



Sai Young Adult newsletter

Dedicated to learning and practicing the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba



The True Meaning of Christmas and the Universal Message of Jesus Christ

ISSUE 20, WINTER 2004

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SAI YOUNG ADULT
NEWSLETTER, USA,
IS ASSEMBLED
BY A TEAM OF
YOUNG ADULTS FROM
DIFFERENT
PARTS OF THE UNITED
STATES, IN UNITY AND
LOVE FOR SAI.

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Swami Says...

PREMA DHAARA

October 3, 1977

My Dear Boys!

Accept my Blessings and Love. I received all your letters. Very happy. One fundamental point that you have to bear in mind while repeating the Sai Name, that is when you take that Name, you must feel that it is only by His Will and Power that you are doing so, and not by your own. Your progress will be easy if you feel that you are doing everything by the Divine Will and Power at the very start of your sadhana. There are some people who do Japa and are proud of the fact that they are doing it. They think they are superior to others. That is very harmful. Spiritual aspirants have to remove egoism of this nature. You defeat your object by developing a feeling that you are purer than others.

God's Name must be chanted with all Love and Faith. Then Vasanas drop out of the mind automatically, without any effort. God comes to the devotee when he cries to Him, just as a mother goes to her child. It is perfectly true to say that the easiest, shortest and quickest path to reach Sai is the repetition of His sweet and glorious Name, which makes the mortal immortal and changes man into God.

My Boys! Your sweet Sai is always with you, in you. Be happy.

With Love.

Yours, Baba. ❧

Letter from the Editor

Om Sai Ram!

We are once again greatly pleased to present the thoughts and words of our beloved Swami and our fellow youth on this issue's topic -- "The True Meaning of Christmas and the Universal Message of Jesus Christ". SYAN would cease to be viable if not for the grace of our Lord and the support of our readers and contributors and we take this and every opportunity to express our gratitude towards both.

Of special note is announcement by the NEC of young adults representation on the the Central Council of the USA Sai Organization (page 9).

Sai80 -- You will hear that phrase among YA circles and on these pages through the end of the year. This is a YA initiative as we prepare for our Lord's 80th birthday and related celebrations. Read all about it on Page 9. In our Q&A section on page 8, we look forward to your thoughts on the listed questions. Stay tuned to our printed edition and online at www.saiyausa.net for more information on this initiative and how you can participate. In addition, the themes of our next few issues leading up to the 80th birthday will be based on Sai80.

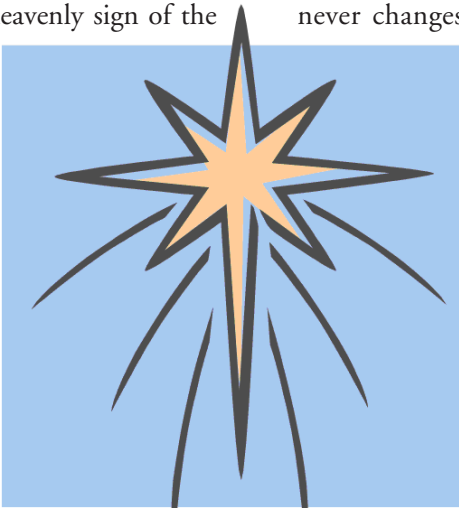
"Even in the depths of winter, there is change," a friend recently remarked, "the days grow longer ever so slightly, and the nights shorter." Winter is a time of change, and it is so for SYAN as well. We are restructuring our operations and procedures and are looking for your continued support. If you can help in any and all capacities of a publication, please write to us at contact@syán.org. We are especially looking for help with reporting. ❧

The Meaning of Christmas Symbols *by Neeta Sanders, Atlanta, GA*

THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS SYMBOLS AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A SAI DEVOTEE

THE STAR

The star is the heavenly sign of the promise of a savior to the world. As Swami always says an Avatar comes to the world when the world needs it the most. Thus the star is the sign of God's fulfillment of His promise. So too as Sai devotees, when we



look upon the star, we should think of Swami's mission here to save us from this endless cycle of birth and death.

THE COLOR RED

The Color of Christmas - Red was first used by the faithful people as a reminder of the blood shed by Jesus Christ for all people. Thus red should remind us to always engage in good activity so that Swami does not suffer for our sakes.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

The stately fir tree is evergreen, remaining pure green all year round. This depicts the everlasting hope of mankind. Green is also youthful, hopeful, and the abundant color of nature. The Christmas tree reminds us of our soul which is God and ever permanent. Everything



else around us changes but our "real self" never changes. Thus when we look at the tree, we should think of the truth "Tat Twam Asi" (That thou art). As the needles of the tree point upwards, we too should point our thoughts upward and Godward.

