for one month said, "We are going tomorrow so ask Swami what is to be done." As swami came I said, "Baba you had told me to join Brindavan college. Immediately Swami reacted, "What can I do, principal is in that building and I am in this building." I replied, "If that is the case, we are leaving tomorrow." Swami said, "Wait, I will talk to him."

It so happened that the warden of the college, Sri Sudarshan, came to Puttaparthi for the Guru Poornima function. Swami spoke to Him about me and commanded me to accompany him to Brindavan. When God decides, everything falls in place. I came from a pure Hindi medium background and was very poor in English. Warden told that as he has accompanied me, he will not take my interview and asked me to meet Prof. Narendran, the Principal. I was very scared as he asked me questions in English. He asked me, "What is your second language?" I wanted to tell him to speak to me in Hindi and said, 'Hindi, Hindi, Hindi. He took it as an answer and wrote in the corner of the form Hindi and asked me to attend the hostel interview. Deputy warden Sri Lakshmi Narasimham took my hostel interview. He asked me, "When did you have your haircut?" I got confused between yesterday and tomorrow because in Hindi *kal* represents both and said, "Tomorrow, Sir."

Once it so happened that I had finished my graduation. I was sitting in the verandah. The Rajmata of Nawanagar used to be seated near the interview room window on the outside. Boys came running in the afternoon for darshan. Swami used to love watching the scene when boys used to run to him like a calf runs to a cow. Swami was very observant even at the physical level. He was intently observing Rajmata's gestures when she was closing her nose. Swami called Rajmata near Him and asked, "Why did you close your

nose?” Rajmata replied, “The boys stink, I think they do not take bath.” Swami looked at the students and said, “Look Rajmata is saying you all do not have bath properly. That is why she closed her nose.” But Swami would never let down His students, so He said immediately, “The classes of boys get over at 3.30 p.m. and they hardly get time to have a wash. They are immediately given tea, after which they rush for my darshan like calf runs towards the cow and I like that fragrance of love and not those perfumes that are sold in the market.” So Rajmata and the students both were given lessons at the same time. So Swami’s every action had multiple messages and each one of us would get it as it is suitable to us.

I recollect another incident that happened with Sri Raja Reddy garu, a great devotee of Bhagawan. Once there was a quarrel between two employees near the canteen in front of some devotees. At that point of time, a complaint was brought to Swami and one person said that out of the two Sri A was at fault. Swami was quite upset and ordered that he should be sent out. Sri Raja Reddy who was present that time in the interview room said, “Swami I was also there at that point of time and I feel the mistake was not of Sri A but of Sri B. Swami asked about it, “How do you know about it?” Sri Raja Reddy replied, “Swami, I was there.” Swami looked at the person who got the complaint and said, “Look he is telling something different from you.” He didn’t agree and stood by his decision. There was a kind of conflict of opinion. Swami told Sri Raja Reddy, “You keep quiet, you do not know about it. Sri Raja Reddy said, “Swami I have learnt from you only to defend the truth and I have seen with my eyes so I cannot keep quiet. Then Swami said, “You do whatever you want to do, but this is the way. Sri Raja Reddy garu said which he would not have imagined he would say, “Swami if that be the case I do not think I should be here, I am going.” Swami said, “Go.”

He came out of the interview room packed his baggage and started for Bangalore to go to Kurnool as there were no direct buses to Kurnool those days. In the meantime, Swami left for Brindavan. Sri Raja Reddy went to a hotel for a wash and have some snacks before changing the bus. As he was having wash, he had a feeling to take a bus to Brindavan, Whitefield. He took a bus to Brindavan and reached the old bungalow where Swami stayed. Swami had not yet mentioned to anybody about his leaving. Very few had access to the residence of Bhagawan. He took the wooden staircase

to reach Swami's room. As soon as he entered, he was facing Swami's back. He silently moved towards Swami. There were one or two guests who were seated there, doing Swami's padaseva. He went quite close to Swami and found that He was writing something. Suddenly Swami turned back and saw Sri Raja Reddy and said – O *vacchavavaa*? You have come.” and then He passed on that letter to him what He was writing. Swami had written in the letter. “Chiranjeevi Raja, wherever you may go, you cannot go away from Sai.”

Another incident that I recall is a little funny about this unique relation between Swami and his students. There was a boy named Rajesh Gulati who finished his twelfth class and wanted to go for some course outside. He was seated in the front and Swami called him for an interview. In the interview, Swami might have revealed some personal secret of this boy. After coming out, Swami asked him, “Should I reveal that?” The boy pleaded, “No Swami please!” Swami moved a little forward and said the same thing again with a twinkle in His eyes. The boy replied spontaneously, “Leave it Swami, why are you troubling me!” Can anybody speak to God in those terms? Hearing that Swami laughed uncontrollably.

Once Swami got very angry with students and was not talking to us and decided to go to Brindavan. Some senior boys hit upon a plan to *gherao* Swami before He leaves for Brindavan. All skipped the prayer session and went to mandir. Swami asked, “Why did you all come? All of us said, “Swami you are angry with us, you are going off to Brindavan.” Swami replied, “I am not angry with you and why should I not go to Brindavan?” What makes you feel that I am angry with you? Boys said, “Swami you are not talking to us.” He said, “What am I doing now? Am I not talking? Then Swami said, “You fellows go and drown yourselves in Chitravathi.” One boy from the final year said in all innocence, “Swami, there is no water in Chitravati.” Swami said spontaneously, “You dig wells and drown yourselves in them.” These kinds of things were possible only between students and Swami.

From 1993 to 1998, I was fortunate enough to be with Swami, doing a small duty in His residence and this little bit of proximity with Swami gave me a chance to know Swami little more. It so happened that one very senior devotee Sri Sunder Rao was not well. His son, Sri Umesh Rao came to mandir and asked me to convey the message to Swami that his father is not well and wants

some prasadam. The message was conveyed to Swami. Hearing the message, Swami said, "Tell him that I am not available." I felt little surprised as this family was very close to Bhagawan in his younger days. Bhagawan used to go quite often to their house. He even used to go in the midnight and demand dosas to be made for him in those days at this devotee's house. I thought, "Swami you have been so close to them for decades and now when they are in dire need and want you, how can you say you are not available!" Swami read my thoughts and said, "They are very old devotees of mine and not doubting Thomases like you all. They won't feel anything if you convey this message to them. I know that the devotee is not going to live, he is going to come to me?" The message was conveyed to them and there was no expression on the face of the son. He took the message with perfect equanimity. Within a short period of time, Sri Umesh Rao came again and told me to convey to Bhagawan that his father has reached Bhagawan's Lotus feet. When it was conveyed to Swami, He said, "Did you understand what it is?"

Another incident I recall is when I was in the hostel. Swami had given me permission to bring food from the hostel. So I brought food one day and Sri Radhakrishnan, Swami's personal attendant suggested, "Swami keeps dining with so many people, why don't you bring flowers when you get the breakfast." Next morning along with the breakfast I also got some flowers and put them there. Swami came, looked at the flowers and asked, "Who brought these flowers?" I immediately said that I brought them. Swami asked, "From where?" I replied, "From the hostel Swami." Swami said sternly, "Who gave you permission?" I said, "Swami it is your hostel. Then swami said, "Did I permit you? Hostel is also my temple. So the temple should look nice and flowers look nice in the garden." Then he added, "If you want to offer it to God, buy it from outside. There are some people who sell flowers for their livelihood. Buy it from them and then offer it to God." That was a great lesson, and after that I did not allow anybody to pluck flowers from our Prashanti Nilayam campus garden. Even for the prayer sessions in the college we have a separate place to get flowers from but not from the front garden.

