



SAILIGHTS



Magazine of the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council, Zone 1

July 13, 2022



Volume 3



Guru Poornima Issue

SAILIGHTS

Offered with Love and Reverence
at the Lotus Feet of our Dear Lord
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba
on the Occasion of Guru Poornima Day, July 13, 2022



“Our life is like a block of ice

Melting away every moment.

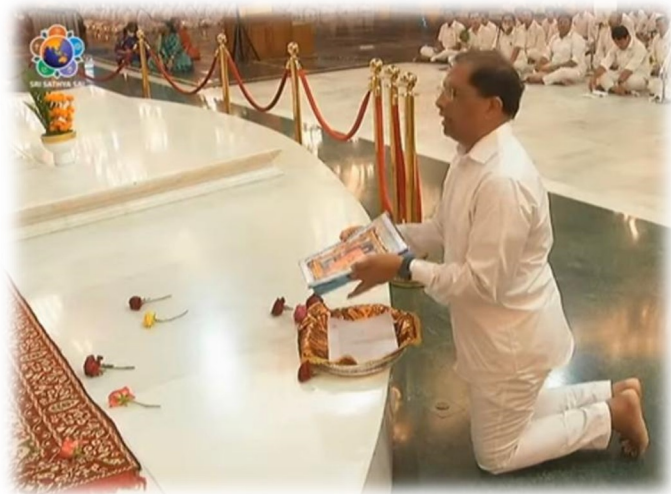
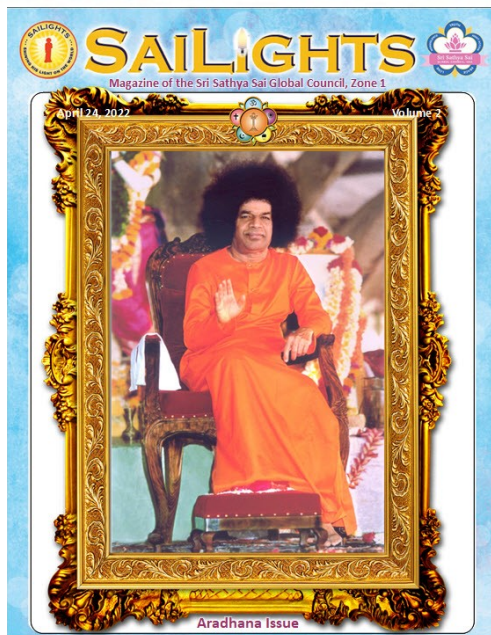
Before it spends itself,

Devote it to the service of others.”

- Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba
Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 31

SAILIGHTS

Volume 2 Offered at the Divine Lotus Feet
on April 23, 2022



Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,

With grateful thanks to our Beloved Swami, we bring you Volume 3 of Sailights, magazine of the Sri Sathya Global Council, Zone 1. We were greatly blessed to offer the first two volumes at His Lotus Feet on the occasions of His 96th Birthday and Aradhana Day, respectively. Now as we make our way to Prasanthi Nilayam for the “Pathway to Prasanthi” Pilgrimage, we beseech our dear Lord once again to accept our humble offering of Sailights 3.

Swami’s Hand has been visible throughout. Certain examples, needed for a particular article in this issue, were hard to come by; then all of a sudden, a book with highly pertinent information practically fell off the shelf! Similarly, the heartwarming recollections of Swami’s devotee, Mrs. Ratan Lal, about Mother Easwamma, were never planned for this issue but discovered, purely by chance, during a search for something else! Yet again, we were not sure if Centers would have enough time to give us inputs for this issue, as May and June are busy in the Sai calendar—moreover with a Pilgrimage fast

approaching. But the contributions from Centers have flowed in more freely than ever, this time around!

We invite readers to peruse Volume 3, which highlights:

- ♦ important Zonal happenings such as the creation of a new SSSGC foundation to support urgent humanitarian and other needs across the world, as well as a new Sai “Awareness Course”;
- ♦ the significance of Guru Pournima and Buddha Pournima;
- ♦ celebrations both joyous and spiritually meaningful on such occasions as Aradhana Day and Easwamma Day and Regional retreats, when devotees come together as one Sai Family;
- ♦ and the inspiring bread-and-butter activities of Sai Centers in the areas of Devotion, Sai Spiritual Education, and in particular, Service.

With prayers for the well-being of all,
Loving Sairams

Sailights Team

SAILIGHTS

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Message from Zone 1 Chair

Om Sai Ram!

As we launch our 3rd edition of the SaiLights Magazine, members and officers of Zone 1 of the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council (SSSGC) have been steadily increasing their involvement in all wings of the organization with center, regional, national, and zonal activities. Our main focus since the launch of the SSSGC, with its aims of worldwide unity and collaboration, has been **Service**. In addition to increasing in-person center service projects, the centers throughout our Zone have supported a wide range of urgent humanitarian projects locally and globally, collaborating with other Global Council Zones around the world as well as with the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust (SSSCT), the new Sri Sathya Sai Global Council Foundation (SSSGCF), the SSSGC of Trinidad and Tobago registered nonprofit, and Canadian SSSGC center nonprofits.

Humanitarian projects. Important service initiatives responding to urgent crises around the world and other needs have included:

- ◆ Delivery of supplies to Hurricane Ida victims in the fall of 2021
- ◆ Delivery of food and supplies, collaborating with SSSGC UK, to Ukraine refugees
- ◆ Delivery of food and supplies to Sri Lanka
- ◆ Procurement and delivery of medication and medical supplies to Sri Lanka
- ◆ Purchase of two mobile ambulances, with coordination from SSSGC UK, for helping transport war victims in eastern Europe
- ◆ Support for the Guru Poornima Medical Camp in Prasanthi Nilayam

New SSSGC and Zone 1 Operational Guidelines. On the administrative front, the Operational Guidelines document was distributed by the Executive Council for all SSSGC centers throughout the world and India.

Our Zone-specific supplemental guidelines were also developed and distributed to all officers.

Ongoing Zone 1 activities. The Zonal Committees have been actively working in their respective areas. Online workshops, interviews, values programs, and study circles have been continually ongoing at Zonal and Center levels. Canada held their national retreat in Toronto, and USA's Region 2 and Region 3 held retreats during the Memorial Day weekend.

Zonal Pilgrimage. Excitement is in the air as devotees prepare for the monumental Zone 1 "*Pathway to Prasanthi*" Pilgrimage that will occur from July 10-17th, 2022. The Zonal Pilgrimage Planning committee has been meeting regularly to pave the way for a divine experience. The ashram authorities have been in constant communication with us, supporting our every need and eagerly awaiting our group. The following are highlights of the preparations:

- ◆ registration and uploading of website information have been completed.
- ◆ travel, transportation and accommodation have been finalized.
- ◆ service activities inside the ashram are being planned, in close consultation with numerous members of the leadership, media center and faculty.
- ◆ our group has been granted permission to present a musical program, and a wonderful program of unity and gratitude has been prepared, and practice sessions are underway.
- ◆ the Guru Poornima International Medical Camp will take place on July 10th—13th; many members will have the opportunity to serve.
- ◆ graduates of the Sri Sathya Sai Educational Committee's Awareness Course will have their certificates blessed at the Mahasamadhi and presented by ashram authorities.

Message from Zone 1 Chair

- ◆ the SSSE children will have their own agenda and planned activities, including tours inside the ashram and village of Puttaparthi.
- ◆ scarves, banners, and sarees have been custom-designed and ordered for our pilgrimage.
- ◆ *prasad* (holy offering) distribution and flower arrangements for Sai Kulwant Hall are being arranged.
- ◆ the Zonal chairs also met with several Young Adults from throughout the world, who, under the leadership and guidance of Mr. Suresh Menon (Zone 9 chair), have been developing a Sri Sathya Sai Global Leadership Program. Jaysai Ghayal from Zone 1 and Mithun Vinayak from Zone 3 presented a preliminary outline of the program to the Zonal chairs. It has a tentative launch date of January 2023 for the first of several modules, with the conclusion, featuring a residential session in Prasanth Nilayam, slated for Guru Pournima 2023.

Global-level developments. On the international front, the zonal chairs from throughout the world have been in constant communication:

- ◆ they will meet in Prasanthi Nilayam during Guru Pournima along with the rest of the Executive Council, including chairman Mr. Chakravarthi and Managing Trustee of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust (SSSCT) Mr. Ratnakar.
- ◆ a meeting with worldwide leaders for SSSEHV programs, schools and the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, along with Dr. Pal Dhall, took place for planning future initiatives.
- ◆ a meeting was held with the head of the Sri Sathya Sai Media Centre, Mr. Swaminathan, and Media Centre hosts Mr. Bishu Prusty and Mr. Prem Anosh, who offered several media-related tips and advice, and graciously offered their support to all zones for any media-related activities.

We are most grateful to Swami for allowing us to be a part of His organization and pray that we get more and more chances to serve, for our own spiritual growth and for the benefit of all beings everywhere.

Loving Sairams,

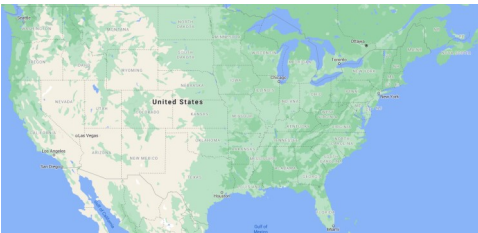
Dr. Axay Shanti Kalathia
Sri Sathya Sai Global Council (SSSGC), Zone 1 Chair

“All service should be regarded as an offering to God, and every opportunity to serve should be welcomed as a gift from God. When service is done in this spirit, it will lead to self- realization.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 20, Nov 19, 1987



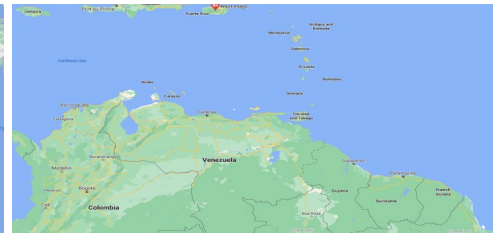
Zonal Highlights



USA



Canada



West Indies

Zonal Highlights

SSSGCF

Sri Sathya Sai Global Council Foundation, Inc.
(501(c)(3) approved)

**V
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To improve the lives of people in communities across the world that are undergoing hardship by providing assistance in the form of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and values education.

Education Support



Housing Support



Food



Disaster Relief



Financial Support



International Aid



**V
A
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Our work is guided by the principles of 'Love All, Serve All' and "Help Ever, Hurt Never" as demonstrated by Sri Sathya Sai Baba. This includes, demonstrating, practicing, and propagating the five human values of Truth, Right Action, Peace, Love, and Non-violence that are common to all cultures and religions.



<https://www.sssgcf.org>

Contact us at secretary@sssgcf.org

Zonal Highlights



Sri Sathya Sai Global Council Foundation: An Important Step in Advancing the Sai Mission

- With the Grace of our Lord, the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council Foundation (SSSGCF) was registered in January 2022 as a not-for-profit corporation in the state of Maryland. In keeping with Swami’s principles of transparency in operations and complete alignment with governmental guidelines, professional legal and accounting guidance and principles have been, and will be, implemented in the operations of SSSGCF.
- ◆ This mission includes demonstrating, practicing, and propagating **the five human values of Truth, Right Action, Peace, Love, and Non-violence** that are common to all cultures and religions.
 - ◆ Emphasis is on providing **assistance to low-income, disadvantaged individuals, families, and communities**, as well as **institutions that are dedicated to serving those in need**.
 - ◆ The **vision** of the SSSGCF is to improve the lives of people in communities across the world that are undergoing hardship, by providing assistance in the form of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and values education.
 - ◆ Its **mission** and purpose are to put into practice the principles of “Love All, Serve All” and “Help Ever, Hurt Never” as demonstrated by Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

A Sign of His Grace

When the application for the formation of SSSGCF was sent in, we were advised that the standard approval time was seven to nine months—and more recently, up to 12 months, due to a back-log. But our dear Swami decided to bless and grace this initiative by granting approval within three weeks!