THE BELL

As a shepherd uses a bell to find lost sheep, we too should be reminded of our journey back "Home". We are lost in the world of endless illusions and when we hear the bell, let it



guide us and remind us that we need to go back to our dear Lord. We need to "Hurry Home".

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND CANDLES

Lights and candles are mirrors of starlight. Just as the star is a sign of our dear Avatar so too are candles and lights. They must remind us that we are but a speck of light of the great ocean of light. We must spread this Divine light to one and all just as Swami teaches us during "jyoti" (light) meditation.



THE CANDY CANE

The candy cane represents the shepherd's crook. Swami is our shepherd holding the crook leading us, his straying sheep out of this world of "maya" (illusion) and back to the flock. The red again represents Christ's blood and the white represents God's purity and redemption.

THE HOLLY WREATH

The wreath symbolizes the eternal nature of Love: it never ceases. It is one continuous round of affection, commitment and caring. When we look at the wreath, we should think of Swami's infinite love for us and we must spread that love to one and all, treating all as our own brothers and sisters; the kind of love that never ends in all circumstances and situations. Swami



has put it so simply for us "Love all, serve all". Again the wreath is made of fir which is evergreen - the nature of permanence and eternity.

Let's always celebrate Christmas by realizing it's true meaning and thus appreciating the Holiday season even more while drawing ourselves closer to Swami through the "true meaning of Christmas". ❧

Love by Jharna Bhushan Vaid, Doha, Qatar

*Give me your Love Baba all
your Love.*

*I know my heart is too small,
for your sweet and simple Love
your pure and pleasing Love
for all your infinite &
immeasurable Love
to be fully contained,
In my shrunken heart.*

*My heart that is only
a heart to call.*

*A heart that is so full, of
jealousy, self pity and anger
so insecure, fearful and wavering,
so full of things you don't approve of.*

*Although, Baba I plead you,
to overflow my heart, with all your
Love.*

*I am scared that,
you may not even glance towards me or
bless a single atom of my being.*

*But still knowing that
I can truly be happy
only with your Love flowing through
me.*

*I naively bring my pitiful heart
to you, to Love.*

*I try to offer you my heart
'cause that's what you asked for
and that's all I truly have.*

*But I am so unsure Baba,
if you'll even consider touching it!
My heart is tainted & bruised.*

*A heart that sometimes
hurts its own kind,
which is killing itself slowly but surely.*

*Will you please take it
from me Baba and make it yours?
I have heard the greatest gift,
that I can give you,
for all that you do for me
Is my heart.*

*I wonder truly if my
humanly heart is good enough
to offer to God.*

*So Baba even though I doubt
my abilities & capabilities,
my decisions & convictions,
my thoughts & words,
my actions & reactions.
I remember a secret that
you told me once
that, what I call "My" is
actually "Yours" my Lord.*

*I am sure and certain that
although this heart of mine isn't fit,
as an offering to Swami,
still my Loving Baba will take it
'cause I am his own child
and how can he not
hear even a silent whimper in my heart?*

*My heart will find its place
among Baba's sweet feet.
'Cause my Sathya Baba
is going to take my poor heart
thus making it the richest one around!
He is going to give me
all his Love that fills the universe.*

*I know from this moment onwards
Baba's Love will shine
in me and around me like the sunlight,
the rays of his Love
will illuminate my heart.
Every atom of my being will be
soaked in his Love.
He will take and transform my heart.
And then with all his Love
I will be the true me.*

*My heart will know,
no more sadness, misery,
fear or insecurity,
or any feeling that
takes me away from my Baba.*

*'Cause I know he is there
not looking over my shoulder
but here with me, in my Heart
that is His.*

Swami's Emphasis on Dharma by

Ashwin Reddy, Detroit, MI

SWAMI'S EMPHASIS ON DHARMA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ATMA DHARMA OVER PURUSHA DHARMA

During my stay in Puttaparthi in June 2004, two afternoon darshan sessions were completely dedicated to dharma consisting of a speech by the Vice Chancellor of the Higher Institute of Learning and a beautiful presentation by Swami's university students. I want to share the message to YA's everywhere.

Dharma is defined as 'right action, truth in action, righteousness, morality, virtue, duty, the dictates of God, code of conduct' in the Dharma Vahini.

The Vice Chancellor began his speech mentioning that Swami has recently reiterated the importance of imbibing dharma in the daily lives of all his devotees, especially the youth. The main points of his speech were that religion and spirituality without dharma are worthless and even useless. Every simple movement, gesture, word, and action of Swami is an act of dharma. In fact, there is absolutely no difference between Swami and dharma. Sri Sathya Sai Baba is dharma. Dharmic conduct must become so natural that it occurs without thought or reason. Therefore, dharma must be so deeply rooted in our spirit that dharmic conduct in thought, word, and deed is automatic.