Once it so happened that Swami had hurt his foot a little bit. There was a small bandage on Swami's foot. In those days, Swami used to attend bhajans in the bhajan hall seated on the throne. This throne was on a slightly higher pedestal with three steps leading to it. It also had a foot stool where Bhagawan used to

keep his feet. The bhajans used to start at 9.00 a.m. and used to end around 9.30 a.m. He used to indicate the end of bhajan session and commencement of Arati by gently pushing the foot stool inside the throne and getting up from the throne. I was strictly instructed by Sri Radhakrishnan to sit closer to the foot stool and push it myself as soon as Swami tries to push the foot stool, to avoid unnecessary strain to Swami's injured foot. I felt this as a special God given opportunity and my ego got boosted up for getting such a special opportunity. It has always been my experience that Bhagawan quickly trounces the ego of His devotee, when it raises its ugly head. It was my first day and I was very excited about it. Swami came in for the bhajan at around 9.05 a.m. Those days there was no Kulwant hall and there used to be a sudden gush of wind into the bhajan hall. As he climbed the step and was about to sit there was a strong wind. Swami moved His feet a bit to adjust His robe and I thought it as an indication to me and pushed the foot stool inside the throne with full force. Immediately, the priest got up, lit the camphor and started the Arati- Aum Jai Jagadisha Hare... All were shocked, as it was just five minutes into the bhajan session. Swami's legs were dangling in air and He was furious with me. He turned to one singer and said, "If this fellow tries to play with me, I will send him out of the hostel." I knew this was a to curb my egoistic thoughts.

The M.B.A. programmeme had started and one day he had called the M.B.A. boys. Swami was not talking to me. My experience is when the ego puffs up, Swami likes to play football with it and I have experienced that very well. Though not being of the M.B.A., class, I thought that I will also silently join them as Swami had not spoken to me for 8 to 9 months continuously. I sat exactly in front of swami's chair. Swami came and sat down and the M.B.A. boys were happy to see them. I was right in the front of Swami and without looking at me, He kept both His feet on my lap, talking to boys. I was overjoyed. I was seeing from the corner of my eye whether others were watching me or not because I was the person of the moment. Suddenly Swami leapt up as though I had done the biggest mistake of my life and went out very swiftly. He called Sri Kutumba Rao garu, the then secretary of Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust and rebuked him, "I have only called the M.B.A. boys, what is this fellow is doing here? I did not call him." I felt miserable that my thoughts got reflected in His attitude.

Sometimes Swami puts you through really hard times and I have experienced that a lot. Swami used to hardly begin interacting with me and suddenly He won't look at me, he won't talk to me. If a person comes and sits next to me, he will talk to him but he will totally avoid me. For four years Swami did not talk to me. If Swami wanted to test you, He would take you to the extreme sometimes. In my final year, I had lost the paper of Organic Chemistry and Swami was very angry with me. One day he told Sri Kutumba Rao – why is he seated in the verandah? Let him sit somewhere else.” So I went inside the bhajan hall and sat at the front door. He once again called and censured Sri Kutumba Rao, “I told him not to sit in front. He is coming again and sitting here.” Then Swami told me, “You should have taken up seva work without affecting studies. It will appear that because of doing seva here you have not done well in studies.”

Then Bhagawan called my father and told him very lovingly, “Wherever you are you should keep your family there only. So my father said, “Piyush has to write his supplementary exam Organic Chemistry.” Swami said, “Then he alone can stay in the old hostel with the other boys, take other members back with you. Once he finishes his exam you can take him back.” My father went back. My mother and sister were still with me, here.

I had finished my exams and was waiting for my father to come but he did not come. On my birthday I had a dream that my father passed away. It was horrifying as there was no means of contacting him. We were in West 5, C-27. Four or five days before Bhagawan's birthday we were asked to vacate the room because the owners were coming. Swami was still not talking to me. One day it so happened that somebody had sent a draft to Swami. Swami came out of the interview room, looked at me. I got a feeling that this was sent by my father to Bhagawan. Swami stood in front of me and addressing Sri Kutumba Rao said, “Send back this draft and tell them that this is not a *choultry* where anybody can come and stay just like that.” Later on I came to know that the draft was sent back to my father.

On 22nd November my father came and he had a bandage on his head. Meanwhile, we had to vacate the room and were staying in the verandah of West 5 with the owners helping us from time to time. I was asking my father, “What happened?” He on the other hand asked us, “What happened to you

all. Why are you outside?"

My father narrated what had happened to him. On my birthday, my father who was a Veterinary Assistant Director was carrying a lot of money to distribute among small farmers. His official vehicle was not available hence he had to go by train. He bought the ticket. He had to get down at a certain village where the train did not halt but slowed down. He tried to get down but slipped and fell on the track. He said, "When I fell on the track, one of my hands and legs were on the track. I was very clearly able to see the wheel coming. It was hardly some three meters away. But I felt somebody gently pushing my head and hand away from the track but my fingertips went under the wheels. Since there were stones on the side of the track my head was a bit hurt." I was very disappointed. So we said that if that be the case let us go from here. So we decided to leave. But we never mentioned this to Swami. Next evening, we were supposed to leave.

We students have an opportunity to sleep in the sands in front of the mandir. I slept that night and woke up next morning and when I was going back, I just looked at Swami's bedroom window and tears started rolling down my cheeks. I was quite surprised because I have never cried like this. I said in my heart, "Swami if your will is such we will go, if not this form, in some other form we will come to you." We were supposed to go to Hyderabad and take other transport from there. That morning Swami came for darshan and my father tried to give that draft to Swami again. Swami did not take the draft. He passed by and again he returned in the same direction. My father thought Swami did not want the draft. So he took out the draft, gave only the letter. Swami took the letter and went away. That day swami had distributed apples. He gave me also one apple that was wrapped in a paper. You may call it accidental or incidental, in that paper it was written in Hindi, '*Ek ghar jisey aap apna keh saktey hain-* a real house is one which you can call your own. Somehow that gave me a conviction that that house is Prasanthi Nilayam only.

We had decided to go in the evening after bhajans. Swami retired and hence I went and met Sri Radhakrishnan who was at the gate. I said, "Sir, we will be leaving today." He said, "Do not give up. pray to Swami." I said Sir, "There is no point, I have given up." Afternoon, none of us had lunch. We were

pretending to be sleeping whereas none of us were sleeping. I could see from the corners of my eyes that my mother was crying, my sisters were crying. My father was standing in front of Swami's photo and crying. During evening darshan, Swami finished the round and came to the verandah. The same very spot where Swami scolded me for the draft few days ago, he called Sri Kutumba Rao and said, "Accept the draft and enter it here in front of me." Sri Kutumba Rao said, "Swami I will take it to office and enter it." Swami said sternly, "Get the register here and enter it." Swami sent word, "Tell them not to go." We had not told Swami we were going and had not even written a letter that we were going. Still He especially sent word to us not to go. He also sent the message, "Tell them that the very room in front of which they are staying, I am allotting them though it belongs to somebody else." We found out later that the owner of the room was given a different room and we were given that room.

So some time Swami tests you to the core and he alone gives the strength to bear that and finally showers His Grace.

Sri Prem Anosh

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Our education develops us as individuals. We are allowed, we are inspired and we are encouraged to think on our own. There is little that we have to accept from others; we have to think on our own. When you are told that this is a grand opportunity to be at Bhagawan's Lotus feet, you may accept it, you may not accept it. Both ways it is fine, as it is a decision each one of us has to make. Let's say, you don't accept it. Let's say, for you it is not such a grand opportunity.