With Swami’s divine grace, the following projects have been supported by the SSSGCF since its inception.

#	Project	Ultimate Beneficiaries	Location
1	Procuring medical supplies to help urgently address some of Sri Lanka’s crisis-driven needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust 	Communities severely hit by the ongoing, wide-ranging economic crisis	Sri Lanka
2	Purchasing Ambulance Vehicles needed for helping the injured <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council, UKSSSGC, UK 	Victims of the conflict in Ukraine in need of urgent medical attention	Ukraine
3	Upgrading the library in a top Sai educational institution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With approval from the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust 	Students of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning	Puttaparthi, India
4	Supporting the International Guru Poornima Medical Camp conducted in Puttaparthi <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With guidance from the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust 	Local residents as well as pilgrims visiting the ashram in need of routine or timely medical attention	Puttaparthi, India

With Swami’s divine grace, the following are serving as Officers of the SSSGCF voluntarily for a period of three years: Dr. Axay Kalathia, President; Sai Sravan Cherukuri, Secretary; Maya Virani, Treasurer; Dr. Balu Karanam, Director; Sri Jeevaprakash, Director; Giridhar Jeedigunta, Director; Kasi V. Sridharan, Director; Dr. Geetha Kamath, Advisor.

Zonal Highlights

Projects Supported by SSSGCF



“Remember three things always: Continue Seva (selfless service), wherever you are. Seek chances to help others. Never lose an opportunity to use your skills and enthusiasm for the alleviation of sorrow, pain, and distress.”

-Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume 10 (1970), Discourse 10

Zone 1 Committees' Reports

Sri Sathya Sai Education Program (SSSEP) Sri Sathya Sai Awareness Course

The date for our *Pathway to Prasanthi* pilgrimage (July 10-17) is upon us. With Swami's Grace, the Sri Sathya Sai Awareness Course (SSSAC) will be completed in time for all participants to receive their course completion certificates, which will be offered at the Mahasamadhi on Guru Purnima day. The last three sessions of the SSSACEP were presided by esteemed speakers who guided the participants with a better understanding of the *Love All Serve All* aphorism.

The first of the three speakers, Dr. Geetha Kamath, opened her session with an oft-quoted statement by our beloved Swami, viz., *What I want is not devotion to me, but your devotion to My teachings*. Our selfless beloved Swami is keener on us putting into practice His teachings than an exhibitionist devotion. The worship that Swami loves the most, or the devotion He appreciates the most, is to love all and serve all. Dr. Kamath then shared the three facets of divine Love as explained by Swami Himself as a triangle with SELFLESSNESS at its apex.



Dr. Kamath narrated an example for each of these facets, which Swami exudes eternally. Regarding SELFLESSNESS, she recollected an interview her family received at Sai Shruti late one evening. Swami had a very long day giving darshan and meetings, and still, He granted her family an interview because His devotee's happiness is His happiness. Swami gave of Himself without limit to make His devotees happy without caring for His own physical body.

Regarding FEARLESSNESS, Swami would announce the advent of His mega projects (water projects, super-specialty hospitals, and the educational institutions) as His *Sankalpa* (Will), which an educated mind would deem impossible. Subsequently, Swami would initiate, execute, and establish these projects in record time.

The following quote of Swami best conveys how CHANGELESS Swami is: *You should understand My ideal. Once I say that you are Mine, I will never forsake you. You may forget Me, but I will never forget you* ([Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 31 \(1998\)](#)).



Dr. Kamath concluded her session by reminding her audience that i) God will not ask, When and where did you do service? He will ask, With what motive did you do it? God seeks quality, beauty of mind, and nobility of motive. ii) Your helping hand does not need to be big in size. It is the helping attitude that matters most. iii) Emphasize simplicity and sincerity more than form and show, and iv) Each act of service is a flower placed at the feet of the Lord.

Sister Thirumagal (Thiruh) Arulselvanathan was the next speaker. She commenced her session by quoting Swami, that *divine Love is the undercurrent for cultivating human values*, and shared the connection between Love and Human Values as: *Love as thought is Truth, Love as action is Right Conduct, Love as a feeling is Peace, and Love as understanding is Non-violence*.

Next, she beautifully shared stories of Prahladha and Jatayu as narrated by Swami, which exemplified various attributes of Love, such as *Love Gives and Forgives, Love is Sacrifice*, etc.

Zone 1 Committees' Reports

She concluded by noting that *Love* and *Service* (or *Seva*) are inextricably intertwined because one must first become **Selfless, Egoless and Voluntarily Act** in order to **Live Our Values Everyday**.



The speaker of the ninth session, Dr. Ramesh Wadhvani, commenced his session with the *Love is My Form* bhajan and then posed an important question: What hinders us from selflessly loving others? The answer lies in Chapter 10 of the Bhagavad Gita in which Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna the *vibuthi yoga*, viz., that everything is God's gift, e.g., talents, wealth, or knowledge one has acquired. Therefore, Dr. Wadhvani concluded that the hindrance from selflessly loving others can be negated only by setting aside the ego and making time to lessen the pain or suffering of others and thereby become a TRUSTEE of His gifts. Dr. Wadhvani then shared a few personal Divine experiences and concluded his session with the *Tree of Love*, which, powered by *Sathya* and *Dharma*, will lead one to Self-realization.

Dr. Raja Rao, Chair, SSSEP Committee

Please note: Readers are also referred to pages 82-86, which contain a list of useful acronyms developed by participants in the Awareness Course.

Medical Committee

Doctors With Heart, Without Borders
- Dr. Keshav Nayak

Project Lion Heart, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting medical service activities, will be going to SSSIHMS (Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, i.e., Swami's hospital in Bangalore) in July of this year to continue a greater than decade-long Commitment to serve patients without access to cardiac care.



Cutting-edge care for the least fortunate.

Led by interventional cardiologist Dr. Keshav Nayak from San Diego, a team of cardiologists from the US and Canada, along with their trusted colleagues and counterparts at SSSIHMS, will conduct **workshops** and a city-wide **symposium** encompassing the latest advances in ECHO and structural cardiology. These annual visits began in 2010, with Swami's blessings, with a very successful workshop in performing atrial septal defect closures for poor patients without access to care. There was a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, and this year's trip marks a welcome resumption of a very rewarding mission on all fronts.

Team members this year, as in the past, are new not only to the project but to India too and volunteer out of their own passion for service to mankind. Project Lion Heart cherishes these opportunities given by Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Central Trust and SSSIHMS and we hope to continue annual visits in the future.

Dr. Geetha Kamath, Chair, Medical Committee

Zone 1 Committees' Reports

Cultural Integration

The objective of this committee is (a) to prepare members to be culturally aware and open, and (b) to develop a global vision that would help Sai devotees see the unity of all faiths, cultures, and people on the planet. An ideal scenario is to bring the best of east and west to our Sai Centers. It is important to make all devotees feel comfortable, and to help all connect to Swami's message.

We are working with center, regional, and national leaders within the organization to understand current best practices that create a diverse and culturally vibrant environment within our Sai Centers. A contrasting effort is being made to investigate the efforts that did not find fruition in this regard. These twin efforts, seeking to produce a precise understanding of the current state, will give us a solid launch pad to try new ideas and practices in cultural integration.

As previously stated, we plan to compile a Best Practices reference for centers to adopt as they see fit, while still based on the local culture, combining the best of east and west.

Girish Jandhyala, *Chair, Cultural Integration Committee*

Sri Sathya Sai Program for Awareness of Human Values and Educare (SSSPAVE)

Swami's grace and kindness has allowed our committee to progress well on various activities:

- ◆ Launch of our first Orientation program for our volunteers on Human Values, coordinated by Brother Abhimanyu Kaul, with 40 participants from Canada, USA, and West Indies.

- ◆ Presentation of a Jump Start training program for our volunteers on five consecutive Saturdays in April and May, with participation by 27 or so devotees.
- ◆ Launch of our external web site ssspave.org on April 24, 2022, Swami's Aradhana day.
- ◆ Meeting with Service Coordinators of Centers in the US, aimed at identifying potential organizations where Awareness of Human Values (AHV) and Academic Coaching and Training (ACT) programs could be conducted.
- ◆ Recording of Chit Chat session Videos with Dr Pal Dhal, Dr P V Shankar and Brother Abhimanyu Kaul, on how to apply human values in our daily life.

Sainath Vadathirthanathan, *Chair, SSSPAVE Committee*

Ladies Wing

Over the last couple of months, the Ladies Wing committee has collated responses to our survey from women across Zone 1, and is utilizing these responses to develop initiatives in the devotional, educational and service wings.

We are also in the process of synthesizing Swami's teachings, for and about women, into reflection and study modules that address topical questions of relevance to women of all ages.

The early stages of planning for a Zonal Ladies Conference early next year is already underway amidst much excitement!

Dr. Ramya Gopinath Rao, *Chair, Ladies Wing Committee*

Awake, Unite, and Inspire



Spotlight: Awake, Unite, and Inspire

Awake, Unite, and Inspire (AUI) is a video interview series launched in January 2022 by Sri Sathya Sai Global Council (SSSGC) West Indies. This program is aired weekly on National Radio as well. The subject of the one-on-one devotee interviews is their experience with Sai, and the program has attracted growing viewer interest. One key reason is, inevitably, the experiences themselves. The other is the host's ability to draw these out, thoughtfully and unhurriedly, in interview after interview. Following is a brief exchange with AUI's host, Brother Fize Mohammed, whose deep spiritual roots and decades of close interactions with Swami make for a highly insightful and inspiring program.



SaiLights Team: How do you see AUI's purpose?

Fize Mohammed: As the name suggests, our aim is to awaken, unite, and inspire the Divinity within each and every one of us. The reflections of the speakers open our hearts and minds to the wonders of Sai, bring us together as a Sai family, and serve to inspire our individual spiritual journeys. Especially during the pandemic, it was clear that we needed a new format for *satsang*, with people being unable to meet physically. Also, as I have often remembered the many stories that people who have had encounters with our beloved Swami have told me, I have come to realize that these precious stories should be preserved for posterity.

SaiLights Team: What has the response to AUI been so far?

Fize Mohammed: The series has grown in popularity, with devotees joining from all over the world. The feedback we get from them is always encouraging and inspiring. Some people relate to the stories being told, others share similar experiences, and then there are those who would be motivated to an action or *seva* or a transformation within themselves.

SaiLights Team: What are some of the memorable interviews you have done so far?

Fize Mohammed: We have done about 30 interviews to date, covering leaders in the Sai fold, students of Swami's institutions, and other long-time Sai devotees. Each interview is memorable, in that it brings together a set of close interactions and transformational experiences with our Lord Sai that have had a deep and lasting impact on the individual.

SaiLights Team: We look forward to more! What do you see going forward?

Fize Mohammed: The energy is always uplifting and filled with inspiration. It is this energy that keeps us going from week to week seeking out many new people to share their journeys. With Swami's guidance and blessings, devotees will continue to share their journey and transformation to inspire change and transformation and bring about a value-based society.



Regional Highlights



REGION 2/REGION 3 - RETREAT KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Br. Nimish Pandya



Br. Cosby Powell



Br. Nishikant Barodekar

Regional Highlights



Zonal Retreats, May 2022

Three in-person spiritual retreats were held during May 2022. **Region 2**, covering the Mid-Atlantic region, had a four-day Memorial Day weekend retreat during May 27-31; **Region 3** covering North Carolina (Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh) had its mini-retreat on May 29; and **Canada** had a one-day Easwaramma Day retreat on May 28. A summary of the retreats follows; Canada's event is covered in greater detail in the Easwaramma Day section of this magazine.

The retreats were well attended and much appreciated by Sai devotees who were in many cases meeting fellow devotees in person after a Covid-driven hiatus of two years. Organizers worked hard to recreate the blissful atmosphere of Prasanthi Nilayam, with an agenda that included a spiritual haven for mind and body, not to mention beautifully decorated altars that were a feast for the eyes and heart. Morning *Suprabhatam*, *Nagarsankeerthan*, and in some cases yoga made for uplifting beginnings, while the days were filled with energizing bhajans, thought-provoking speeches and workshops, creative programs for children, and activities for all on the lighter side that nevertheless kept the focus on spirituality. Above all, the retreats served to create an opportunity for *satsang* for adults and children alike—a Sai family reunion, as it were—and indeed, the uninterrupted contemplation of Swami and His Teachings.