The presentation of the students began with the relation of dharma to unity of thought, word, and deed. However, unity of these three is not enough. Thought, word, and deed become dharmic only when they are unified [emphasis] and purified. The students gave an example that if a thief had unity of thought, word, and deed with regards to robbing a house it would definitely not be dharmic since it lacks purity. The second part of the presentation dealt with more abstract topics yet was extremely applicable to daily living. Two

types of dharma were described, Atma Dharma and Purusha Dharma. For anyone unfamiliar with the definition of Atma, it is the real Self, one's divinity, or the spark of God within each of us (from Dharma Vahini). Atma Dharma is defined as our Atmic duty or divine duty (from Dharma Vahini). In other words, Atma Dharma is conduct that seeks the divine and is therefore divine conduct itself. Atmic Dharma or divine conduct would include any conduct that consists of one of the five principles (truth, love, peace, righteousness, and non-violence) at its core. Purusha Dharma is simply the dharma of man which can include professional responsibilities, family responsibilities, responsibilities to society, nation, etc. Each individual will have several Purusha Dharmas. Atma Dharma is the same for everyone while Purusha Dharma is different for each person. The most important point of the students' presentation was that Purusha Dharma must be constantly conducted with Atma Dharma in mind. Or, in other words, Atma Dharma should pervade Purusha Dharma.

A beautiful analogy given by Swami is that Atma Dharma is the milk while the Purusha Dharmas are the dairy products created from that milk. The students gave a very relevant practical example of Atma Dharma pervading one's Purusha Dharma. Two different doctors, one with Atma Dharma in mind and the other without, treat a rich patient. The rich patient comes with symptoms that are painful and disturbing but not serious and his condition can be treated simply and inexpensively. The doctor without Atma Dharma in mind takes advantage of the rich patient's ignorance and wealth by conducting and prescribing expensive procedures and medications. In contrast, the doctor with Atma Dharma in mind does not take advantage of the rich patient and conducts the appropriate medical procedures without regard to the cost of the procedure and the patient's wealth. As we can clearly see from this example, following

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Divine Mother by *Nirmala Venkataramani, CA*

EXPERIENCE THE LOVE THAT EXISTS IN THE DIVINE PALM OF OUR DEAR MOTHER'S HAND

How did I come into Swami's fold? That is, by itself, a long and detailed narrative and recounting it here would mean taking away pages from my grandparents' and mother's books. I will share my most cherished memories. My mother was a devotee of Swami even before she got married. I have been going to Sai Bhajans ever since I was born. My first darshan of Swami was when I was nine months old. Until my brother reached middle school, we used to go to Whitefield or Prashanthi so often that we lost count of it. I could feel Swami's love every time I went there though I never knew how to express it. Swami used to walk up to my mother and bless me by ruffling my hair, or pinching my cheeks or just placing His hand on my head, just like an aunt or uncle. When I was about two and a half years old, Swami wrote the primal symbol "Aum" on a small slate for me, thereby initiating my educational path. At that point, He became my Guru.

It was not until the age of twelve did I come to realize a fraction of the divinity within Him. Until then, Sai Baba was my best friend, some one whom I used to visit often and who was an integral part of our altar. When I was twelve, I got to sit with my mother's bhajan group and Swami gave us padanamaskar. I cannot ever relate or explain what I felt inside, but that day, I wept for several hours shedding tears of joy.

As a teenager, I had a craving to attend one of the summer courses. I found out that I would either have to be a VIP or a college student to actually gain access into the auditorium. Now, becoming a VIP seemed rather impossible to me. So I was determined to join Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Ananthapur. Though I had no aptitude for chemistry and physics, I decided I would learn them just to attend a summer course. I told Swami and my mother that I will be applying only to one in-

stitution for my Bachelor's degree. I applied and took the entrance tests. The English examination was particularly very difficult. But wonder of wonders, my name was on the list of short listed candidates. I then attended an interview and finally got in to the prestigious Sathya Sai Institute.

During this period, Swami appeared every other day in my dream and would give me directions and darshan. This was the best phase of my life. While at Brindavan for the summer course, I felt the Divine Mother's eternal love. Although I am very attached to my mother, I never missed her even a single day during the summer course. On the night prior to the last day of the summer course, I was ill with a high fever. Swami came in my dream that night and said, "Go home". I did not quite grasp the meaning of it, but in that dream He also said, "I am your Mother and you are My daughter". I woke up with a jolt and realized that I was completely cured.

Swami's words came true; I was not able to stay on at Ananthapur and returned to Madras (now Chennai). I returned at a time when normally school admissions are already closed and academic sessions are already a month underway. Surprisingly, that year schools were still accepting applications and the deadline was the day after I arrived in Madras. By the sheer grace of Bhagavan, I was accepted into one of the best schools and it was the only school which offered a Bachelor's degree program in mathematics without chemistry and physics!