Many years ago, I read a beautiful quote and the quote goes, "Remember that you are unique." That's how the first line of the quote goes. And it further says, "But remember also that you are only as unique as any other." Isn't it? We are unique and everybody else is unique in her/his journey. What is it that makes us unique? Isn't it the experiences that we go through life? Or the path that life takes us through? Doesn't it make it unique?

There are hundreds of universities in this country and you could say with a fair bit of approximation that 99% of these universities follow a similar pattern. They have similar curriculum, they have similar way of teaching, and boarding – all of them are similar. I am not saying it is 100% because I don't know about all the universities. It would be wrong to make a sweeping statement. But we can comfortably say 99% or even 99.5% of the universities are not like this.

You have been given an opportunity to go through a system which is so different. Whether that is special or not is a different issue, but there is something different. If you had been studying in any other university, you would be going through a system which 99% of the students go through. You are going through a system which is different and while going through the system which is different, you have to make the opportunity count- by absorbing whatever it is. As to what to absorb, I am going to say that in the later part of the talk. You are going through something that is unique.

There was this Vice-Admiral of the Marine of US Navy by the name James Stockdale. Interestingly his name was James Bond Stockdale. These marines were captured during the Vietnam War. As a result, he was imprisoned in the most atrocious prisons of Vietnam and went through untold torture, along with the other prisoners. Later, James was one of the very few who survived that terrible period. Many years later, a business correspondent who wanted to write a book on what makes a corporate or an organization resilient through their trying times interestingly met James Stockdale and asked him, “How, as an individual, were you able to get past that terrible period in your life?” What he said is very interesting. He said, “Among all of us who went through that horrible period in the prisons of Vietnam, all the optimists perished.” The correspondent, who was doing research, was shocked. We have been told that optimism is a life-giving attitude. Then how was it that all the optimistic prisoners perished? James went on to explain how it worked for him. Among the many things he said, I am just taking this one statement. He said, “You have to acknowledge the difficulties you are going through and be positive. You must not overlook your difficulties and tribulations in a blind manner.” I am saying this because—let’s admit it—our schedule is quite rigorous.

When I was a student, I was accustomed to late night studies and waking up late in my old school, especially when you are in class XII, it becomes a norm. Parents feel happy if you study late, say up to 2 o’clock at night. But suddenly here- 10 o’clock—whether you want or not—you have to sleep. 5 o’clock—whether you want or not—you have to get up. It’s probably an honest confession. After three months or rather two months, I asked my cupboard mate, “How many Omkaars do they chant in the morning?” Because I would not last more than four or five. I would be knocked out. See, it’s difficult. I am saying this because even if you feel that it is not so grand an opportunity, even if you capitalize on the opportunity which is given to you, acknowledge what is difficult. Ask yourself why it is difficult. Be positive, because you have to grow from any kind of situation you go through, because each one of you who have come here has to be a unique personality. That’s case one, where you don’t agree that there’s something grand.

Well, the case two is that this is a jackpot and I stand by that. I am sure all my teachers who are seated here will stand by that. But it is up to you to decide whether it’s a jackpot or not. So for those of you who believe that

this is a grand opportunity, thrown to you from the heavens, and this is a jackpot, what do you do? We all are familiar with the programmes we see on TV where they say who wants to be a millionaire? You win a crore in a game show. Or you have a lottery where you are richer by a few million dollars. Or some lotteries are drawn in the US, and if you win, you are richer by a few or even a hundred million dollars.

A survey was conducted in the US. They wanted to see how the winners fare after winning a jackpot overnight. What happens to these people? So they tracked down some of these winners and did a survey over a period of time. You will not believe it, 70% of the people who won over a million dollars in a stroke of luck, spent all the money they won in a span of one year. And then, they are back to square one. So, if you believe that having an opportunity to win a jackpot is all it takes, it does seem to be taking some effort to make use of an opportunity. So, if you think that this is a jackpot you have got, you have to work hard not to be in that 70% who frittered the chance away, isn't it?

So, what does it take? Swami tells a very fascinating Chinna Katha. It goes like this: There is a king who goes out into the forest in search of a game. He is hunting with his ministers and his army men. In the jungle he loses his way and goes away from his men. He is lost and he is without food, without water, and he is about to die starving. Then a very humble wood-cutter comes by. He doesn't know that he is the king and without any idea, just out of humanity he comes and sees the man who is suffering. He picks him up, takes him to his hut, gives him water, gives him food and nourishes him. The king doesn't say anything but is so thrilled and is filled with gratitude. The king goes back. The king calls his minister and says, "There was this wood-cutter who helped me. If not for him, I would be dead." He adds, "Go and find out who he is, what does he do? I want to reward him."

So, the ministers go out into the jungle. This man is staying in a lonely hut and chops wood for a living. He makes charcoal out of that wood and sells it in the city. You can imagine what he would earn will be pittance. The news is told to the king and the king beckons the wood-cutter and he is brought to the king's presence. This man doesn't recognize that the king is the same man he had saved because king is in all his expensive clothes. He thinks that he must have strayed into some restricted government land and he is going to

be prosecuted. So, he is taken to the royal court. The wood-cutter is trembling with fear and in front of him is the king who is full of gratitude and he wants to repay. The king looks at this wood-cutter and says, "Man, what do you want? I want to gift you something. What do you want?" And what does this wood-cutter say? "Lord, spare my life, that's all I want." He thinks that he is going to be killed. So he says, "Spare my life. And that's enough." The king takes pity on this simpleton and says, "Alright."

He gives a huge area with sandalwood to the wood cutter and says, "Alright. This is a repayment for your kind gesture." This simpleton is more than happy that his life was spared and he runs away from there. One year goes by. The king wonders, "How is this wood-cutter friend of mine fairing? How is he doing in his life?" So, he calls his minister and asks him to find out what this wood-cutter is doing. The minister says, "The wood-cutter is leading a very happy life." The king asks, "What is he doing?" The minister says, "He is chopping that sandalwood, making charcoal out of it and selling it." From the wood-cutter's point of view, he was doing well. The only thing is that, what he could do out of wood was charcoal and he was doing that. And someone is giving free wood. He doesn't have to worry about whose land it is and whose tree it is. So, he is very happy. But the king says that he gave such a treasure and this is what the wood-cutter was doing out of it!

Three years later or five years later, when you all graduate from this university, you can walk out with B.Sc., B.Com., M.B.A., Ph.D., whatever it is. But, if you are going to walk out with only B.Sc., M.Sc., M.B.A, Ph.D., it is like you are making charcoal out of sandalwood. You still get what you get. You are not the loser in that sense: You still get your degree, and your academic learning. But if that is all you are going to take from this place, the unique opportunity is being frittered away. Not to scare you, you'll all do well, but it is important to be conscious of what you are going through, just like the Stockdale paradox I'd spoken earlier about. The theory is called the Stockdale paradox, by the way. You have to acknowledge the difficulties you are going through. As you go through life, you have to acknowledge what is at least different in your life. And what is that difference going to do in your life? If after 3 years, I'm going to walk out of this university with a degree which any other student in any other university in any part of the country would have done, who is the loser? So what to do to not make mere charcoal out of

sandalwood?