Region 2 Retreat

The retreat was the first Sri Sathya Sai Global Council Region 2 Retreat in North America. Nearly 400 persons attended the retreat in person, while another 100 or so watched online. The retreat theme was “Living Life His Way”, a reference not only to Swami's teachings but also to His Life's example.

“Our main homework is Action”. Brother Nimish Pandya (All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization and Vice Chairman, Sri Sathya Sai Global

Council) set the tone for the retreat at the very outset of his (virtual) keynote address. He opened with an emphatic reminder that God resides in our hearts; and added that this is commonly known but not easily practiced. The wide gap between knowing that God is within us and experiencing Him all the time can only be bridged through Action, he said. In other words, we know the *sadhanas* we need to undertake but lack adequate resolve. Recalling a personal incident with Swami, he alerted aspirants that “our main homework is Action”, without which one could not reach the Lotus Feet of Swami.

Participants' Feedback

Ably interviewed by Nitya Chilkuri, a Group 4 student at South Bethesda Center, a few participants responded to specific questions posed to them.

Takeaway messages included the importance of action (more than words), chanting “Om”, looking to Swami as one's best friend, letting go of ego when doing service, and recognizing that service begins at home.

“Why go?” elicited several responses. Participants said they enjoy going to retreats because each one imparts one or more new learnings; they inspire the whole family; speakers make an impression on young minds; the talks and workshops, and the warm company, motivate us to make transformational changes; and finally: because Bhajans are amazing!

“Dive deep!”. Brother Cosby Powell of Georgia, who came to know of Swami in 1974 and made several heart-touching films of Him, opened the second day's proceedings, speaking of Love and Unity. He underscored that the Divine can be grasped only through Love. Using the beautiful metaphor of pearls, and the need to dive into deep waters to obtain them, he explained that aspirants should “dive

Regional Highlights

deep and get submerged in Swami". Love for God is devotion, he said—an inner experience of living in faith with the awareness that everything that happens is the grace of God and for one's own good. He noted his own *sadhana* of the past decade or so, to think of Swami all the time and involve Him in everything.

A wide range of workshops were offered. Topics ranged from common spiritual themes such as Faith, Surrender, and *Namasmarana* to topics encountered less often such as Ethics and Morality, Seeing Divinity in others, and Basic Concepts to Navigate Sai Literature.

Offerings for SSSE children were also plentiful, thanks to the dedication and creativity of the SSSE teachers, parents, and other volunteers. A **Sri Sathya Sai Educare Cultural Program** was presented for the first time, albeit virtually. A novel feature of the children's portion of the in-person retreat was the use of "spaces", labeled "Swami is", "I am", and "I will". These spaces are further explained in an attachment to this article (p.20), which also contains a summary—worth reading!—of children's **highly positive feedback** on the retreat.

Region 3 Retreat

The "mini" retreat was held in Raleigh, North Carolina. The first item on the day-long agenda, *Nagarsankeerthan*, struck the twin chords of unity and devotion, as devotees from Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh joined together to go



around the *Mandir* (temple), singing a medley of devotional bhajans while carrying a photo of Bhagawan in a palanquin.

Keynote message: Look to Swami at all times.

The main speaker was brother Nishikant Barodekar who came all the way from India, and spoke of "Ominipresent Swami". Speaking of his faith, devotion, and close interactions with Swami, brother Nishikant left the audience in awe with his miraculous experiences filled with Swami's presence.



He narrated a captivating story on practical spirituality, asserting that, when we look for Swami's presence in everything and everywhere, He will always be there for us—the Omnipresent Sai!

Brother Nishikant's Story: Have Faith in the Omnipresent Sai!

A devotee from Himachal Pradesh arrived at Puttaparthi and was told of the prevalence of snakes. He brushed it off, as he had come across such snakes before, but little did he know that Swami had other plans. After lunch, he decided to nap under a tree but was surprised to find a huge snake standing tall and looking directly into his eyes. Without moving an inch, he closed his eyes and prayed to Swami. Then on opening his eyes, he was relieved to find that the snake had simply vanished! The devotee came away unscathed, thanks to his faith and devotion.

Regional Highlights

The uplifting speaker session was followed by a medley of lively, dynamic **bhajans by the SSSE children** of Greensboro, who had worked hard to memorize the full medley and executed it with passion. The three centers came together again to serve food, dine, and clean, observing Swami's messages of not wasting food and being environmentally mindful.



Breakout sessions. Five breakout sessions were organized to cater to devotees' diverse interests:

- ◆ **Young Adults:** YAs explored ideas on how to further the YA program on a large scale and how to follow Swami's teachings in a college setting.
- ◆ **SSE Teachers:** Teachers from the three centers compared notes on their respective SSSE programs, identifying commonalities and differences and exploring ways to learn from each other.
- ◆ **Service:** Participants in the Service room made cards and created care packages for patients at the local hospital.
- ◆ **Go Green:** In a Q&A format, Practical ideas were put forward for implementing in everyday life, to improve the health of the planet.

- ◆ **Devotion:** Brother Nishikant shared more of his experiences with Swami and provided tips on incorporating musical instruments with bhajans and singing with "Bhav" (feeling).

Doll-making. In an inspirational presentation by the Charlotte Sai Center, devotees learned how to make a stuffed doll for hospital-bound sick children. Participants were amazed at how simple it was to take part in such a significant service that was so meaningful to the children.

Scenario time! The Charlotte Center then brought teams together to create and perform a skit on the essential purpose of a Sai Center and on Swami's teachings. Using the settings of a workplace, a bank, and a restaurant campaign, the creative teams shared their interpretations of Swami's teachings, applied in real world scenarios.

The three centers jointly rendered **harmonious bhajans** to bring the retreat to a close. In the words of the North Carolina team, "the mini retreat allowed the members of the North Carolina Sai Centers to come together and share their love for Swami. The captivating programs and inspiring activities added in recharging our spiritual batteries as we experienced positive vibrations from the blissful event, all due to Swami's Grace."



Regional Highlights



SSSE “Spaces” at SSSGC USA Region 2 Retreat, 2022

By Swami's grace, the SSSE children were blessed with a wonderful opportunity to attend an in-person event after over 2 years! And what a treat did they experience!

We all were truly blessed to have a beautiful divine space, with so many hands coming together to transport us all to Prasanthi Nilayam. The dedicated and creative group of SSSE teachers and volunteers created a magical, divine experience for children to immerse themselves in Swami, their inner divinity, and exploring how to Live life, His way!

There were three spaces aptly named as prompts: “Swami is”..., “I am”... and “I will”... Like a theme park, each group of children visited the spaces in a uniquely woven path, learning and building on their understanding as they went from one space to another. The children visited the same space multiple times to deepen their understanding in each dimension.

Here is a brief glimpse of what was experienced in each space:

Swami is: Children learned about Swami’s life, His works, His Messages and His miracle of Love that set an example for humanity by transforming millions through His organization.

I am: Children were given a taste of taking the time to experience who they really are by observing breath, silence and active meditation and practicing asking the question Who am I? and listening deep within for an answer.

I will: Children were made to identify what they are practicing and what habits they want to develop to follow Swami’s teachings and express their love for all, through service.

Each space engaged the children with music, activities, quotes, affirmation and life application, thereby directing all aspects of the children's focus inwards so they may truly connect with the Swami within. Children got to create unique expressions like "Swami is...Quilt" and "I am...wall" to share their understanding with each other. They also did hands-on service by sorting grocery items and service to nature by understanding practical ways to do upcycling and composting.

In addition, we had the Treasure Hunt game for Swami’s quotes, exploring different religions through a game called "Pathways to God" escape room, mindful walks, and outdoor games. Due to the ongoing pandemic, we felt it necessary to create opportunities for those who could not attend the retreat to participate in the Saturday evening SSSE offering. The main theme of the program was based on Swami’s message, “You should lead your lives taking divinity as the basis. You will ruin yourself if you take the world as the basis” - Divine Discourse, Delhi,12-Mar-1999. The presentation focused on ways to divinize every moment of our lives. All the children in the SSSE program in the region were asked to pick one of Swami’s messages and give their take on the understanding and implementation of the message in their daily life. Some of these messages were:

- “Start early, Drive slowly, Reach safely”
- "See no evil, See what is good. Hear no evil, Hear what is good. Talk no evil, Talk what is good. Think no evil, Think what is good. Do no evil, Do what is good."

Swami yet again showed us how He works through each one of us to make a beautiful tapestry from seemingly unconnected weavings of threads to a beautiful program. He is the one who inspires us and He is the one who works through us. Thank you Swami

- The Region2 Dedicated Retreat team

Regional Highlights



Retreat Reflections – Groups 3 and 4 SSSE Students

At Region 2's Retreat, a handful of questions were posed to Group 3 and Group 4 students (and one Young Adult), to gauge the experience of this group of Sai devotees. The youth were ably interviewed by Nitya Chilkuri of SSSE Group 4, South Bethesda.

The responses show overall that the retreat was a very positive experience for these young Sai devotees who attend retreats to broaden and deepen their Sai experience. They enjoyed singing bhajans, reconnecting with fellow Sai students, and immersing themselves—as a group and as a community—in day-long activities focused on Swami. The organization of SSSE activities into the three “spaces” of “Swami is”, “I am”, and “I will” appears to have been a success, as several students made mention of it. The retreat was thought-provoking, stimulating students' reflections on Swami's teachings, ways to connect with Him, and future actions or intentions. Takeaway messages varied across the group, ranging from the need to align with God and recognize that He is always with us and within us, to the importance of group *sadhana* (spiritual practice) and *satsang* (good company) with like-minded people and event speakers.

Question 1: What was the main message you took away from the retreat?

- * We should align ourselves with God and His way of life. *Devakh Rashie (Grp 4, Loudoun)*
- * While there are individual sadhanas that we all do, group sadhanas such as bhajans, seva, and Balvikas really bring the community together. *Rutajit Shetty (Grp 4, South Bethesda)*
- * Hanging out with friends and enjoying away! *Sai Arjit Anand (Grp 3, Edison)*

- * Help ever hurt never, Love all serve all. Serving people. I helped cut vegetables and clean bathrooms. *Saishree Ramkumar (Grp 3, Edison)*
- * Swami is with us in our hearts and minds, even if He is not here in His physical form. *Vedika Deshpande (Grp 3, Doylestown)*
- * Being mindful. *Sravika Bolla (Grp 3, Baltimore)*
- * There are many ways to connect with God. Besides bhajans, everyone took something away also from the workshops and guest speakers. *Sai Prinaka Suresh (YA, East Brunswick)*

Question 2: Which sessions were most useful/enjoyable and why?

- * Nimish uncle's talk. He talked about aligning with God. In geometry, a degree off results in a huge discrepancy. So we want to align as much as we can with God. *Devakh Rashie (Grp 4, Loudoun)*
- * I love music, so I enjoyed the bhajans. *Rutajit Shetty (Grp 4, South Bethesda)*
- * We had 3 spaces for SSSE – “I am”, “I will”, and “Swami Is”. I enjoyed all of them and bhajans. *Saishree Ramkumar (SSSE Grp 3, Edison)*
- * My favorite was the “Swami Is” space because we got deeper insight into Swami's life when he was young, all the events in His childhood, and things that happened in Puttaparthi. *Vedika Deshpande (SSSE Grp 3, Doylestown)*
- * The “Swami Is” space was enjoyable and comfortable. The “I Am” space had a lot of useful activities. *Sravika Bolla (SSSE Grp 3, Baltimore)*
- * The bhajan sessions - the energy filled the room. *Sai Prinaka Suresh (YA, East Brunswick)*

Regional Highlights



Question 3: Why did you attend the retreat?