I believe that if it were not for His Grace, I would not have gotten to attend the summer course. I still remember every single incident that happened there. Also, ever since I came back, I can feel Swami's invisible hand steering my life's boat in the right direction, like a true Mother - our Divine Mother. ❧

He Whom Christ Announced

EXCERPTS FROM DISCOURSE, DECEMBER 24, 1972, BRINDAVAN

It is therefore appropriate that the Birth Day of Jesus who felt the need to save mankind and who strove to achieve it is celebrated; but, the celebration must take the form of adherence to the teachings, loyalty to the principles, practicing the disciplines and experiencing the Awareness of the Divine that he sought to arouse.

These days, the world is deriving satisfaction in mere words, and in witnessing clever rules designed to cover up one's faults. The Birthdays of the Great are honored by such hypocrisy and external pomp. There is no examination in the light of the message they gave, nor, any effort to practice it and derive the bliss it promises.

The Great Teachers belong to mankind. It is wrong to believe that Jesus belongs only to the Christians and the Christmas is a Holy Festival for the West only. To accept One of them as one's own and discard the rest as belonging to others, is a sign of pettiness. Christ, Rama, Krishna - they are for all men everywhere. The various limbs and organs together form a body; various States and communities together form the world. The sustenance given by Divine Grace circulates in every part of the body, helping it to function in unison. The sustenance of Love, endowed by Divine Grace, has to circulate in every State and community to make the World live in Peace and Joy. If this truth is realized, there will arise no idea of difference.

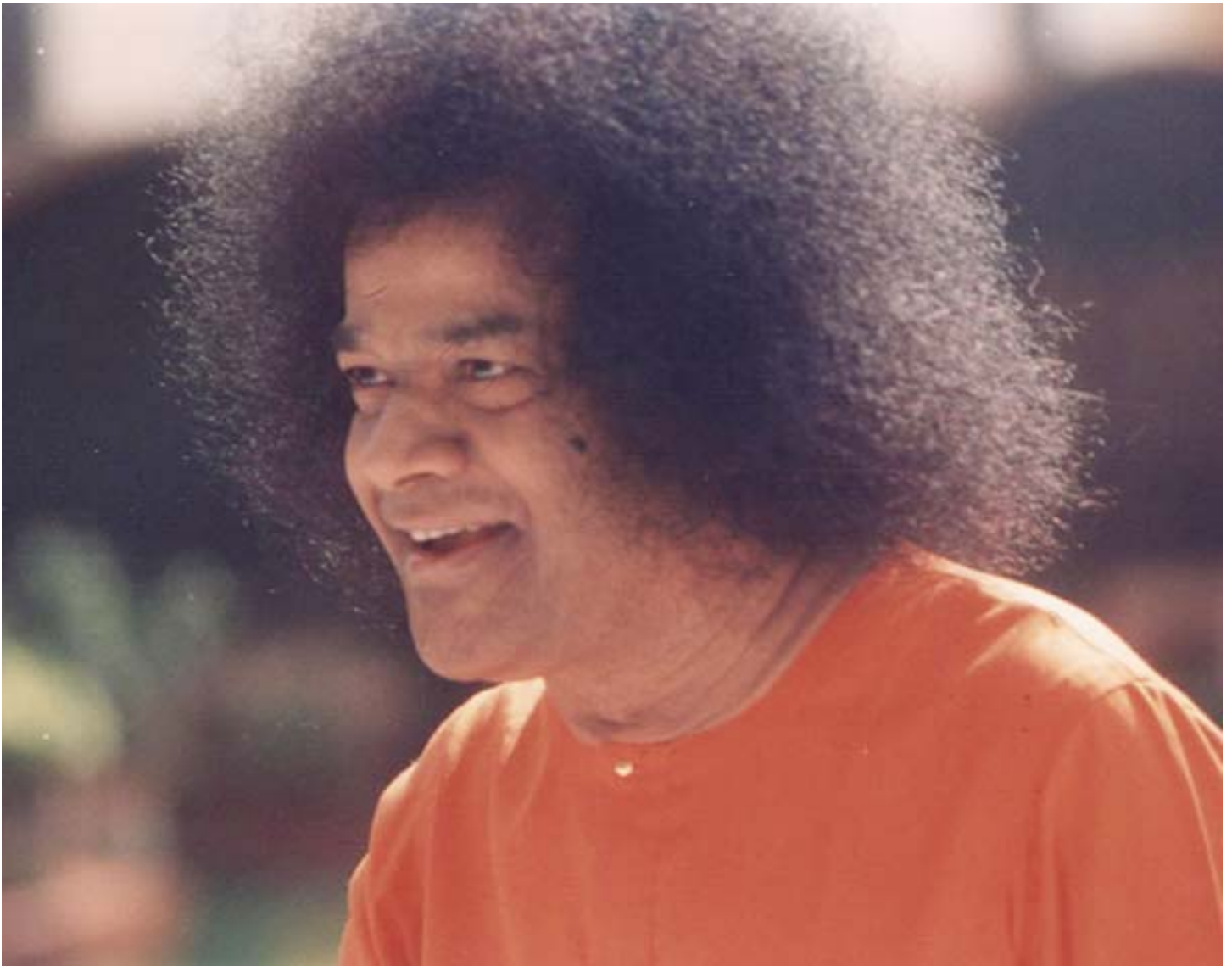
Jesus taught simple practical lessons in spiritual advancement for the good of mankind; He manifested Divine Powers to instill faith in the validity of his teachings; He marked out the path that can confer on men the sweet nectar of Ananda. He exhorted people by precept and example to cultivate the virtues of charity, compassion, forbearance, love and faith. These are not separate and distinct qualities, they are only the many facets of the Divine in Man, which he has to recognize and develop.