A lot of you are from the science background. And when you read about inventions and discoveries, you'll find that most of the inventions and discoveries were stumbled upon accidentally. Be it gravity, or penicillin, they were looking for something and found something else. There is an interesting story. There was this scientist by the name Spencer Baron. He had this weird habit of carrying a slab of chocolate in his lab coat pocket. He was working on something called magnetron which is used for communications in military. One fine day, he puts his hand in his pocket and finds that the chocolate has melted. He was surprised because he was working in an air conditioned laboratory and there was no way the chocolate could have melted. He wanted to explore why this happened, and guess what he came up with? He came up with the microwave oven. He was working with the Defence research and he came up with the microwave oven! So most of the inventions and discoveries have been accidental.

Once a journalist asked Louise Pasteur, "When so many scientific inventions and discoveries are accidental, serendipitous, why do we need scientific education? Why do we need to teach our children science? After all, everything seems so accidental and there seems to be a hand of providence in everything. Why then do we need to teach our children science?" Then, Louise Pasteur made a very beautiful statement. It's the most sought-after thing in the world of science. He said, "Chance favours a trained mind. Fortune favours a trained mind." Take the classic example of Newton. That's a debatable topic. How many people have sat under apple trees and how many would have had apples falling on their heads? Imagine: If Newton was an optimist, he would probably have thanked his fate, eaten the apple and walked off. And if he was a pessimist, he would have cursed his fate and asked God, "Why me-of all the people- why did the apple drop only on my head? Of all the trees, why only this tree to drop the apple?" But, Newton asked a very silly question. He asked, "Why do apples fall **down**? Why don't they fall upwards?" That's surely a stupid question to ask for a scientist. But he asked that question and pursued that question until he found that answer. So, when a chance is given, how well are we prepared to make use of that chance? I think I don't need to ask one difference between the education given at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning and education given elsewhere. I don't know how many

of us have understood that completely. I confess, I haven't understood that completely yet. I call it Spiritual Education or Values-based Education. We use the word spiritual as if it is a pinch of salt.

But what is this Spiritual Education? Why is Education inferior to Spiritual Education? If we consider our university superior to others, it is because we give university education and still Swami has not figured anywhere. We have to still get Swami into this picture. What is this "Spiritual"? As the word suggests, Spirit means that which is the underlying principle—the Spirit of the argument, the Spirit of the discussion, the Spirit of the project, etc. So if one is spiritual, it means he has the ability to look within, to see the essential element of any situation. So probably that's a thumb rule, when you go out from here, are you able to think like that? Are you spontaneously able to nullify all those frills which kind of cover the spirit of any situation? So, are we learning that spiritual education? How many of you have heard of John Lennon? He is one of the founders of The Beatles. He's got this very interesting episode when he was a kid. When he was in the middle school or even younger, his teacher wrote on the board and asked the students what they wanted to be when they grew up. That's a question that all of us were asked when we were kids, haven't we? And it's so interesting how it changes so drastically over the years.

So this was the question that they were asked and the students were supposed to write it down on their notebook. So here was John Lennon a little boy sitting there, and he wrote in his book— 'I want to be happy.' The teacher who came by, looked over his shoulder, looked at his answer, and said, "Boy, you don't seem to have understood the question," because she was expecting some kind of profession over there, like a truck driver or a firefighter, which is the common thing the American kids usually want to be. When we went to a school nearby, 90% of them wanted to be police inspector because that is a position of authority from their perspective. So, she was expecting some answer of that sort but he had written: 'I want to be happy' and the teacher said, "John, you don't seem to have understood the question." And this little boy looked up to his teacher and said, "Ma'am, you don't seem to have understood life."

So whatever you want to be, whatever you pursue in life, whatever it is, you

are an ambitious person, you are not an ambitious person, you are a lazy person, you are an innovative person, you are a person of action, you are a person of slumber. Whatever it is, if you look at the spirit of it, what are we trying to do? We are trying to seek happiness through different ways. So what are we after? We are after happiness in different forms and we all have different preconceived notions of the best way to go after it, and the best way to secure it. It is because we don't want to have our happiness snatched away from us. So we all are after happiness.

How many of you play football? Let me give you all a situation: you are taking a penalty kick; you are standing there; the goalkeeper is right in front of you, one-on-one, how many factors are involved in your getting that kick right? The power of your kick, the angle of your kick, your ability to negate the wind movement, all that matters. But what is the probability of your getting the goal kicked? Its 50-50! You can have a hundred factors, but the probability is 50-50. And all that I said about the power of the kick, the angle, the wind conditions, and taking into account all the training you undergo as a footballer, you only gain control over the 50%. What about the remaining 50%? If after all this, the goalkeeper knows where you are going to kick, even by fluke, he guesses where you are going to kick, that's it. You don't get the goal. You have done everything perfectly right but you don't get the goal. If you actually see, what is in your control is less than 50%.

Generally, the education we are taught is to focus on the result and get the result we are looking for. I want to be rich, I want to be successful, but how do I get there? I want to be a CEO, but how do I get there? But in this same situation, suppose I tell you instead of being happy about the result, put your 100% in that 50% which you have the opportunity and place all your satisfaction only on that. It just doesn't matter whether I score a goal or not. Maybe I'll be dull for the evening, but when I'll get up in the morning, I know that I've given my 100% and that was all in my hands and I'd done that perfectly right. So now, what are we doing? We are bringing the control back to us. We are not allowing forces, which are not under our control, to decide whether we are happy or not. Sadly, in the Dwapara Yuga, there was no football; but this exactly was what Lord Krishna told Arjuna. He said that all we can do is, do our actions 100%. No harm in worrying about the result, but nothing is going to change. This is the primary thing that I learnt

in this university, which is, 'Give your 100%.' It's a long process and it's not learning overnight. But the more we learn to find happiness in the effort and the more we are able to remove the result from the equation, the happier we are. So, now we know why we are trying to be successful; we are thinking if we are more successful, we will be happy. I'm not thinking I'll be rich but I'm thinking that one day when I'll be rich, I'll be happy. Now you see, we want to be happy and at the same time we don't want to be couch potatoes.

But how do I bridge these two? Focus and place all your happiness in the efforts. There is one small problem in this. You know when we were kids we were told that low aim is a crime. Why is it told to us? It is because we tend to lower the bar for ourselves, sometimes, and we are happy to do that. And we say that in this situation this was the best. Was it really the best? We don't know but we kind of become slaves to the circumstance. What is it that can be done for this? And this is the place where I feel the university changed a lot of things for all of us.

Now I'll bring in a concept or rather a personality. I'll bring in Swami. Instead of saying that 'I'm going to please myself and I've no idea of what it is to please myself,' you could end up setting a low target for yourself and you could please yourself all your life. You would have made a fool of yourself. So, you set a high standard for yourself that 'I'm going to try and want to please Swami.' We just bring in this concept. We bring in this personality. For us He was a living presence. Swami was in front of us making us think all the time how to please Swami. But what we found was that throughout our stay in Brindavan, Swami was only responding and rewarding the effort. The result mattered very little to him.

Many years ago I was talking to an old student whom Swami had blessed to be a part of the M.B.A. programmeme. In fact, it was the first year of the programmeme. Swami spoke to the Registrar and told him that He wanted that boy to be in the programmeme. And in this boy's priority list, academics was not even in the top ten. He was a happy-go-lucky guy. A lot of us get into this idea that we can love Swami and that is enough. We tend to get into this comfort zone 'I love Swami and that is enough, I don't need to do anything more. I don't need to change anything about myself. I don't need to worry about transformation. I love Swami and that is enough.' This boy

was very bad at academics as it was not his priority. The mid-semester results are out and he does terribly. The results reach Swami and He comes out looking for this boy. Swami calls him and asks him about his exams. He says, "Swami, you know that I have no interest in studies, I'm interested only in you, Swami." Then Swami says to him that the higher authorities had come to him complaining that Swami's student had not done well.