- * Throughout the year, we get apart from Swami but the retreat brings me back and rejuvenates me. *Devakh Rashie (SSSE Grp 4, Loudoun)*
- * Gives me a sense of community. Meet a lot of like-minded people in my age group and adults too. *Rutajit Shetty (SSSE Grp 4, South Bethesda)*
- * It's a memorable and enjoyable experience. *Sai Arjit Anand (SSSE Grp 3, Edison)*
- * Because we spend the whole day thinking of Swami. Sitting in the devotion hall and doing bhajans is peaceful and gives us happiness. *Saishree Ramkumar (SSSE Grp 3, Edison)*
- * I feel more connected to Swami, I feel peaceful and happy. I also meet a lot of my friends and people who are Sai devotees. *Vedika Deshpande (SSSE Grp 3, Doylestown)*
- * It's different every year and it's fun. *Sravika Bolla (SSSE Grp 3, Baltimore)*
- * I want an opportunity to connect with everyone and do seva. *Sai Prinaka Suresh (YA, East Brunswick)*

Question 4: Did you prepare anything for the retreat?

- * For the SSSE cultural program, we were requested to explain what one of Swami's quotes means to us and how we implement it. I chose "You must fill your heart with love for God (*daiva preeti*), fear of sin (*paapa bheeti*), and morality in society (*sangha neeti*)." I spent some time analyzing it, studying it, and preparing my take on it. *Rutajit Shetty (SSSE Grp 4, South Bethesda)*
- * Attended a few meetings as part of the photography team. *Sai Prinaka Suresh (YA, East Brunswick)*

Question 5: Any noteworthy anecdote or message that made an impression on you?

- * It is nice to see a lot of people who I have not seen for some time. We had powerful discussions. *Rutajit Shetty (SSSE Grp 4, South Bethesda)*
- * It made me think about what I want to do in my future. *Sai Arjit Anand (SSSE Grp 3, Edison)*
- * In the "I Will" space, they talked about recycling and compost. I think this is important. *Saishree Ramkumar (SSSE Grp 3, Edison)*
- * During one of the sessions, we watched a clip from the Lion King where Mufasa is always with Simba. Similarly, Swami is always with us. *Sravika Bolla (SSSE Grp 3, Baltimore)*
- * Main message was how we can connect with God. There are so many ways in which we can express our love for Swami. *Sai Prinaka Suresh (YA, East Brunswick)*

The SaiLights team gratefully acknowledges the responses given by :

Devakh Rashie (SSSE Grp 4, Loudoun, VA)
Rutajit Shetty (SSSE Grp 4, South Bethesda, MD)
Sai Arjit Anand (SSSE Grp 3, Edison, NJ)
Sai Prinaka Suresh (YA, East Brunswick, NJ)
Saishree Ramkumar (SSSE Grp 3, Edison, NJ)
Sravika Bolla (SSSE Grp 3, Baltimore, MD)
Vedika Deshpande (SSSE Grp 3, Doylestown, PA)

Region 2 Retreat Highlights



Guru Poornima



Gratitude is an important part of Guru Poornima. Even Gods give thanks...

“Rama saw the squirrel; He appreciated its devotion; He took it fondly in His palm; He stroked its back tenderly, and with a blessing. That was ample reward. The squirrel race has since acquired three lines on its back, to indicate that sign of gratification and Grace.”

- *Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 8, Jan 13, 1968*



Asked...and Answered by Swami



Asked... and Answered by Swami Guru Poornima Special!

This summary draws mainly on words spoken or written by Swami

What is Guru Poornima?

Guru Poornima is the day dedicated to revering and worshipping the Guru. Swami says it should actually be called Vyasa Poornima, as it is the birthday of the great guru Sage Vyasa, who was Lord Narayana himself and came to teach man the path to God.

It is "Poornima", the full moon day, as the full moon represents the mind when it is fully illuminated and filled with the light of Love. Thus it is the day on which one celebrates the dispelling of the darkness of ignorance from the mind.

What is Guru?

'Gu' is darkness; 'Ru' is light: Guru is thus the one who helps destroy the darkness - the veil of ignorance or *Maya* - so the disciple can see the light and realize his own divinity.

The Guru reveals the Atma to the pupil and makes him free. He is also the living example and embodiment of the virtues he desires his disciples to develop.

Who is the Only True Guru?

Swami says there is only one Guru, He is God. And that God is within you.

Divine knowledge can be granted only by *Avatars*: Only He who has known supreme bliss can raise us to His level, only He who is formless and attributeless can open our "inner eye" and reveal our inner Self.

God alone resides in our heart and is available to us as a 24/7 counselor, companion, confidant - or whatever we allow Him to be!

*"Manasa bhajare guru charanam
Dustara bhava sagara taranam"*

"I called on all those suffering in the endless round of birth and death to worship the Feet of the Guru (spiritual preceptor), the Guru who was announcing Himself, who had come again for taking upon Himself the burden of those who find refuge in Him. That was the very first Message of Mine to Humanity. *Manasa bhajare—Worship in the mind!*"



- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks vol 1; Ch 1. October 1953

How Blessed We are to have Swami as our Guru!

Swami says He has come to:

- * Unite mankind into one family
- * Affirm and illuminate the Atmic reality of each being
- * Teach us to recognize our common Divine heritage, rid ourselves of the animal and rise up to the Divine, which is the goal.

How should we celebrate Guru Poornima?

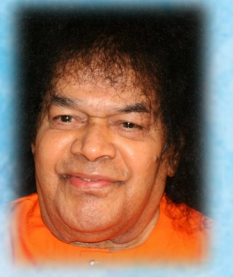
On this day, we should reflect on Swami's teachings and commit to following them. We should engage in self-inquiry - Who am I? - and believe (in) His assertion of our divine identity - I am God - in a spirit of strict obedience and faith.

We should remember Him with gratitude, for being our Guru and giving us the gift of human birth that gives us the opportunity to realize our Divinity.

We should pray, to cleanse the heart (not feast and fast, to serve the body). We should accept the God within as Guru, chant the *Gayatri mantra*, and pray to Him to illuminate our minds to see the Truth.

We should offer Him our Love - that is all we have to give, everything else is His!

Guru Poornima



Guru Saakshaath Param Brahma: Transforming Humanity with selfless Love

The Guru assesses with care the past of the disciple, and prescribes a path of actions in the present so that the future can (a) bring success in the disciplines (*yogam*) chosen by the individual, as well as (b) ensure the complete welfare (*kshemam*) of the individual. Thus the Guru provides an education customized to the individual, and takes responsibility (*vahami*) upon Himself (*aham*) to build the character of the individual. Education thus takes the noble form of educate, “*yoga kshemam vahami aham*”. In this process of building the character of the individual, the Guru does not think of his own comfort, and demonstrates by example the proper practice of selfless Love. Such a teacher embodies the true definition of Gu-ru as “*one who removes darkness with light*”.



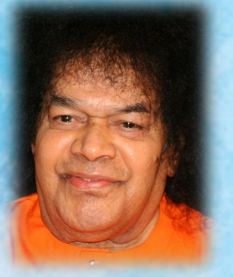
The phrase “*Param-Brahma*” refers to the Infinite Source of selfless Love. That Infinite Source verily blessed all humanity on this earth (in fact, all living beings) with a triad of Avatars (*Saakshaath-kaaram*), namely Shirdi Sai, Sathya Sai and Prema Sai. What a great Blessing indeed for all of us that the Param-Brahma Himself is directly our Guru !!

The unique hallmark of Swami was (and is) the ease with which He brought (and brings) about wholesome and integral transformation in the character of the individual. Such transformation is a herculean task indeed, given the habits we have accumulated over innumerable births. What made our transformation easy was the Purity in His *Sankalpa* (*thoughts and wishes*).

One evening in Trayee Brindavan, we were witness to that Love, which corrected human behavior without condemning. A celebrated Hindustani classical vocalist had just given a stellar performance in Bengaluru City the previous day. The singer was seated amongst the students, as it was customary then that the latter would provide the necessary instrumental accompaniment. Swami gestured to the vocalist to begin his performance. He was a sincere devotee of Swami, and had delighted huge audiences at both Puttaparthi and Brindavan on several occasions.

His music strengthened our focus on Swami, as his devotion to Swami was reciprocated by the attention Swami gave him. However, quite unexpected of a great master of music, his voice faltered. While he struggled to continue the song (and his eyes were closed), there was a mischievous smile on Sai-Krishna’s face, and a twinkle in His Eyes, as He gestured with His Hands to us, students, that he had consumed alcohol. It is a well-known “secret” that famed singers often consume some alcoholic drink to achieve a bass voice, and a large dynamic range, during a performance. His voice got worse enough that he could not continue the song any further. It is at this point he opened his eyes to see Swami beckoning him to proceed to the Interview room adjoining the bhajan hall. After a few minutes in the Interview room, Swami lovingly led the singer back to the bhajan hall. We saw a large Vibhuthi mark on his face, and the singer sat back to continue with the song, this time with Swami’s Love enabling him to deliver a masterpiece, much to the Motherly

Guru Poornima



satisfaction of a beaming Swami.... Corrected, but never condemned !! Swami loves all of us, in spite of our mistakes and shortcomings. This incident remains etched vividly in my memory as I recollect here, nearly forty years later, that “*Sakshaat-kaaram*” (manifestation) of the Infinite Love of Swami.

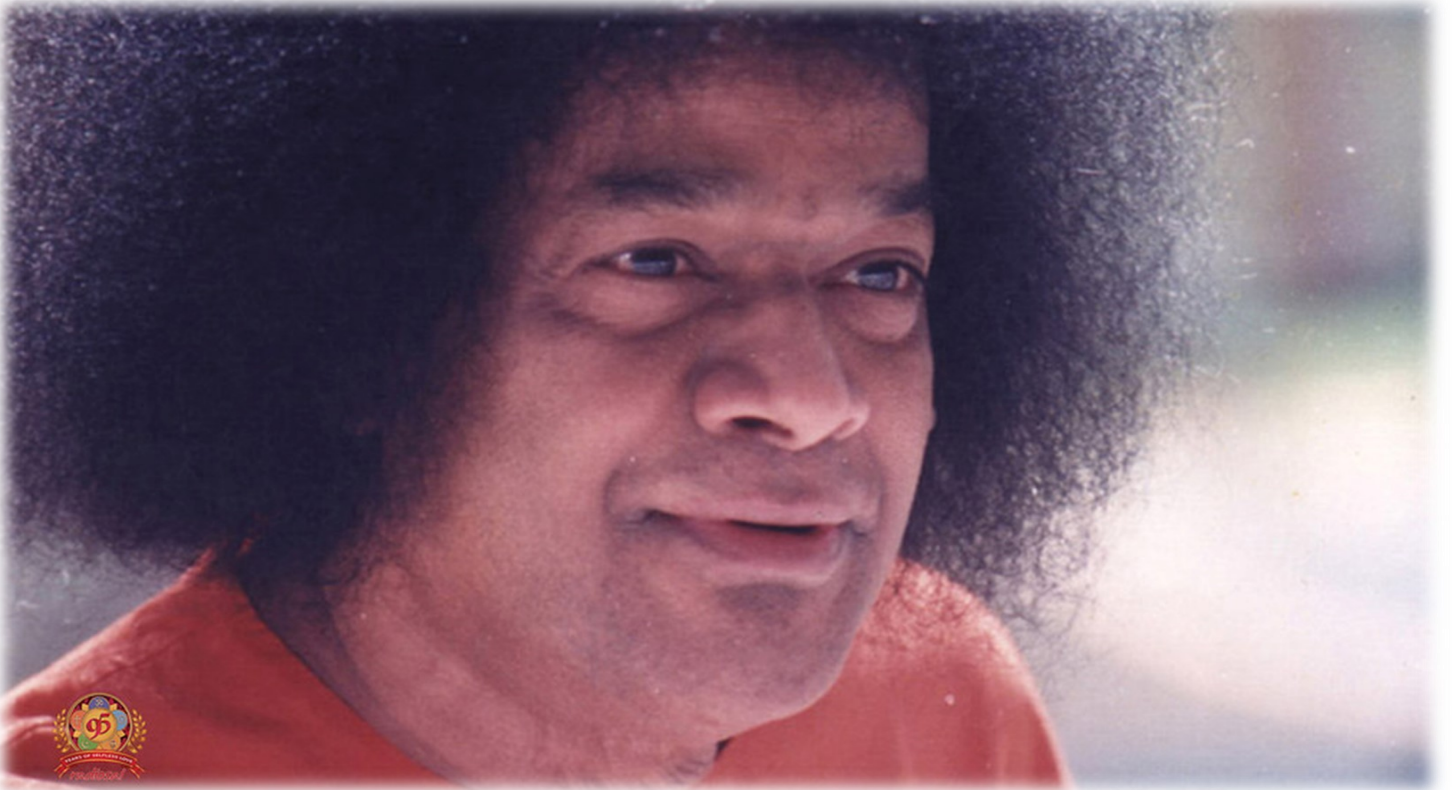
Swami never condemned our shortcomings for the single reason that He saw only His Innate Purity in all of us as well. How wonderful and harmonious our life would be, if we were to imbibe Swami’s Love in our interaction with others, and see the same Light of Love in others which Swami sees in us all !!