He sacrificed his happiness, prosperity, comfort, safety and position; he braved the enmity of the powerful. He refused to yield or compromise. He re-

nounced the 'ego', which is the toughest thing to get rid of. Honor Him for these. He willingly sacrificed the desires with which the body torments man: this is sacrifice greater than the sacrifice of the body under duress. The celebration of His birthday has to be marked by your sacrificing at least a desire or two, and conquering at least the more disastrous urges of the ego.

The followers of Jesus have got broken into schisms on various counts; but the life of Christ is a lesson of Unity. When Christ was on the cross, ill-feelings towards the men who tortured Him troubled Him. Suddenly he heard a voice alerting him. "All Life is One, my dear Son! Be alike to every one!". This was followed by another admonition, "Death is the Dress of Life." As one casts of the worn clothes and dons another set, so, the soul dons and doffs bodies. Therefore, Jesus was warned against hate and ill-feelings, as well as the lamentation to which man is heir.

Wealth without wisdom becomes an instrument of exploitation and tyranny. Wisdom without wealth becomes mere fantasy and a bundle of blueprint. Use makes them worthwhile; misuse makes them disastrous. It is like the knife in the hands of maniac, it becomes an instrument for murder; in the hands of a surgeon, it becomes an instrument which saves a life! Are you doing good with wealth? Are you benefiting others by means of wisdom, that is the test. This day, Christmas, when you celebrate the birth of Christ, resolve to lead the lives of Loving Service, to the weak, the helpless, the distressed, the disconsolate. Cultivate tolerance and forbearance, charity and magnanimity. Hold dear the ideals He laid down and practice them, in your daily lives. The ways in which Christmas is being celebrated now show how far men have moved away from those ideals, how much ignominy they are heaping on his name! The midnight hour is revered; illumination is arranged; the Christmas Tree is set up; and then, the night is spent in drinking and dance. ❧



He who considers himself free is free indeed, and he who considers himself bound remains bound. Constantly think yourself as being eternal, unlimited, Consciousness-Bliss, and you will be free and happy. So long as you trap yourself in body consciousness you are like a lion moping about in a musty cave. Do not feel satisfied by saying, 'I am the body'. Roar and say, 'I am the Universal Absolute. I am all that is, was and will be.' Pettiness, ego, time and space - all will flee from your heart and you will realise your own Divinity.

Sathya Sai Baba

Q & A Session



Questions on Self-Transformation

Use the quotation provided to give us your thoughts on the questions below. Your answers will be compiled and published in the next issue with comments from our own "experts." We would love to hear from you.

"... The participation of youth is necessary for the welfare of the world. We should rejoice when they turn over a new leaf in their life. There is a common saying that you should not rejoice and distribute sweets etc. when a child is born, but you should do so only when the son grows up and earns a good name as a 'Sathputhra' (good son) . You can't please Me just by joining as a member of the organisation. I shall wait for the day when you turn over a new leaf and transform yourselves into better individuals. You should become 'Guna-sheelas' (persons of sterling character and good qualities)."

-Sathya Sai Baba, Abbotsbury, Madras, 19 January, 1983

- 1 Based on this message, what does 'self-transformation' mean to you?
- 2 What is your goal of self-transformation?
- 3 What are some areas you would like to work on?
- 4 What day-to-day challenges are you facing?
- 5 What are some practical methods you've discovered aid in achieving your goal?
- 6 What improvements have you noticed in yourself since you started the program?

The Power of Constant Namasmarana *by Nirmala Venkataramani, CA*

TRAVEL ACROSS THE OCEAN OF LIFE USING THE LORD'S NAME AS YOUR GUIDE AND LAND ON THE ISLAND OF UNITY WITH HIM

Our entire life is like the vast ocean, and hence it is called "samsara sagara" (the "ocean of life"). The goal of life is to cross this ocean without falling down and drowning in it. Our dearest Mother Sai emphasizes constant namasmarana (Chanting the name of the Lord) in every single discourse as the easiest way to attain this goal of our lives. Swami stresses that this goal is easily attained by constant namasmarana. Why does Swami place such emphasis on namasmarana?