Swami calls him inside the interview room with a very serious face. Swami was really upset with him. Swami looks at this boy and says, "I want something from you, will you give?" The moment Swami told this in a pleading tone, this boy melted. He says, "Swami anything for you. You don't have to ask this. Just say and it will be done." Swami says, "I always say this statement- I'm not bothered about marks, I'm only bothered about the remarks. Today I'm saying, I want marks, will you give me?" He says, "Swami, just watch out for the next exams."

That is the confidence that comes when we say we are not doing for ourselves, not doing for our self-satisfaction, not doing for parents, but doing it for Swami. Needless to say, he studied really hard and he got an 'O' grade in the end-semester exams. He had to put in a lot of hard work. On the day of results, Swami bursts out of the interview room and says, "This boy has got the first rank." You can actually imagine what, the boy who had actually got the first rank, was thinking. 'We did all the slogging and this boy after all has got only an 'O' grade.' But Swami came out and told all the VIPs that this boy had got the first rank; he is the topper of the class. Technically, going by the marks, he wasn't. But for Swami the effort deserved a top rank. It was these kinds of things that without our knowledge kept building in our head, saying that it doesn't matter what the end result is, what pleases Swami is the effort.

We all have this torch vehicle for the sports meet. I remember, we had done a lion during our II Postgraduate and it was amazing. I remember one of my roommates had gone all the way to Bangalore. They had bought that fur which is used for making carpets for the mane of the lion and they had taken a hundred snaps of lions, from different angles to get the muscles right, to get the shade of the fur right and they had done a brilliant job. I believe that some of my classmates had said that when Swami had come for the first practice session and actually that was the first time when the torch vehicle

was shown to Swami, in whatever condition it was. So, this lion was brought and kept there. The first practice would also be the first practice for Sai Geeta and the students there had said that Sai Geeta wouldn't come near the dais because she thought that it was a real lion there. I don't know how far it is true because one of my classmates there rightly pointed out whether Sai Geeta had really seen a lion ever because she had never been in the jungle.

Nevertheless, they say that the lion looked that real. It was really very good. The march-past was over. The torch vehicle boys brought the lion in front of Swami. Swami looks at it, keeps a frown on his face and he asks, "What is this?" It beat the whole idea. One look at it and you should be able to tell what it is. And if Swami looks at it and asks what it is means you have really messed it up. They say, "Swami, it's a lion." Swami asks, "Why is the lion in this colour." They say, "Swami, that's the colour of the lion." Then, Swami says, "I want a white lion." Swami wants a white lion and it is already the 7th of January, 3 days from the D-day. For a moment the boys were disappointed because all the effort in getting it into shape was put in already. The purpose itself looked defeated. They went back. When some of us went to the Music College, where they were making the torch vehicle, we saw all of them having a hearty laugh, cracking jokes and repainting it white, including the mane which was so carefully selected by one of the boys, going all the way to Bangalore and buying it. Without a moment of anymore disappointment, they were having a hearty laugh and repainting it. Four to five days of night outs to get it into some shape and their laughter was real, they were not pretending to be happy because they said, "After all we are doing it for Swami. He wants it white, it will be white. And we are happy that it is going to be the way that Swami wants it to be."

I think this is what doing for Swami did to us. It is because, without our knowledge we take the focus out of us, we take the focus of people who are going to judge us and we are putting it on something which is absolutely pure, I don't know how you relate to Swami. But for me Swami is purity, Swami is selflessness and Swami is the purest part of me manifest in a different form. So when I say, "I am doing something for Self satisfaction," it is no different from saying that I am doing it for Swami's satisfaction. And doing this for Self satisfaction is such an illusionary thing you could get wound up and caught up. But when you say I am doing it for Swami's satisfaction, we could

see it manifest in front of us. So it really helped. But you might wonder how I am saying that Swami is this real inner part of you. Swami was an entity. You might say that Swami was an avatar, He was a spiritual master. When my classmates were in school, they had this practice of having about 10-15 minutes of meditation after the evening bhajans. And I don't know who the teacher in charge of meditation was. This friend of mine who is one year senior to me, he narrated this absolutely fascinating little story.

There was this teacher who was teaching them meditation. Now, how do you teach meditation to X-XI Std. boys? Boys come freshly out of cities and towns. How do you teach them meditation? This teacher had hit upon a brilliant idea. He asked them to sit for meditation, close their eyes, and imagine themselves going within. He asked them to just have a descriptive imagination as perfect as it was possible- visualization of them entering their own heart and going inside. He also told them that they could have it howsoever they wanted. They wanted it the way the old Telugu films did: seven dwaras, eleven dwaras, they wanted to have a lift there. They could do whatever they wanted but they were going right into their hearts. And he said, "Close your eyes and visualize yourself going right into your hearts."

So this boy did this, you know, with the sincerity which only children have. Something happens to us when we grow up. This boy sat very sincerely and said, "I am going to do this with all my visual abilities and mental abilities and I am going to go inside." So he sits in meditation and imagines that he is opening one door; he is going into an inner chamber and opening another door, yet another door and this teacher told them that they could imagine Swami sitting in any posture on any throne that was of their liking.

Just imagine: this boy does this whole exercise and the beauty is the teacher told him that Swami whom he sees there is the real Swami who is inside him. Believe it. So finally the last door has to be opened and this boy opens this door and sees Swami sitting there on a beautiful jhula with a beautiful smile. And that moment was so real as though he had really walked into a room where Swami was sitting on a beautiful jhula. And he looked at Swami; Swami smiled at him and said, "Come." So he imagines he is running into his own heart. It was all visualization. He is going into his heart and then goes to Swami's feet and sits at Swami's feet. He imagines the inner Swami; the

ultimate Swami is calling him. What is he going to tell him? He goes and with all expectations looks at Swami. Not one of the boys would guess what Swami would tell him that evening, “In your food stall they are going to get vegetable-puff today.” He says, “Swami, did I hear you right?”

This is Swami. After all this mental exercises when the boys come to Him and He says, “Today, in your fruit stall, they are going to get vegetable puffs.” He is dazed and he is looking at Swami say, “They are going to get vegetable puffs, but you don’t eat.” No points for guessing, that boy was a fat boy. Swami said, “You don’t eat.” This boy, who didn’t know what to make out of it came out and then gathered himself up. Let’s say, it was a Tuesday or Wednesday, a non-puff day. We all have our puff day in hostel. It was a non-puff day, and here is Swami telling that this evening they were going to get vegetable puff on a non-puff day and he could not eat. So he ran to his room leader and he said, “Brother, has it ever happened that they get vegetable puff on a Wednesday?” The boy says, “I have been studying here from VIII Std. and it has never happened that the vegetable puff came to the hostel on a non-puff day.” So he is thrilled and is waiting for the food stall to open. He runs to the food stall as soon as it opens, and most definitely, there was vegetable puff that day.

Now the second part of the command: “Don’t eat it.” It’s okay till he hasn’t seen the vegetable puff. But once he has seen it (and he is a fat boy who is fond of food), his hands begin to itch. So he runs back to his room which is just opposite the food stall. He doesn’t know what to do. So he runs and hides himself in the bathroom; locks himself up, and says to himself, ‘No I don’t want to go and eat the vegetable puff.’ He is not able to resist and runs straight to the food stall; picks up the last vegetable puff and eats it. Now he has to face Swami. The next day, he sits in meditation and looks within and starts going inside. There is not much of excitement, but a little bit of fear this time. He opens the last door and needless to say, Swami is sitting there waiting for him. He goes inside and sees Swami sitting. Wagging a finger, Swami says, “I told you not to eat.” So this boy says, “Swami, I am very sorry.” Then Swami tells him, “Today they are going to get vegetable puff again. But you don’t eat.”