Dr. Sudarshanam came into Swami’s fold in 1969. After graduating from Swami’s College at Brindavan, he received a Ph.D in Physics (from the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning) from Swami’s Divine Hands in 1988. As directed by Swami he joined the faculty of the Physics Department at Brindavan. In the US since 1991, Dr Sudarshanam currently leads dashboard projects on high-performance pulsed fiber amplifiers. With Swami’s Blessings, he and his wife and son have been members of local Sai Centers since 1997.

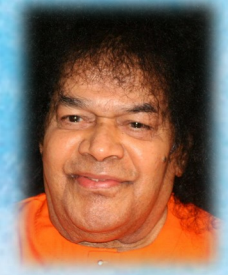
Jai Sai Ram.

By Dr. V.S. Sudarshanam

Sri Sathya Sai Center of East Brunswick, NJ



Guru Poornima



Guru: Helping Us Realize Our Inherent Divinity

Guru Poornima is dedicated for offering gratitude to the Guru. On this day, the moon is full and clear with no blemish or dullness. The Guru too is pictured in the same way and praised, on this occasion, as unblemished and bright.

“**Gu**” means darkness and “**ru**” means light. Guru is one who removes the darkness of ignorance through the light of wisdom. Wisdom is total awareness: Wisdom is non-dual.

Swami says, “When you identify yourself with your body, it is ignorance. When you say ‘My body’, question yourself, ‘who am I?’ Then you may realize the ignorance of identifying yourself with your body.” The Guru will make us understand that we are not just a body, but indeed sparks of the Divine, Atma.

God descends as a Guru, referred to as Sadguru. Our Lord Sri Sathya Sai Baba is our Sadguru, the Avatar of the age who came to transform our hearts to make us better human beings. His teachings, which focus on human values, allow us to realize the inherent divinity within us. The human values are love, peace, truth, right conduct and non-violence as taught by our Lord. Love or Divine Love (not to be confused with worldly love) is the core value of all values. When one practices all of the human values, one will be demonstrating LOVE in its completeness. As told by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba:

Love as thought is Truth,
Love as action is Right Conduct,
Love as understanding is Peace,
Love as feeling is Non-violence.
Love is selflessness

The practice of human values will eventually take us to the core value of Love, which is to finally realize the true inherent divinity in the form of LOVE - “**Love Is God**”.

Practicing human values will lead us to see oneness in everything. Oneness means treating everyone in the same way that we want to be treated. This will bring us peace of mind and happiness.

Further, Swami’s teachings allow us to realize that we are sparks of the divine. He teaches us that the Divine pervades everything around us. Oneness brings out the human-ness in us. In order to experience human-ness, we need to get rid of the six inner enemies of desire, anger, greed, jealousy, pride and attachment.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba is our Sadguru, our Lord whose teaching, when put into practice, will basically transform us through Love, without hurting anyone.

Aruna Suvendran

National President - SSSGC Canada

Originally from Sri Lanka and now residing in Canada, Sister **Aruna Suvendran** became a devotee of Swami in 1979 following a life-changing conversation with an uncle who had visited Swami in Puttappathi (her parents were not followers). She joined a center in Canada in 2002, with her two children, and has since served in many roles—including SSSE guru, Regional Education Coordinator, and now National President of SSSGC Canada—which have helped her understand herself and Swami better. She is a Commerce Graduate from University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka and has also taught Management Studies in Sri Lanka.

“The first guru is the mother; her example, her advice, her admonition affects man deepest and longest.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 11, July 26, 1972

Guru Poornima



Guru Poornima Blessings for Life

The evergreen memory of a five-decades-ago visit to Prasanthi on Guru Poornima Day

The year was 1972. Those were the days when Swami used to travel frequently, and one did not always know, in advance, whether He would be in Puttaparthi. But that year we received information that Swami would be in Prasanthi Nilayam for Guru Poornima and, moreover, would be distributing *Amrit* (holy nectar), Himself, to the devotees. My sister and I decided to go to Puttaparthi and reached there two days before Guru Poornima. The ashram was very crowded. In those days, there were not many rooms for rent. But there were many trees around the ashram and we settled down under a tree that was directly in front of Prasanthi Nilayam, with the beautiful Poornima full moon directly overhead.

The anticipation builds. The evening before Guru Poornima, after bhajans, Professor Kasturi (who was essentially managing all the affairs of Prasanthi Nilayam at the time) made an announcement in the prayer hall that Swami would distribute *Amrit* the next day at 7 am to all devotees. He asked that everyone take a shower and line up by 6.30 am.

The Lord's Compassion. Swami came out even before 7 am, and distributed *Amrit* until noon, to rows and rows of devotees. For five long hours, Swami stood out in the hot sun, patiently distributing the divine nectar. However, He urged devotees to go into the shade as soon as they received the *Amrit*. Oh, what compassion!!!

I am blessed! I moved anxiously about the lines, in hopes that I would be among the chosen ones to get the prized nectar. When Swami eventually came to the row where I was seated, tears started rolling down my eyes. I could not believe my good fortune: I was about to get *Amrit* from Swami's hands! Slowly, Swami made His way to where I was sitting,

and dipped the spoon into the beautifully carved silver bowl that was full of *Amrit* and which a devotee was holding. Looking at me lovingly, He blessed me with a spoon full of *Amrit*. Its taste was heavenly—there are no appropriate words to describe the taste other than “heavenly”. When Swami dipped the spoon into the bowl, a few precious drops splashed on my cheeks. After drinking the *Amrit* that Swami gave, I checked to see if the drops were still on my cheeks. They were, and I licked those drops too!

A lifelong memory. The 1972 Guru Poornima is embedded within me as a lifelong memory. The loving glance that Swami gave me has become, with His Grace, the focus of my meditation for life. And the *Amrit* that the *Jagad* (world) Guru graced me with, on holy Guru Poornima Day and in His immense compassion, was and is a blessing and protection for my entire life.

Today when I look back and contemplate my Guru Poornima experience of 1972, I am reminded of a phrase from the Bible: “To Whom Much is Given, Much is Expected”. And I pray to Swami—Oh Lord, make me worthy of the *Amrit* you poured into my palms—and let be me an instrument in Your grand Divine mission!!!

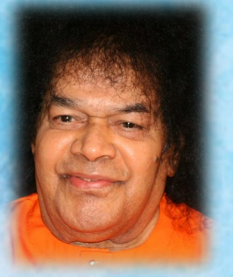
JAI SAI RAM

Mangala Kini

Sri Sathya Sai Center of Loudoun, VA



Guru Poornima



Gratitude: “Man’s Foremost Duty”

Thanking the Guru is a key part of celebrating Guru Poornima. And for Sai devotees, who enjoy the immense good fortune of having Swami, God Himself, as Guru, the importance of thankfulness is immeasurably higher. Indeed, being *ever* grateful to God, not only on Guru Poornima day, is paramount.

Swami’s exhortations on Gratitude are abundantly clear. He has declared that it is a great and sacred virtue, and man’s foremost duty. He says that a person without gratitude ceases to be human, and is indeed worse than an animal. He urges gratitude to parents, to the wise, and to God: “Since the mother has given you blood, her life and strength is responsible for your birth, you must show gratitude by respecting her. You must show gratitude to your father, who gives you money, education, and protection. The wise and the saints give you human qualities and you must show gratitude to them. Ultimately, God is responsible for all these, so you must show your gratitude to God”. Yet, Swami points out, while we are quick to give thanks to a friend for “trifling acts of service”, we fail to acknowledge our gratitude to those who have given us everything in life, namely our parents and Almighty God.

Indeed, there is so much to thank Swami for! He has given us the most precious gift of human birth; brought us into His spiritual fold; blessed us to receive His *Darshan, Sparshan, and Sambashan*; shown us the spiritual path by precept and example; gifted us with a wonderful organization that supports our *Sadhana*; guided us through His writings, discourses, and experiences; and above all, showered on us His abundant Love!

How do we express our thanks to Swami? Just as Swami has told us how to pray, He has also

guided us on how to say “thank you”. True devotion, He says, is an expression of gratitude; and our prayer, worship, bhajan, and meditation must therefore be done in a spirit of gratitude. Indeed, all nine forms of worship are different ways in which gratitude is expressed. Practicing “Love All, Serve All” is ostensibly the simplest yet the most powerful way to thank Swami. Through such service we can also express our gratitude to society and our motherland. But even when we serve, we should serve in a spirit of thankfulness, Swami reminds us, because the opportunity to serve is also a gift from God. Indeed, what more can we offer to Him other than our love and gratitude...everything else is already His!

While it is our *dharma*, or duty, to show our gratitude, Swami does not wait for our thanks. As the popular bhajan says : “All I want is Your love, my child, all I want is your faith...” Like a loving mother, Swami continues to guide and guard us with unconditional love.

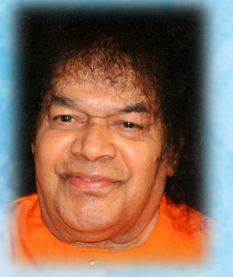
“ Love all beings; that is enough.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 12, March 5, 1973

The spirit of thankfulness is an integral element of the students’ education in Prasanthi Nilayam. Every February-March marks “gratitude season” in these educational institutions as batches of graduating students express their profound gratitude to Swami, with heartfelt speeches, skits, songs, and dances, and sharing of beautiful experiences with their beloved Swami. During these times, and indeed throughout the year, students (and faculty alike), express their thanks to Swami also through Letters of Gratitude to Swami.

Inspired by these practices, devotees in Zone 1 are privileged to offer Letters of Gratitude to Swami for His myriad blessings, attached on page 71 of this Magazine.

Guru Poornima



God Gives Thanks Too!

Swami repeatedly said “[My Life is My Message](#)”. In other words, everything He did was an example to mankind. And one of the things He did, was to say “Thank you”.

Swami always expressed His gratitude for whatever His devotees did for Him. Every single act of service, however small, He returned multi-fold. When guest artists performed at Prasanthi Nilayam, He gifted them sarees, suit lengths, shawls or other items, and extended to them all courtesies and hospitality. When local villagers thanked Swami for the precious gift of potable water, Swami’s response was astonishing! He said that it was He who should thank the villagers for the wonderful opportunity to serve them, and that He hoped that they would give Him many more such opportunities, so that the Avatar could sanctify His Avataric life.

Professor Kasturi also tells the story of Swami thanking a watchman at a guesthouse where He had rested, by giving him the privilege of a personal photograph with him. But when the watchman was unhappy at not receiving the photo, Swami returned the next year, sent for him and personally gave him the photo, much to the watchman’s delight.

God’s expression of gratitude has not been limited to human beings; animals, too, have been happy recipients of Godly acknowledgment. A heartwarming incident relating to Swami affectionately patting and thanking a buffalo for carrying water up a steep hill, day after day for several days, is now well ensconced in Swami lore.