We have several examples of sincere devotees of the Lord using this very powerful tool to attain the goal. One prominent example is the story of Hanuman. Hanuman was entrusted the task of crossing the mighty ocean in search of Mother Sita. Hanuman was not sure about his strength and ability to cross the ocean - the ocean of life. It was then that he was reminded of the power of Name of Lord Rama. He constantly repeated the Name. That helped him assume a mighty form by metamorphosis and in a single leap, he was able to cross the ocean and reach Lanka, where Mother Sita was held captive. Hence, just the name of the Lord is sufficient enough to help us cross this ocean of life.

However there is more to the power of the Name than just crossing the ocean. When Hanuman returned back to Lord Rama after having met Mother Sita, the Lord hugged him and said that Hanuman was like a brother to Him on par with his own brother Bharatha. Bharatha was indirectly involved in the exile of the Lord to the forest along with Mother Sita and Lakshmana. Why then did the Lord compare Hanuman who was considered His greatest devotee, to Bharatha?

It is said that Bharatha after accepting the Padukas (Sandals) of the Lord, lived in the outskirts of Ayodhya in a hermitage. He passed his life constantly repeating the Lord's Name. There

was not a moment when he did not chant His Name. When Lord Rama returned to Ayodhya after fourteen years, people of Ayodhya, the sages, hermits and all others were not able to tell the difference between Lord Rama and Bharatha. Bharatha was in every sense just like Lord Rama. Due to the constant chanting of the Divine Name, he even resembled the Lord. This is indeed the power of chanting His Name. Constant Namasmarana does not just help us cross the ocean of life, but also realize the Ultimate Truth that we are not different from God.

In Swami's words, "Love is the only property that always grows - the more you spend, the more it grows; it never diminishes. When we sing the glory of God, the Divine vibrations spread all around and the people who hear this Namasmarana, even from a distance, feel very happy. Divine music can confer solace even to children and animals. By hearing Namasmarana, even the heart of a stone-hearted person will melt. We have heard of several instances in Indian history where great devotees of God, by their Namasmarana, could bring about complete transformation in die-hard criminals. For example, Valmiki, the composer of the Ramayana, was a robber by the name of Ratnakara, who was transformed by the power of divine music.

"Continue this Namasmarana wherever you are throughout your life. Especially, when your spirits are down with sorrow, sing the glory of God full-throated. Never feel diffident to sing the glory of God, thinking that others may make fun of you. Irrespective of what others may think or say against you, continue this sacred activity of Namasmarana. Only then will you be charged with Divine power."

Let us all pursue this sacred task of Namasmarana diligently to cross the ocean of life and realize the Ultimate Truth that we are indeed no different from God. ❁

Announcement from the NEC

The Young Adult National Executive Committee, USA (NEC) is very happy to announce that Sangeeta Lekhi and Daniel Scovill have been selected to membership on the Central Council of the USA Sai Organization, where they will represent the views and interests of the American Sai Young Adults. This is an important and auspicious development, and it further reinforces the fact that Young Adults are an integral part of our Sai Organization. Moreover, it will permit a better incorporation of the Young Adults' vitality, innovative talent, and energy into all phases of the national program.

Phyllis, Hal and I wish to congratulate Sangeeta (sss108@rcn.com) and Daniel (daniel@arcsine.com) on their selection and we are confident that they will continue to do an excellent job of communicating young adult perspectives to the Central Council. Please feel free to contact them on a regular basis. And, of course, we of the NEC (nec@saiyusa.net) are always happy to hear from you.

In Sai's Service,

Phyllis Krystal, Hal Honig, Dr. Bill Harvey (Chair).

Sai 80 - A National Young Adult Offering

Sairam Young Adults!

We are very happy to serve as your representatives to the USA Central Council. With Swami's blessings, the YA program represents an opportunity to work together for advancement in our own spiritual journey. Through active participation and sharing between individuals, groups and even regions, we can meet this goal! Please share with us any questions or comments you have, as we look forward to working with you to further develop and enhance the Young Adult Program!

Offering 2005

The year 2005 marks the beginning of activities as our Organization celebrates Sathya Sai Baba's 80th year. As you may have already heard from your regional/local young adult contacts, we would like to offer Swami our personal transformation as a gift for His 80th birthday.

We would like to see each group adapt this "Sai 80" goal of transformation to best reflect their time, resources and ambitions. For some groups this may take shape as a Self-Improvement Calendar. Other groups may focus on a series of transformation workshops and activities. Some may even seek to find this transformation through service to others. Regardless of the intricacies of each project, the goal remains the same: a nationwide Young Adult effort of self-transformation.