So the session is over and he gets up. He asks as many people as he is able

to whether they get puffs in hostel on any two consecutive days. Everybody replies in the negative. It has never happened that puffs come to the hostel on two consecutive days. That day he goes to the fruit stall and there is definitely vegetable puff. I meet this boy very often as he keeps coming to the stall. Can anyone take away the belief of this boy that his Swami is within him? Can anything change the strong belief he has that Swami is within him? And when we start pleasing this Swami within, you will realize that so many things automatically get sorted out. You are not worried about the reputation.

What is the difference between respect and self-respect? Respect is what others think of you. Self-respect is what you think of yourself. But what we do is combine these two. What I think of myself is based on what others think of me and that's where all the confusion starts. But here is an opportunity that Swami is giving for us to develop self-respect. Look at yourself the way Swami looks at you. Many times when I look back at my stay in the hostel, I would always wonder what that one thing was this place had given me. If somebody were to ask me, "What is that one thing this place has given you?" I would probably respond this way: a sense of responsibility, a sense of belongingness.

I'm not saying I'm flawless, but every time when I felt guilty, I felt I belonged to Swami. Every time I committed something wrong, I felt I had not actually done it, which was because I belonged to Swami. The greatest gift which you all can take from this place is the gift; 'I belong to Swami'. What you make of it is dependent on each of you. How you interpret this sense of belongingness in life is up to each one of you. But are you carrying this with you? I remember one of my classmates wanted to stay back after studies (like some of us do). He had finished his M.B.A. after his engineering. He stayed back here for a year. The situation at home did not permit him to stay any longer. His parents also felt that it would be better if he came back and took up a job. And here Swami was not talking to him nor was He taking his letter. So, this boy had to finally make up his mind. With a heavy heart he decided to leave that particular day.

And this was what happened the night before he was to leave. He saw a dream in which Swami came and he had a letter in his hand. His eyes were filled with tears, his throat was choked, and he didn't know how to express

his prayer. With lot of emotion, he went up to Swami and said, “Swami, I’m leaving tomorrow. Swami, you have not accepted me, at least accept this letter.” These were the words he managed to tell Swami. You might think that Swami would have suddenly become compassionate; He would have given him a big hug, patted him and said, ‘No Bangaru, it will be fine.’ But what did Swami do? Swami came with his hand out to slap him with all vigour. He said, “Swami, even now you don’t have compassion for me. I’ll cry any time now and you are coming to slap me.” Swami came to slap him and said, “Where will you go? Where can you go?” And in fact in a very firm and angry voice Swami said, “Wherever you go, I’m coming with you. Let me see how you will live without me.”

One of the greatest things that you can take from this place is that sense of belongingness- ‘I belong to Swami.’ But I would urge each one of you to find for yourself who that Swami is for you. Don’t take my word for it. For that matter don’t take anyone’s word for it. I think each one of you has to try to discover who that Swami is. What happens when you start doing everything for Swami’s happiness? I’m sorry to make it a farewell speech- not that you all are going to leave anytime soon but maybe it’s worthwhile collecting all these.

My senior and a very good friend of mine narrated this incident to us; Swami had taken a group of about ten boys to a function in Bangalore. I think it was an inauguration of a temple, I’m not very sure. Swami had taken a select group of ten. This may be sometime in the early 2000’s. Swami went to this particular function, and whenever you go with Swami there is a hearty lunch. So they had a nice good meal and came back. In the evening, Swami was sitting with only these ten boys and Swami was talking how the function was, how the food was. There was this one boy in the group who was looking dull. Swami looked at him and asked, “Entra? What happened? Why are you looking dull?” He didn’t say anything. He just kept quiet. So, Swami started speaking more about food because He knew that that particular boy liked food. Swami started telling that that item was good and the other item was good. But this boy was still dull. So, Swami told, “Something is really wrong. I’m talking about food and this boy is still dull. There’s something that is really troubling him.”

So, Swami looked at him and asked, “What happened? What is bothering you?” And then this boy spoke up. He said, “Swami, you took us to this function today and we saw thousands of people adoring you, worshipping you. I saw hope in their faces. They looked at You as if You had come to change their world. There was lot of hope in their eyes. But then You call us the torch bearers. You tell us that we are the change agents. Suddenly I feel burdened with a lot of responsibility, with so much to do. We are just a handful of people and the whole world is to be changed. That’s how we all are.” It’s like that typical Chinna Katha in which Swami says, “There is this simpleton who gets into the train and refuses to put the luggage down- still holding it in his head. When asked he said, ‘The train is carrying so much luggage. At least I’ll carry my luggage myself.’ It’s like, ‘We have to change the world! There’s so much work to do!’” In the same way this boy asked Swami, “I’m feeling so burdened. What do I do? There is so much to change.”

In reply Swami said just two words “Don’t care.” This boy felt a little offended. He said, “Swami, I’m talking about something which is so mammoth, so important and so significant. You say, “Don’t care!” To this Swami explained very beautifully, “For all that you have done for this University, for all that you have done for this Institute, for all that you have been given in My presence and for all that I have given you- all you have to worry about is, “How do I lead a life that Swami wants me to live.” That’s all that you have to do. It is your duty to do all this. For another person to look at you and adore and admire you, it is my responsibility to do that. If you be a perfect person by following whatever I tell you, I will ensure that other people recognize you and say, ‘I want to be like him.’”

Now, what is that secret? Let me narrate an incident. Some of my classmates were working in a laboratory in Bangalore, after finishing their M.Sc. They were about 8-10 of them who were working in the same lab. They had this superior who was very irritating. This person would, at every opportunity, try to bring down Swami’s name. He would talk of Swami in not very pleasant words. This used to hurt one of my classmates, who as mentioned earlier, also worked in the aforementioned laboratory. The superior would take some thrill in this boy’s discomfort. Whenever this boss would talk in disparaging terms regarding Swami, he would just walk away politely. But he would be very hurt. One day he went up to his boss asking for three-day’s leave. On

his boss's enquiry he says, "I want to go to Puttaparthi because it is Swami's birthday." To this, the boss starts shouting at him, "This is the whole problem with all of you fellows. You people are more interested in doing Bhajans and meditation than doing your work. I have got a whole lot of people like you and I don't know what to do with you." This boy gets very hurt and thinks, "Why Swami should get dragged into all this?" He replies, "It is okay if you don't want to give me leave." He then just walks away.

Some days later this boss, who somehow happened to stay later than usual in the evening walks into the lab. The time was about 7:30-8:00 in the evening. He saw that a group of students, about 8-10 of them were sincerely doing their work without any supervision. When he went around and looked at them, he realized that these were Swami's students. That one evening changed his perception. I am not trying to tell that all our students who go out are so perfect. But, if you try to individually hold on to what makes Swami happy, Swami would create situations like this. You would become His instrument whether you like it or not. It is just that if with all that we've learnt, we perfect ourselves we would become His instruments.