The Hindu scripture Ramayana, meanwhile, is replete with examples of the mighty Lord Rama expressing gratitude to animals. Arguably the most famous story is that of the small brown squirrel

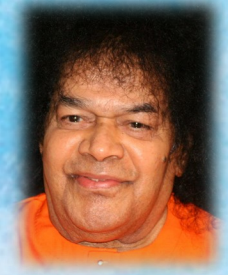
that carried little pebbles in his mouth to do its share in building the stone bridge across the sea for the war with Ravana. When the strong Vanara monkeys mocked the miniscule efforts of the squirrel, Lord Rama chastised them, noting that every task, however small but done with love, was important, and worthy of His recognition. Indeed, He said, it was the tiny pebbles brought by the squirrel, and some other little creatures, that were binding the stone structure together and making it strong. Rama then held the squirrel close and thanked it, gently stroking the back of the squirrel with his fingers. And when He put the squirrel down, there were three stripes on its back, the marks of love from Rama’s divine fingers!

As Swami has told us below, after the war is won, Lord Rama expresses his deep gratitude to each and everyone, human and animal, who contributed to the divine victory.

“The first pronouncement which Rama made on the occasion of the coronation is remarkable. He asked, [Who is primarily responsible for making today’s celebration possible? Hanuman was solely responsible for the successful search of the whereabouts of Sita and helping me to recover her. Hence, at the outset I express my gratitude to Hanuman. Rama then expressed His gratitude to Jatayu who sacrificed his life in fighting against Ravana while he was carrying away Sita. Next Rama expressed His gratitude to Sugriva who had helped him in organizing the search for Sita and in providing hordes of monkeys for the war with Ravana. Rama next expressed His gratitude to Vibhisana who had come over to him...and who had revealed to Rama many secrets of the enemy. Above all, there were huge hordes of monkeys...who endured many hardships and even laid down their lives for His sake and He expressed His gratitude to all of them...The Supreme lesson to be learnt in the Ramayana is that one should be grateful all his life to anyone who has helped him in a crisis.](#)

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 29, May 29, 1996

Guru Poornima



Jesus also demonstrated the importance of Gratitude by His words and actions. The Bible contains several references to Jesus praising and thanking God in prayer. In Matthew 15, Jesus gives thanks for the few loaves of bread He is about to multiply to feed the hungry crowds. The passage says “Then Jesus took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples....” In John 11, just before raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus thanks God for hearing Him. In Luke 22, at the Last Supper, Jesus once again thanks God for the bread and the wine that he offers as his own body and blood. Jesus’ public prayers in the Gospels are often prayers of thanksgiving to God for food. As discussed further below, the Christian faith—as indeed, several other religions--emphasizes the crucial importance of giving thanks, including saying Grace before partaking food.

Gratitude in Various Faiths

Most major religions accord great importance to thanking God for His many blessings. While traditions in the expression of gratitude may vary, some features appear to be common across religions:

- ♥ Viewing gratitude as an obligation, and making it central to religious practice
- ♥ Giving thanks for blessings big and small
- ♥ Offering prayers of gratitude first thing in the morning, on waking
- ♥ Expressing gratitude through prayer and song, and through living a godly life
- ♥ Teaching children to thank God at an early age
- ♥ Living each day in a constant state of thankfulness, including for food
- ♥ Thanking God equally in good and bad times

Some examples of prayers of gratitude to God in various religions are noted below.:

Christianity: God created foods to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the Truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (The Bible, 1 Timothy 4:3-5)

Give thanks to the Lord for He is good and His love endures forever (Psalm 107:1)...rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances...I (The Bible, Thessalonians 5:18)



Judaism: Be not like those who humor their gods in prosperity and curse them in adversity; In pleasure or pain, give thanks. (“Wisdom of Judaism”, Midrash, Mekilta to Exodus 20:20)

I give thanks unto you, Adonai, that, in mercy, You have restored my soul within me..I thank You for the rest You have given me through the night, and for the breath that renews my body and spirit (prayer on waking, Siddur, Jewish Book of Prayers)

Guru Poornima



Islam: It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections—that you may give thanks (Quran 16:78)

And out of His mercy He made for you the night and the day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek His grace, and that you may give thanks. (Quran 28:73)

Buddhism: Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today, at least we learned a little; and if we learned a little, at least we didn't get sick. And if we got sick, at last we did not die; So let us all be thankful. (Gautama Buddha)

A person of no integrity is ungrateful and unthankful. This ingratitude... is advocated by rude people. A person of integrity is grateful and thankful. This gratitude... is advocated by civil people. (Katannu Sutta, Thanissaro Bhikkhu translation)

Sikhism: Dear God, please enlighten me to sing Your praise throughout the morning, noon, and night.

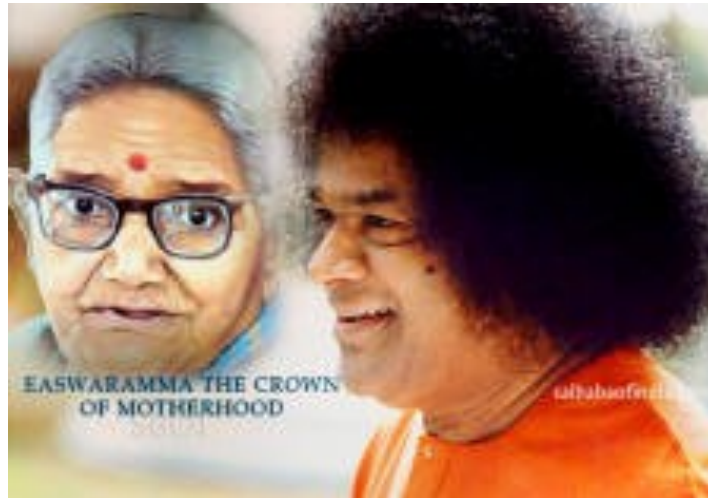
O greatest giver of all, we are very grateful to enjoy the food you provide. Bless us to get rid of our vices by gathering with Your disciples. O Nanak, my heart is full of eternal gratitude for the company of enlightened beings. (Shri Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh Holy Scripture).

Hinduism: Just like the word and its sense; like mother Parvati and father Parameshwara who go hand-in-hand and are inseparable; likewise, our birth/ breath and gratitude go hand in hand. (Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsam*, a Sanskrit *Mahavakyam*)

Padma Gotur

Sri Sathya Sai Center of South Bethesda, MD





Mother Easwaramma

Sometimes known as Children's Day, May 6 is celebrated across Sai Centers worldwide. It is a day of joy, when children reverentially remember the Holy Mother in play, song, and dance. Easwaramma was, after all, no ordinary woman but a great devotee "chosen" by Swami to be His Mother, and indeed the spark that ignited His Grand Avataric Mission on earth.



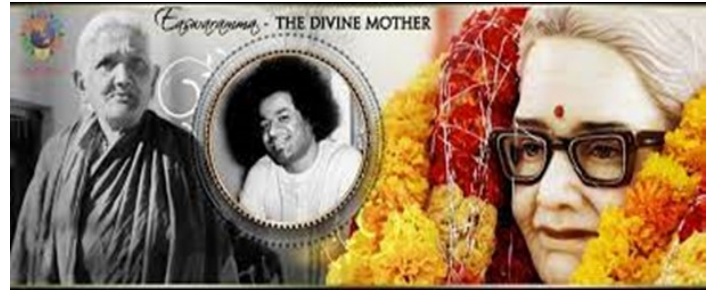
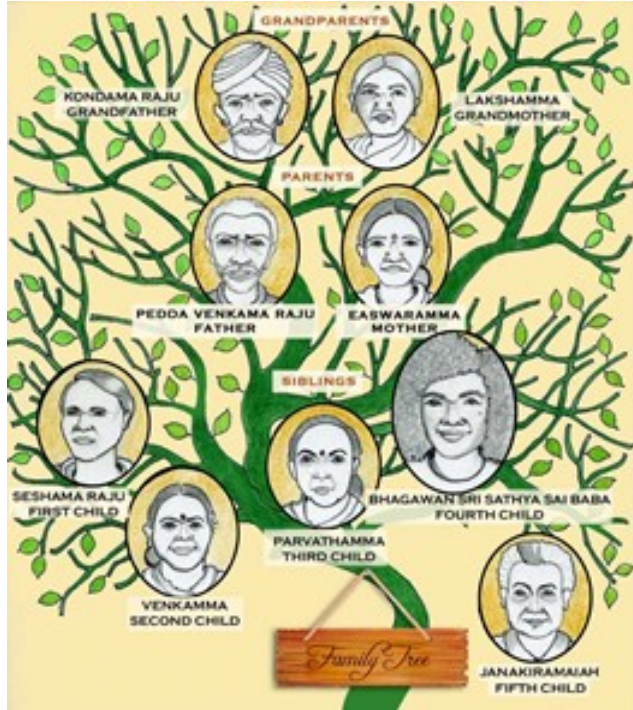


Mother Easwaramma

Swami's Words on Mother Easwaramma

Excerpt from Discourse at Brindavan, May 6, 2000

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol.33 (paragraph headings added)



chutney is My favorite food. Both *ragi* and groundnut are available in our village. When I come here from Puttaparthi, I bring *ragi* flour with Me. Easwaramma was illiterate. When I see the egoistic attitude, perverted mentality, and ostentatious behavior of the present-day educated people, I feel it was better that Easwaramma did not have any schooling.

Sacrifice. When I was seven and a half years old, I used to teach Pandhari bhajans to small children in our village. Easwaramma and Subbamma used to feel ecstatic watching Me sing Pandhari bhajans and dance to their rhythm. Sometimes, her husband Pedda Venkama Raju would give Easwaramma some money for the household expenditure. Once two annas were remaining with her out of this money. One could buy two bags of puffed rice for two annas those days. So, Easwaramma bought two bags of puffed rice with the two annas and distributed to the children. She always used to give away whatever she had with her. She was the embodiment of sacrifice. She used to talk lovingly to all those who came to her. When devotees would feel sad that Swami was ignoring them, she would console them saying, "Whatever Swami does is for your own good."

Who is Easwaramma? She is the mother of Easwara. This was not the name given to her by her parents. But after her marriage, Kondama Raju (Swami's grandfather), being one of wisdom and blessed with a vision of the future, started calling her Easwaramma (mother of Easwara). She was christened as Namagiriamma at the time of her birth. But Kondama Raju told her that Easwaramma was the most appropriate name for her, as he knew that she was going to become the mother of Easwara.

Simplicity. Easwaramma was born in such a poor family that she did not even have proper food to eat. All that she had to eat was *ragi sankati* (gruel prepared from a coarse grain). Even I too eat *ragi sankati* only. Many people in Karnataka eat *ragi sankati*. I like it very much. I do not relish rice, *kurma* (curry), etc., *ragi sankati* with groundnut

A warm heart. When I was being taken to Uravakonda for further education, all those children whom I used to teach many good things in the evening felt very dejected. At the time of leaving, ten of those children came to Me and offered one *battu* (three *paise*) each as Guru *Dakshina* (an offering of gratitude to the teacher). When I gave this money to



Mother Easwaramma

Easwaramma, she was moved to tears. She held My hand and exclaimed, “What a spirit of sacrifice at such a tender age!” Till she breathed her last, she kept those coins with her.

Compassion. Initially, I was staying in Subbamma’s house. But when the number of devotees increased, a new mandir was constructed. One day Easwaramma came in when I was having My food. When others tried to follow her, she told them not to come. She held both My hands and pleaded, “Swami, there is no hospital in our village. Consequently, when the children become sick, mothers are forced to carry them to Bukkapatnam. I am unable to see their suffering. My children and others’ children are one and the same for me. So, kindly construct at least a small hospital in our village.”

Finding joy in others’ welfare. I promised her that I would fulfil her wish and accordingly I built a big hospital, which was inaugurated by the then Central Minister, Bejawada Gopala Reddy. Easwaramma’s joy knew no bounds. The whole day she did not feel the need for food and water as she felt highly contented and overjoyed. She caught hold of My hands and expressed her happiness as her wish was fulfilled in a big way.

Love for children. I told her, “Be happy.” After some time, she approached Swami again and wanted a school to be built in the village. As desired by her, I got a school constructed. Initially, it was a small one. Later on, I made it into a big building. She was very happy. She went to the school, kissed the children, and showered her love on them. She was extremely happy and said, “In this Age of Kali, it is my good fortune to have a son like You, who has done whatever I wished.”