To ensure maximum participation, the support and enthusiasm from all Young Adults is needed. Your interest,

ownership and personal example will inspire others to actively participate in this offering.

The culmination of this effort will result in a tangible presentation which we hope to present to Swami. The national Young Adult website, www.saiyusa.net will be used as a forum to track our collective progress. Groups and individuals are encouraged to provide feedback on your progress as well as any challenges you face. Anecdotal stories and lessons learned can also be shared, demonstrating spirituality in action.

The Next Step

Please discuss with your peers how this project will take shape in your group. Decide on a method that is appropriate to your individual group, bearing in mind your individual, group and regional commitments. Then, stretch beyond your immediate group and share your thoughts with others. People in other regions may be struggling with something that you have experienced great success. Help one another.

And finally, investigate ways that can reflect and record the progress of personal transformation and how we can present everything to Sathya Sai on His Birthday this November! We are eager to see the collective creativity of the USA Young Adult Program and witness the strengthening of unity as we offer our transformation to our Lord! ❧

With love & Sairams,

Sangeeta Lekhi [sss108@rcn.com]
Daniel Scovill [daniel@arcsine.com]



A Christmas Gift *by Aparna Murali, Los Angeles, CA*

A YOUNG ADULT EXPERIENCES THE JOYS OF RECEIVING THROUGH THE ACT OF GIVING

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself"

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The dawn of December 25, 2004, brought amongst many things the promise of another beautiful day with clear blue skies in Southern California. It felt as though nature was reminiscing with fondness the advent of God which occurred almost two thousand years ago. The entire atmosphere was charged with divine vibrations.

The local Sai center organized a special Christmas day celebration with two seva projects. In the morning, we assembled at a devotees' home to prepare gift bags, artistically decorated and included chips, candies, peanuts and fruits. It took less than two hours to assemble about one hundred such bags for the inmates of the local juvenile correction center. All the while the devotees were singing carols and bhajans, enjoying the true spirit of the season.

In the afternoon, we headed to the convalescent home in Studio City, Los

Angeles, to visit the elderly and sing carols for them. All the residents of this home were beaming with joy on having visitors on this special day, greeting us with hugs and kisses. Their enthusiasm and participation in carol singing took us by surprise.



The mutual exchange of love and affection was not only inspiring but tremendously energizing.

Feeling rejuvenated, we then proceeded to the juvenile corrections center in Malibu which houses more than a hundred boys from the age group of fourteen to eighteen. It was around din-

ner time when we reached the center. All the devotees lined up on either side of the dining hall and handed out the gift bags to each boy as they walked in, wishing them a merry Christmas. They seemed to be puzzled and slightly amused at the sight of us, complete strangers, standing in very cold weather on Christmas Day, wishing them a happy holiday. We later learnt that these boys were extremely thankful that some one would take the time and effort to be with them and, for them on this special day. What was even more gratifying was the sight of happy grins on the faces of these young boys when they opened the gift bags. Their Christmas dinner would have otherwise been only a sandwich and a carton of milk.

In true modern Christmas tradition, we all received and gave away gifts that day. It was no ordinary gift which could be purchased with money or by any other means, nor could it be returned unused. And, the happiness of possessing this gift did not last only for that day, it would last forever. It was a gift from Bhagawan. It was the gift of Love. ❁

Holiday Cheer, 2004 *by Shelley Herai, Brooklyn, NY*

SPREADING CHEER THROUGH UNITY AND SERVICE

For the Holiday season last year all the New York City Sai Centers came together at Goldwater Specialty Hospital and Nursing Facility for a two-part seva activity. The seva activity entailed wrapping and distributing gifts to the patients at the hospital. The Hospital is located on Roosevelt Island, in New York City where patients/residents receive medical, rehabilitative and long-term care.

The first part of the seva activity took place on Saturday, December 11, 2004. During the morning tables were set up to package and wrap gifts for the patients. Packages for male patients included: an alarm clock, a pair of socks,

bag, lotion and a hat. Packages for the female patients included: a scarf, clock, bag, lotion, deodorant, teddy bear, and a pair of socks. almost a thousand packages were put together and wrapped.

Packages not only went to the patients at the hospital but also to other service projects like the Bowery project (where food is distributed to the homeless each week). Other items like boxes of sweat suits and other articles of clothing were given to homeless shelters in the NYC area. In the afternoon, patients were escorted to the auditorium where the S.S.E children of the Flushing Center put on a play titled The Life of Buddha.