Ravi Kumar Sir talked about the programmeme, which we air on Radiosai, called the Afternoon Satsang. My brother Aravind and I do it. It is more of a conversational programmeme, a live programmeme. As part of this, we take up some topic, note down some points, stick to those points and then discuss the topic. Many a time we go off the track. But that is also interesting. One day, as part of the routine we had taken up a topic, I fail to recall the topic which we were discussing. So after we decided the topic, we sat and wondered how to start the topic: some interesting way of starting the topic, may be start with a story, start with an incident or start with something that was happening in the news. So we just came upon this idea that we would start with a discussion on 'If God is all compassionate, why is there so much pain in the world?' We thought we would start with this topic and go into the topic as we had planned. I think it had something to do with devotion. But believe me: it was a one-and-a-half-hour programme and two of us doing it, made it even more complex. It was almost like three hours. Because coordination became all the more difficult, we started with this theme and ended up speaking the entire one and a half hours only on this theme. We had not planned so much, we did not have so many points, but somehow it

just happened that we spoke for one and a half hours on this theme. And at the end of it we were surprised. We even confessed on air that this was not our topic, but somehow maybe this was Swami's will, we spoke, we finished it. Two weeks went by and we still are thrilled how this happened. Almost two weeks later, we got a mail from one of our listeners from Japan, a very active Sai devotee, who works in the Sai center there. Apparently this young lady was pregnant. So she couldn't participate in the activities and didn't know what to do.

She said, "Swami, I want to do some seva." So what she started doing, was taking the programmes from Radiosai, and kept emailing them to people. She would say, "This is the seva I do." So she kept listening to Radiosai the whole day as she was confined to bed because she had some complexities in her pregnancy. However, she would randomly keep listening to programmes and keep emailing them to people. And she picked up this satsang, this radio programme and emailed it to some person randomly and got a feedback also. This person she had sent this email to was convicted of some offence and was in a prison. He writes his feedback to this lady who later forwarded the same to us. There was one question that was troubling him: If God is compassionate, why is there so much of pain the world? That person said, "These are the exact words of my thoughts for three full days, three full days before we actually thought of it." We thought of doing this, that morning, and she says, "You send me this file and it gives me all my answers."

I am not saying, "We are perfect, and that's why Swami uses us." Even an attempt to live the life which is somewhere at least 70% -50% -40% of what Swami expects from us, that pleases Swami, will work miracles. There was something which happened a couple of weeks back. This is about the afternoon programme. We had another programme in the evening, which is for children. We had storytelling and a short conversation with a kid. Then we had told this familiar Chinna Katha of Swami.

There is this young boy, who doesn't have a father. He is living with his mother; he has to go to school, all alone. And in order to go to school, he has to go through a forest. So one day he goes to the forest, he hears all kinds of sounds, he gets scared, and comes back to his mother. He says, "I won't go to school." His mother tells him, "When you go, when you are all alone and

scared, there is an elder brother of yours who lives in the forest, you call out to him, he will come and walk you through.” This boy believes his mother 100%. He goes and calls out. The story goes that Krishna himself comes as an elder brother and for many months this goes on, till the boy overcomes fear.

This was the story we had narrated. Imagine a 7-year old boy writing back to us. It is very easy to answer the questions of adults, even if they are in the depths of sorrow, even if they are in the prison. But in case of a 7-year old boy, I don't think so. So this boy writes to us saying this, “I really enjoy the programmeme, I really enjoy this story, but I have a few questions about the story.” What are the questions? He says, “Look, I go to school by bus, so how do I call out to Krishna, and there are so many children around.” And he says, “I have also an elder brother. But this elder brother bullies me. Can I still call Krishna? And the third question he asks is, “There is no forest anywhere near my house, where do I go and call out to Krishna?”

And he had written it with utter sincerity. He says, “Please answer me, please answer me, I am really confused – how do I call out to Krishna?” So we made a very lame attempt at answering the question in the next show. We said something which I am sure wouldn't have convinced him because it hardly convinced us. We forgot about it, three weeks later this kid writes to us again. A 7-year old boy usually would write a ‘hi’ or a ‘hii’. That day there was a “HIIIIIIII” just to show how excited he was and he said, “I want to share something very beautiful with all of you.” During summer vacation, this boy had gone to Delhi with his parents. He writes, “You know what, one night, Swami came in my dream and answered all the questions. He said, “Swami answered all the questions and only a little child can do this. This child in the dream is asking Swami, ‘But Swami, how did you know these questions? How did you know that I had asked these questions? I had asked the boys in the Radiosai”.

What does Swami tell him? Yeah, the boys in the Radiosai could not answer this question. They prayed to me so I have come to answer your question. The other thing beautiful about this place is miracles are possible. That makes life so much exciting and we go out of here, we are going to carry Prasanthi Nilayam or Brindavan wherever we go- so miracles are always possible.

We will just conclude with this last story. Some devotees in Vishakhapatnam do this Narayan Seva in one particular railway station, everyday, every morning they serve only breakfast. Their idea is that a lot of workers, people who do manual work and collect daily wages go for work without eating anything in the morning. They can't afford breakfast. So they set up a counter to serve breakfast for all these people. All these coolies, people who sell tea in the platform and anybody can come and have. So they have been doing this for a while. There was one particular devotee who was joining this seva for the first time. He joined this group. They all went to the railway station, and were doing this Seva. As they were serving food, there came a man dressed in perfect clothes, neatly pressed, wearing a nice shining shoes, nice belt, very well groomed. He came and very rightly took the breakfast, ate it and went away. So this new devotee became restless. He said, "We are doing this seva for poor people. Why is he coming and having here?" After this sSeva is over, he goes to this man and says, "You shouldn't be doing this. This is for poor people. You are taking away somebody else's breakfast."

Then this man tells the story. He was working as a clerk in some particular office. He was doing well but lost his job. He had a big family to fend for and he didn't know what to do. So, you will also have that anger. There would also be the thought 'The world has been unfair to me.' He had got into that mode of self-sympathy and he said that he was going to pay back. He said, "I am not going to take a job. I will go and start pick pocketing people." What he did was that he would pretend every day as though he is going for work. He would get up, would go into these busy streets and he start lifting wallets, handbags, etc., whatever he could lay his hands on. And this was going on for a few months; he said that he had a very practical problem. If he was going for a government job, he could go at 10 o'clock, but this kind of job would have had to go early. He had to leave home by 7-8 a.m. His wife could not cook breakfast for him. Then, one day, he came and saw this counter, and said, "Wow! This is interesting; I can always have my breakfast here and carry on with my work the rest of the day."

So, one day he comes, eats this breakfast and he goes to the nearby bus stand. He, standing there, finds an elderly man and a young lady, come and stand in front of him. From behind, he comes to know that they have some money in the bank. They have a hand bag and also have money in the bank. So he

decides, "For today, this is it. Just loot this and then go home." And as he is standing there, he hears the father. Apparently it's a father and his daughter. He hears the father telling his daughter, "If your marriage is done, I am done with all my responsibilities and I can retire in peace." Therefore, that money is apparently for that daughter's wedding and he has earned all his life saving up for that. That's his last responsibility. This man, who wanted to steal that, hears this and thinks, "I have heard such things many times before but, today I feel I cannot loot this man. I cannot break this family's heart." And he says, "I have no idea why I feel that way." But he says that day he just could not pick anybody's wallet or handbag. He goes back home empty handed. He thinks the whole night, wakes up in the morning and wonders why this happened. Then he gets this sense, "Has it got anything to do with the breakfast?" You have nutritional food; but moral food- you ever heard of that? "Is it because of the breakfast that I had because that's the only different thing that I did?" He again had breakfast that day and for the rest of the day he is just not able to lift anybody's money. And then he goes on to say that he was repentant, he goes looking for a job. He gets a job which doesn't pay well. But, still it's a job which is permitting him to live well. And then to this devotee who asked, he said, "I come here without fail every day and eat at least something from here because this heart is as good as this food has made it so."