Good Intentions Bring Good Results

Then she wanted the village to be provided with drinking water. I promised that it would be done. I

found that bore wells were being dug to overcome water scarcity. But they become useless within a short period of time. So, I got a big well dug in the Old Mandir.

Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavati (as the feeling, so is the result) If the intention is good, the result also is bound to be good. As My intention was good, a copious spring of pure water gushed forth even at a depth of seven feet! At the back side of the Mandir, an entrance was provided for people to collect water. As you are aware, Swami has now provided drinking water from the river Tungabhadra to the entire district of Anantapur. Nearly 300 crore rupees were spent for this purpose. If the ministers, leaders, and elders come together, they can undertake such public welfare schemes. But this requires concern about public welfare and spirit of sacrifice.

Before Easwaramma passed away, I fulfilled all her three wishes. There is no fee whatsoever in our institutions. Education is offered totally free to one and all. Our hospitals are also free.”

Swami tells us of Mother Easwaramma

“Summer classes were going on in the month of May 1972. She used to come and sit in these classes. Swami used to be amused at her presence and asked her what she followed in these classes. She used to say, ‘I am not interested in these studies. I come here to see how the students of Swami conduct themselves, how they obey His commands and how they react to Swami’s advice and teachings. The parents take great pains in bringing up their children with expectation that they may lead a respectable life. Are the children behaving in accordance with the expectations of their parents? They wear new clothes provided to them by their parents, but do they spare any thought for the hardships their parents undergo to procure these clothes?’”



Mother Easwaramma

The Divine Mother: A Fond Remembrance



On May 6, 2014, Radio Sai's Heart to Heart journal published an article entitled "A Living Scripture on Ideal Womanhood". The article was about Mother Easwaramma and the loving recollections of Mrs. Ratan Lal, a distinguished early devotee who began her journey with Swami in the sixties. Radio Sai's interview, presented in the article and reproduced below (headings included), offers a few extraordinary glimpses into the unique relationship between a son, who was no less than the Kali Yuga Avatar, and His Mother, who was no less than the woman He chose to be His earthly mother.

The Jolly Relationship

"I saw The Mother for the first time in 1965," she started. Her speech was slow but very measured, and her every word clear.

"As I come from North India," she continued, "Then I did not understand even a word of Telugu and The Mother did not speak Hindi, so I could not interact much with her initially. Nevertheless I would always pay my respects to her with folded hands but she never allowed me, or anybody for that matter, to go near her and touch her feet. She in fact repelled at such adoration.

"With time as Swami gave me the privilege to take food for Him, I had the chance to go upstairs and into His dining room, and it is there that I saw the lovely interaction between The Mother and her Divine Son."

Mrs. Ratan Lal now paused, and a bright smile blossomed; maybe she was reminded of a beautiful scene.

"You know...," she resumed, a childlike joy so evident on her affable face, "Swami used to be 'naughty' with her; He loved playing with her. So He would tease her and make some curious remarks, and she too, sensing her Son's mood, would smartly retort. And as this went on, at some point she would be no match for Swami's quick-witted comments, and so seemingly disappointed she would return to her room in the Mandir. **As we climbed down the staircase she would be repeatedly saying, 'He is now a Pedda Devudu (Big God), still He is my son too!'**"

Like every mother, she was possessive of her Son, and even though her Son had now risen to such heights that she was always left baffled and bewildered, she could never let go of Him. Same with Swami too, He also always loved her dearly and regaled in her company.

"Once when we were traveling, Mr. Raja Reddy was driving and Swami was sitting next to him in the front," Mrs. Ratan Lal recalled a specific instance, "Mother Easwaramma and three other ladies were sitting behind. The Mother was seated right behind Swami and her hands were stretched, holding on to Swami's seat. On this occasion, after a while the charming Swami started playing with His mother's bangles and exclaimed, **'Oh! Golden bangles! Who gave them to you?!'**

"The mother too riposted, 'Your father, who else?' And Swami had a hearty laugh, sending everyone



Mother Easwaramma

else in the car too into ripples of smiles because everyone knew that by no means her husband could have given her golden bangles as the family during Swami's childhood struggled to make both ends meet. Still, the Mother intentionally did not want to give the credit to Swami just like Bhagawan too never praised her qualities but always liked to 'tickle' her. This always had a better and beautiful effect!" Mrs. Ratan Lal reminisced with glee.

A Character as Clear as Crystal

"Oh! Swami was very fond of her," she went on, "He respected her a lot, probably because she was a repository of virtues. Sterling qualities studded her personality. **She never asked anybody for anything. Often devotees would bring something for her but she always refused to accept, no matter whoever he or she is.** Even when Swami said to the devotee 'Give it to her' she would not take it. She would say 'You give it to Swami'. She would accept it only when Swami gave it to her.

"Not only this, she would be extremely careful about her dealings with public. Even though she was brought up in a rustic village with little education, she was very sensible and highly observant. She would keenly watch Swami's interactions with different devotees and accordingly maintain her distance.

"Besides she would never do anything without consulting Swami. Let alone going out, she would not visit the houses of her relatives or children in the village itself without telling Swami. Even though she had all access to Swami and could say anything to Him at anytime, she would always wait patiently for a moment when Bhagawan is relatively free, to speak to Him. **Such was her love for Swami that she would never do anything which could upset Swami.**

"On His part, Bhagawan would do everything that would make her happy. For example, whenever Swami went to Bengaluru He would always take her

along. While there, knowing her weakness for her grandchildren, Swami would often send her along with them to the city giving her sufficient money so that she could buy things and feed her dear ones to her heart's content. But more than this, what gave her maximum satisfaction is when heeding to her request Swami alleviated the suffering of a devotee."

When we asked Mrs. Ratan Lal, what is the one virtue of Mother Easwaramma that she would want every woman in this world to cultivate, she said, "You are asking me about one virtue... **whatever is written in our *shastras* (holy scriptures) about the right conduct and character of the woman of the house, she had it in her. She was a living scripture on ideal womanhood!"**

That pretty well sums up what Mother Easwaramma is, why the Lord chose her and loves her, and also why the very mention of her name in His physical presence always made the eyes of the Lord moist with emotion.

Even for the Lord, The Mother's place is at the highest pedestal and her principles most precious. If we call ourselves devotees of such a Lord, it is worthwhile for us to reflect on where our relationship with our mothers stand. That would be a fruitful contemplation as we celebrate Easwaramma Day.





Mother Easwaramma

Zone 1 Easwaramma Day Celebrations, 2022

Easwaramma Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm and joy across many centers in Zone 1, on May 6, 2022 or thereabouts, as children, parents, teachers and indeed all center members came together to honor Mother Easwaramma. It was a day to remember the greatness of the Divine Mother and the teachings of her Divine Son, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It was also a day that put on striking display the lessons being learned by even the youngest members of the Sri Sathya Sai Education (SSSE) Program, as well as the confidence and budding spiritual maturity of their older cohorts.

Several aspects of the celebrations stand out:

- ♥ The programs were **significant undertakings** at many centers, often featuring reputed speakers; multiple formats (across and even within centers); and highly substantive themes across all groups
- ♥ **Life application** and putting into practice the themes being presented, in the months leading up to Easwaramma Day, were identified across centers as a priority
- ♥ **Children worked hard**, showed drive, and took ownership of their programs across the board
- ♥ The depth of the older students' presentations underscored the **spiritual messages they are internalizing** through participation in SSSE, known originally as "*Bal Vikas*", or "blossoming of a child"
- ♥ In some centers, Easwaramma Day marked the **first time that centers were meeting in person**, adding to the joy and excitement and feeling of oneness as a Sai family
- ♥ In total, the presentations served to broadcast not only Mother Easwaramma's **message of Love** but also Swami's vision for sowing in children the **seeds of spiritual transformation**.

Easwaramma Day programs this year were remarkably creative, coming in all shapes and sizes:

Bhajans, plays, dance, poems, and service activities were a staple across many centers' SSSE programs; the children's offerings to Swami also took several other interesting and creative forms. For example:

Atlanta: Children hosted an SSSE Carnival, replete with booths, posters, trivia games, interactive presentations, a digitized version of 'Jeopardy', quizzes, and prizes. Children picked topics of their own choice, applying their presentation and public speaking skills and taking pride in and ownership of their booths. The format showcased the children's creativity and project management skills as well as their depth of knowledge and confidence.

Canada: The retreat featured multiple interactive role-plays and family games including "Sai Jeopardy" and "Pathway to Parthi". The games helped devotees of all ages reflect on Swami's teachings.

Dallas: Children practiced long and hard over three months to present a bouquet of nine beautiful bhajans in five languages, including "*Hum Ko Tum Se Pyar Kitna*" (We love You so much)



Mother Easwaramma

Indianapolis: Children (Group 3) prepared practical presentations on Water Conservation, presenting techniques in the form of games and skits; all groups also learnt/recited the *Narayana Suktam*

Raleigh: Group 4 children offered to Swami a video on the Schoolwork Assistance Initiative (SAI) Tutoring program, in which about 100 volunteers (students and adults) participated in helping as many children in the community with their academics.

South Bethesda: Group 3 boys offered to Swami not only an entertaining play but also a thoughtful life application exercise: as a reciprocation of their mothers' love, the boys helped their mothers at home in various ways, keeping track of their *Sadhana* over a six-week period.

Canada's Easwaramma Day Retreat: "A Divine Experience"

On May 28, the SSSGC-Canada National Team hosted a 12-hour Easwaramma Day retreat at the Scarborough Centre in Toronto, Ontario. Devoted to the Divine Mother's "Holiness", the day was filled with spiritual activities, keeping participants fully engaged and connected to Swami throughout!

Early morning *Aumkaram*, *Suprabhatam*, and *Nagar-sankeerthan*, reminiscent of Prasanthi Nilayam, set the tone for the day, with the outside chill subsumed under the warmth of the Lord's name sung in unison. A rich agenda followed, including:

- ◆ Jyoti meditation and Study Circle – Path to Truth
- ◆ Vedam chanting
- ◆ SSSE bhajans and a musical offering
- ◆ Panel: How to be "near and dear" to God, a thoughtful, heart-warming discussion leaving participants feeling the presence of Swami
- ◆ Spiritual games/fun activities throughout the day.

A particular highlight was the speech on the Chosen Mother by Dr Axay Kalathia, Zone Chair, who graced the occasion in person as the day's Special Guest.

Words of Wisdom—from Baltimore's Class of '22*

"One lesson that has always stood out to me was the one about faith. It is not something one can get overnight [but] has to be acquired by constant *Sadhana*. The *Balvikas* program has given me so many opportunities to build my faith in Swami. Having strong, unwavering faith in Swami is THE most important thing in life that anyone can have. I know for a fact that it will be the guiding force of my life forever."

"Service activities were defining moments in my SSSE experience, as I was able to apply what I learned in class, through the years, in these events. Specifically in the farm seva, I was able to learn how selfless service is a universal language for all."

"During the pandemic, a lot of things I was looking forward to and was counting on were canceled, there was a lot of uncertainty. But keeping my faith in Swami and working hard allowed everything to work out in the end."

"SSSE has been a tremendous part of my life since first grade. Even though I am graduating today, [I know] it is just a small step towards the much longer path in my life and that Swami will continue to be with me every step of the way."