The second part of the seva activity took place on the following week on Saturday, December 18, 2004. Everyone who attended was divided into two groups to distributed the gifts. Each group was led by the S.S.E children who were dressed as santa's helpers. Accompanying both groups was a caravan of musicians who played an assortment of instruments such as the guitar, flute, drum and harmonium. They helped lead the Christmas carols that were sung in each ward of the hospital. A few of the hospital residents accompanied us the entire day as we went around distributing the gifts - singing and leading christmas carols with so much heart-

warming enthusiasm. At the end of the day, one of the resident shared that "...its been a beautiful day - full of love and Joy." She said all she felt that day was God and so much love surrounding her that she was not conscious of her constant physical pain. The most rewarding part of this project was to see the happiness on the faces of the patients. They were so joyful when we sang the Christmas carols to them. We felt so much love being shared among all who were present. Of course it was Sai's love and holiday cheer spreading throughout the hospital. ❀

The Sathya Sai Education in Human Values, USA is seeking Sai Devotees who are Professionals working with students in Elementary Schools, Secondary Schools, or Post Secondary Areas. If you want to know more, please contact Bea Flaig, Chair SSEHV Advisory Board to the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values Foundation

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Swami's Emphasis on Dharma

Continued from Page 4

Atma Dharma does not always lead to material/worldly advantage over Purusha Dharma. However, Swami has promised that if we follow the dharmic path, we will be protected by God for God is dharma. Swami has also promised that if we follow the dharmic path (our Purusha Dharma is constantly in the direction of Atma Dharma), God may not always give us what you want, but He will always give us what we need.

In other words, although Atma Dharma might not always grant us at a materialistic/worldly advantage over other paths, it will give us things of much greater value: peace of mind and a place in Bhagavan's heart. ❀

A True Act of Giving *by Anuradha Narayanan, Boston, MA*

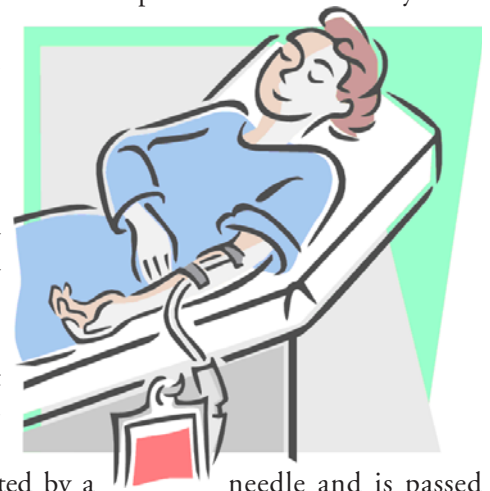
A GIFT FOR ANY REASON, FOR ANY SEASON

December is a month of holidays that are often associated with gift giving. It seems as though most of us go around frantically looking for suitable gifts around this time. Every year we spend much time, energy and money in buying a gift, hoping to bring happiness to someone special in our life. Here is a great gift idea that we would love to share with all of you: Platelet Donation! Although this gift does not come with a price tag, it is as valuable as the giving of a new life. Many of us wish we were doctors so we could save lives and cure diseases. But we don't all have to be doctors to save lives. We can, by our selfless act of donating blood, we make make a difference. With this thought in mind, here are a few facts about platelets and the procedure to donate the same.

Platelets are a component of our blood that control bleeding and help blood to clot. Patients undergoing treatment for leukemia, cancer and marrow transplant need large quantities of platelets for an extended period of time. Only a single tablespoon of platelets can be collected from a unit of whole blood and six whole blood donations are needed to provide a single platelet transfusion. However, one apheresis donation can provide enough platelets for one complete transfusion. Platelets can be stored only for five days. This makes platelets a very precious component of blood.

Apheresis (pronounced ay-fur-see-sis) is a special kind of blood donation that allows a donor to give specific blood components, such as platelets, plasma, etc.. During apheresis, whole blood is collected by a needle and is passed through a machine called the "cell separator". The whole blood is spun in this machine to separate platelets, plasma and red blood cells and a predetermined amount of the platelets is collected. The red blood cells and plasma are then returned to the donor. Donors can watch a movie, listen to music or read something during this procedure. Platelets donation takes around two hours including the preliminary health interview, medical checkup and the refreshment time.

Since our body replenishes platelets very quickly, we may donate platelets by apheresis as frequently as every two weeks. Apheresis donations receive a specific blood typing called HLA typing, so donors can be matched more closely. Type A blood is the universal donor for whole blood donation. A few of us young adults engage this seva on a regular basis and there is an extremely nice feeling in knowing that we too can save a life. The discomfort that one goes through during the donation process is very minimal and is often forgotten by the time we leave the donor center. All it needs from us is a standing commitment to donate frequently and to share this idea to others we know. If we put our minds to it, we too can Save a Life! ❀



LET US ACT TODAY, MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SOMEONE'S LIFE AND IN THE PROCESS GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE !

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*The True Meaning of
Christmas and the Universal
Message of Jesus Christ*



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