When you go out and you say, "Swami, I want to do things the way you would like it." It can be seva, it can be even your corporate life. It could be anything, could be research. But you say, "I am going to do whatever I can, only to please You, probably in my limited understanding of what appears to me is what will please You." You will see that you will become the centre of miracles. I am not selling miracles to you, but you will see that why this university is giving you sandalwood and why if you take only a B.Sc., an M.Sc. or an M.B.A. out of here you are making charcoal out of sandalwood. I pray to Swami that he blesses all of you with all that he has to offer. I offer this at Bhagawan's Lotus feet. I thank all the teachers for the opportunity.

Dr. N Niranjan

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This parayanam session is an abridged version of the actual talk and notes are given on the main points discussed by the speaker.

The First Journey to Sai

No one in my family knew Swami then, but a small picture of Swami was kept in the altar by my mother, so I asked her about this picture. She replied that this is Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba and then I first came to know about Swami. My first journey towards Swami started in the year 1990-91 when I was in XII Std. It was the first time I saw Swami and was mesmerized looking at the beauty of Swami's physical form. I got so attached to Swami's physical form that I made up my mind to stay with Swami for the rest of my life. Swami also came into my dream, created vibhuti and honey for me and asked me to apply for the M.B.A. programme in Puttaparthi. Swami has been guiding me ever since physically as well as in dreams.

Omniscient Swami

Once I happened to sit very close to Swami and a thought crossed over my mind that it would be so nice while taking 'Pada Namaskar' Swami places his feet over my head. To my amazement just as the thought crossed my mind, Swami placed His feet over my head. At that point of time, I thought of king Bali's story and got frightened for a moment's time but, Swami had just gently placed His feet over my head so, I thanked Swami for not pressing me down to nether worlds.

The Master's Teachings

Swami taught me great lessons like "Don't try to escape difficulties but face them." Swami asks us to do what we fear so as to overcome that fear in us. Swami says "General knowledge is knowing about your own strengths and

weaknesses.” Swami gives a small analogy to illustrate how to achieve success. He says that we dig only five feet for water in one place then we move on to other place and dig five feet and then another and so on, we cannot find water if we keep digging different places but, if we dig in one place deep enough we can find water. Similarly, Swami says if we put in effort single pointedly in one direction, success is sure to follow.

Take Away Home Points

Life is all about challenges and it doesn't work the way we desire it. We have to learn from Bhagawan the qualities of fearlessness, changelessness and selflessness and apply them in our lives to attain the goal of changing ourselves from animal to human and human to divine. We have to learn the right lessons from the experiences which we gather in life. We must not be like the tail of a dog which comes back to its original curve no matter how much effort is put in to make it straight. Education and discipline should be the two pillars in our lives. They always go hand in hand like the two wings of a bird. It is impossible for the bird to fly only with one wing. So, both the wings of education and discipline are essential for a good smooth flight through the society. We must also try to avoid criticizing anybody as every negative thought is harmful to the person who thinks or talks about it, people around that person and the person who is getting criticized.

Dr. Jagadish Chandra

Alumni, SSSIHL

Sai Education System Builds Self-Confidence

Let me ask a fundamental question that every Sai student has asked himself at some point of time, “Why are we advised to lead sattvic lives devoid of fashion, luxury and all those gadgets which students in other colleges are crazy about?” To answer this, I will narrate a simple story which Swami had once narrated to his primary school children. There lived a small bird which had built its nest on the delicate branches of a creeper. Once when there was a violent storm, the creeper was shaken up and the nest lay shattered. What happened to the bird? It flew. Because, it had faith in its own wings, neither in the nest nor the creeper.

In this age of advanced technology where people have covered the retina of their eyes to the tip of their fingers with sophisticated gadgets, schools are creating smart classes and in turn dumb students, the Sai Education System is a stand out. It moulds students into self-conscious, self-reliant and self-confident individuals who contribute to the society’s well-being. With the surging development of information technology, everyone is being knowingly or unknowingly spoon fed with information from all corners of the world, we are being taught the value of discrimination so that we take the right decisions for our lives.

To be with Swami is not our wish, but indeed His will. I will narrate a beautiful experience of a devotee in this regard. There was once a Himalayan monk who performed meditation in a cave. He often saw a person in his dreams who used to guide him in his spiritual pursuits. Once when that monk came down to the plains to buy some grocery, he saw a photograph of Swami at a shop and recognized him as the same person who appeared in his dreams. Within a few days he gathered the required money and reached Dharamavaram late in the night. He slept in the waiting hall of the railway station and wanted to catch a bus to Puttaparthi. But when he woke up, he found himself back in his Himalayan cave where he used to meditate and not

in Dharamavaram. Swami told him that the time had not yet come for him to step into Parthi. If we are here, then He has willed it. Many of us feel that we have got an admission in Swami's university because we performed well in the entrance test and impressed the interviewers with our answers.

During an interaction with Swami in Kodaikanal, an elderly devotee asked Swami, "What *punya* (merit) have we accumulated that we are blessed with your divine presence in our lives?" Pat came the reply, "My presence is not attainable through human efforts. Even Brahma's recommendation will not help you." So never take your days in Puttaparthi lightly."

Sharanagati

Once I had the golden opportunity to ask Swami the true essence of Sharanagati (Total surrender). Swami lovingly explained, "At every point in your life if you know and believe that whatever is happening to you is for your own good, then you have truly surrendered to God." Swami goes on to give an analogy of the four gears in a car. Just as there are four gears in a car, your life also has four gears. They are- happiness, sorrow, happiness and sorrow. Just as a driver is completely at ease in any of the four gears, but he needs to press the clutch during the transmission of gears. Similarly, the difficulty arises when there is a transition from happiness to sorrow and vice-versa. Then we must press the divine clutch of Sharanagati.

Why is an Avatar so Important?

When an Avatar takes a human form and walks amongst us he breaks the humongous psychological barrier that man has created between himself and God. It's great to think of God's unconditional love but how can you feel that love unless you have seen that all-encompassing smile on his face. Unless you have felt the Divine touch, how can you ever comprehend the tenderness which the divinity resembles? The phenomenal experience at a physical level when the avatar changes human behaviour, solidifies our beliefs fills us with joy which is out rightly impossible at a theoretical level. This is the very reason behind the advent of an Avatar.

Swami, the Backdrop of Our Stage

Regarding my professional life, I have been recruited as an analyst of Future Technology in an organization which holds 80% share in the semiconductor market and for this credit goes only and only to our Dearest Swami and His university which inculcated in me a deep sense of work ethic and self-discipline. In fact, the Vice-President of my company had disclosed it to me that I was being taken only because I was a Sai student; that was my principal edge above the other candidates. If you have faith in Swami as your role model, your guru, then there is nothing you can't achieve in your life. Set Swami as the backdrop of your stage, the wallpaper of your desktop. It may be the self-reliant activities in the various hostel departments, sweeping your hostel room, singing for the Bhajan group or performing in the annual sports meet. Do everything, with Swami in your heart. His happiness is our objective.

The fortune that we are blessed with is the love of Swami which enables us to focus on some higher aspects of life rather than mundane human existence. As ideal Sai Students, let us focus our now on what is right and what is required.

Very few get such precious gems of Divine instructions from the Yuga Avatar which can be so easily followed in our day to day lives. The world outside will never have this opportunity to experience this amazing transformation process where Swami prepares each one of us for the journey of life and stays with us through all its ups and downs, so that we remain unaffected... because we live for Him, with Him and in Him.



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