Mother Easwaramma



Some of the important themes attempted by the SSSE children are highlighted in the table below:

Center	Group	Theme
Atlanta	Pre-SSSE	Importance of Prayer, Human Values
	G1	How food affects thoughts; the importance of avoiding bad company
	G2	“Start early, drive slowly, reach safely”; Four “F”s; Unconditional Love
	G3	Swami’s childhood; healthy habits; the Koshas; techniques for transformation
	G4	Koshas, Human Values, Choices and Climate Change
Baltimore	G1, G2	Easwaramma’s Love, compassion
	G3	Easwaramma’s compassion, self-sacrifice, selflessness, love
	G4	Essence of world religions seen through lens of Vedas (Mantra Pushpam)
Indianapolis	G3	Water conservation
	G4	The Beatitudes of Jesus
Kansas		“What do you love about your mother?” Breaking down a mother’s qualities
Loudoun		The 5 mothers: Deha Mata, Go Mata, Bhū Mata, Desha Mata, Sai Mata Tribute to Mother Easwaramma with a song and dance Interactive Quiz -involving all students and parents Shadow Puppet Show
Orlando		Mother is God, Mother is Divine
Phoenix	G1	Ceiling on Desires
	G3	5 “D”s (Duty, Devotion, Discipline, Determination, Discrimination)
Raleigh <i>(worth noting: 400 people in attendance)</i>	G1	Kindness at home, to friends, environment; the example of great leaders
	G2	Self love, selfless love, Divine love; Love conquers the “Six Enemies”
	G3	Love & Service: 2 wings that help man soar heights to reach divinity; examples
South Bethesda	G1	Mother is God (<i>Matru Devo Bhava</i>)
	G2	Inspirational Mothers, Inspired Children (examples across countries and faiths)
	G3 boys	“My mother is the best”: honoring all that mothers do for their children
	G3 girls	<i>Panchabhoothas</i> (importance of the Five Elements for our life and sustenance)
	G4 boys	<i>Gita Vahini</i> : do your duty, do not expect result, control senses, be equanimous
	G4 girls	Mother’s Love; <i>Gayathri mantra</i>

Region 3 SSSE Easwaramma Day Highlights



Canada Easwaramma Day Highlights





Buddha Poornima



Buddha Poornima



Gautama Buddha: Path to Enlightenment



Swami has said that we should not be content with merely celebrating the birthdays of Avatars, without understanding and following their teachings. In light of the observance of Buddha Purnima on May 16, we remember Lord Gautama Buddha, His teachings, and His journey to enlightenment. Above all, we remember His message, exemplified in his own life, that any human being has the ability to attain *Nirvana* or *Moksha* or Liberation.

Gautama Buddha was born a prince, in the 6th century B.C. Named Siddhattha (Pali) at birth, he renounced his kingdom, royal obligations, and family duties at the age of twenty-eight in order to understand the meaning of suffering and the cause of sorrow in the world. Buddha Purnima, also known as *Vesak*, or *Theravada* new year in some countries, celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and final emergence of the Buddha—a title he acquired as he developed *Buddhi* (intellect) and discrimination.

“Sarvam Dukham, Dukham”: Everything of this world is Sorrow

The young prince was deeply troubled that material pleasures and human attachments were the cause of pervasive sorrow and disappointments. Even from childhood, he could not bear the sight of anyone in pain, and was grieved by the inevitability of sickness, old age, and death. He declared that happiness was

fleeting and could not be found in any of the things of the world: “*Sarvam Duhkam, Duhkam*” (All is sorrow); *Sarvam Kshanikam, Kshanikam* (everything is momentary); “*Sarvam Nashyam, Nashyam*” (everything is perishable).

“Starting from today, the auspicious day of Buddha Purnima, vigorously develop your love for God. Propagate and spread selfless love. There can be no greater spiritual preaching than love.”

- Divine Discourse, May 21, 2000

Man must turn inward

Man, Gautama said, should not waste his life in the pursuit of transient relationships and worldly desires; instead, he should turn the mind inward to seek what is permanent, namely *Nirvana*. On his quest, the Truth-seeking prince realized that suffering continues over multiple lifetimes, as man is caught in the cycle of birth and death. He asserted that life’s ultimate goal should therefore be to transcend this cycle of rebirth, and that human beings could attain this goal by seeking the divinity within. By tapping into this divinity, he stated, man could acquire the power to control and overcome his senses, which keep man wallowing in the mire of pain and pleasure.

Control senses, reduce desires

By controlling our senses, we can reduce our desires and be more mindful about what we say, think, and feel. We can choose our actions and words wisely, and be much more aware and conscious of the world around us—and more importantly, how we interact with it. We are no longer slave to the whims and attractions of the world, and are instead able to focus our mind on spiritual endeavors.

Buddha was once asked: "Who is the richest man in the world?" Buddha replied: "He who has much satisfaction, with what he has, is the richest man." To the question, "Who is the poorest man?" Buddha

Buddha Poornima



replied: "He who has many desires." The strong pull of desires, he said, can deter us from our primary goal of attaining *Nirvana*.

Purity of Thought, Word, and Deed: the Eight-Fold Path

Buddha's quest was an inward journey to the Truth, guided by experiences, encounters, and sacred vision. He declared that a first step in the spiritual journey was to cultivate *samyak-dhrishti* (pure or sacred vision). It is only when man has a pure vision that he can get rid of impurities in the body, speech, and mind. Buddha taught that Nirvana can be attained only through the eight-fold path: cultivating *Samyak Drishti* (pure vision), *Samyak Sankalpa* (pure thoughts), *Samyak Karma* (pure deeds), *Samyak Vaak* (pure speech), *Samyak Shravanam* (listening to sacred words), *Samyak Jeevanam* (living a pure life), *Samyak Sadhana* (right spiritual practice), and *Samyak Samadhi* (realization or liberation).

Buddha Purnima is a day to recall the life that Buddha led and his emphasis on a *dharmic* way of life. Buddha attached great importance to *Ahimsa* or nonviolence, and considered it the foremost Dharma, cautioning that one must never hurt another by thought, word, or deed. Swami says to lead the *Dharmic* life, we must "subdue our egosim, conquer selfish desires, destroy bestial feelings and impulses, and give up the natural tendency to regard the body as the self."

Sugandhie Hapangama practically grew up in the South Bethesda Sai Center in Maryland spending her whole childhood there before graduating from SSE. SSE made a very deep mark in her life, which inspired her to become a guru. She has taught SSE in Groups 3-4 for about 10 years and has recently been a guru at the Loudoun Sai Center. Her three children all attend SSE.

Three Maxims in Buddhism

Buddha's life story and teachings demonstrate that we all have the ability to tap into our innate divinity and break the cycle of rebirth. Accordingly, Buddha gave us three maxims:

Buddham saranam gacchami

I take refuge in the Buddha, the symbol of the awakened intellect.

Dhammam saranam gacchami

I take refuge in the Dharma

Sangham saranam gacchami

I take refuge in the Sangha (society).

Swami has explained them thus: "In a life filled with desires, the pleasures one seeks are inevitably followed by grief and disappointments. All unrighteous actions lead to sorrow. It was for this reason that Buddha emphasized the need for discrimination. The first prayer, "*Buddham saranam gacchami*" is a call for cultivating wisdom and discrimination in the Buddhi. But unless the power of discrimination is used for doing right action for the good of society, it is of no use. Hence the second prayer, "*Sangham saranam gacchami*" (I surrender myself to society). What is this right action that must be done? That is indicated by the third prayer: "*Dhammam saranam gacchami*" (I take refuge in Dharma). To reach your goal, the royal road is Dharma—Righteousness. It is only when these three are combined—wisdom, social service, and righteousness—that there is fulfillment in life."
— Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 16, December 31, 1983

May we find enlightenment. May we do so by following the path of Dharma. May all continue to practice the good way, the upright way, the knowledgable way, and the proper way.

Sugandhie Hapangama

Sri Sathya Sai Center of Loudoun, VA

Center Highlights



Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Service

Zone 1 Centers: Service (*Seva*) Highlights



“Shining His Light on the World” are words etched in the SaiLights Logo—and week after week, that is exactly what Sai devotees are doing, as they engage in service activities. Sai families—adults, young adults, and children alike—are sharing with their fellow human beings the love and light of the Sai spark that resides within them. And they are doing it in the way taught by Swami: remembering that God alone is the Doer; we are but His instruments; and every act of service goes straight to God, for He resides in all.

Hot meals. Hot meals for homeless shelters were the most common type of service activity across centers in the period covered. Familiarly known as “Narayana Seva” (literally meaning service to Lord Narayana or God), such activities have been ongoing for many years—with as much if not more energy and vigor than when first begun, according to one center, a comment no doubt shared by all. The weekly-once (on occasion –twice) activity encompasses buying groceries, cooking, packing, transporting, and serving. Praying for the welfare of all and singing bhajans, prior to and during the seva, is an important part of the routine. Variations of Narayana seva include hot meals for soup kitchens, warm healthy breakfasts, and fresh home-made sandwiches.

New Jersey: Observing Aradhana Day with (Lots..and Lots...of) Love

New Jersey Sai centers (Bridgewater, East Brunswick, Edison, and Sarva Dharma Service Center) joined hands to observe the *Maha Samadhi*, or *Aradhana Mahotsavam* Day, on April 24, 2022.

The main event: a *Narayana Seva* feeding program, calling for **1300 meals** to be cooked in the morning, packed, and distributed to some **14 area shelters**, churches, and relief centers.

A massive undertaking: A total of 100 volunteers lined up at assembly stations set up at the Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple in Monroe, NJ, the central venue for the Seva, and packed, in container after container, four entrée items, bread and butter, a water bottle, a banana, and cutlery and napkins.

The numbers tell the story: 104 large trays of Baked ziti, Mexican vegetarian chili, Mexican rice, and Vegetable salad (26 large trays per each of the four items); 1300 bread rolls and butter packets; 1300 bananas; and 1300 16 oz water bottles.






Success, with Swami at every step. The teams launched the effort with holy sounds of *Suprabhatam*, bhajans, Swami’s 108 names, and *Aarti*. Throughout, Swami’s presence was felt: in the volunteers’ enthusiasm; in the divine vibrations that come from working in unity; in the recipients’ joy as they felt the volunteers’ love and humility; and in the glitch-free success of the physically demanding operation.

Some reflections from the team: “We need more activities like this!”; “Working in harmony brings us closer to Swami”; “We must see Swami in all”; “We are forever grateful to Swami for bringing us together for a magnificent, joyful, gratifying seva and a wonderful *satsang*.”

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Service

(Continued)

The hot meals are greatly appreciated by the wide-ranging recipients. Most often, recipients include homeless shelters (or the homeless themselves) and local churches that support those in need. Sai centers also provide food service to places that house refugees or people in transition, i.e., between jobs or between homes (for example, **Atlanta, Mesa, AZ, and South Bethesda, MD**); homes for troubled or less fortunate members of society (**Sugarland, TX, South Bethesda**); and women centers (**Atlanta, South Bethesda**). Some Sai centers also have programs to serve snacks to schools. Some centers undertake additional food service for special occasions, sometimes also teaming up with neighboring centers, as in the case of New Jersey, on Aradhana Day.

HOT MEALS	BREAKFAST	SOUP KITCHEN	SNACKS	SPECIAL OCCASION
 <p>Atlanta, GA Concord, CA Edison, NJ Kansas City, KS Loudoun, VA Mesa, AZ S. Bethesda, MD Tampa, Tamarac, West Palm Beach Centers, FL</p>	 <p>Loudoun, VA S. Bethesda, MD Phoenix, AZ</p>	 <p>Edison, NJ Indianapolis, IN Sugarland, TX Phoenix, AZ</p>	 <p>Edison, NJ Loudoun, VA Mesa, AZ NE San Diego, CA S. Bethesda, MD Sugarland, TX</p>	 <p>Bridgewater, East Brunswick, Edison, and Sarva Dharma Centers, NJ Loudoun, VA S. Bethesda, MD</p>

Some centers collaborate with other, non-Sai organizations, which may enable them to reach a wider group of beneficiaries. For example:

- ◆ the **West Palm Beach** and **Tamarac** centers serve warm meals once a month to the homeless community in South Florida, in collaboration with a local service organization known as the “God Squad”. This service, which sometimes includes the collection and distribution of gently used clothing, enjoys the active participation of Sai families as well as others not part of the Sai fold.
- ◆ the Sai Center of **Mesa, AZ** recently entered into a partnership with a local agency to provide support for two of their programs. Under program “OASIS”, devotees delivered 150 brown bag meals a week, each bag containing peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a healthy bar, juice/snack—and often a note of love and encouragement for the recipients. Under the second program, namely Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program, or “I-HELP”, Sai devotees prepared and served hot meals to about 50 participants temporarily housed in local churches at nights. *“You can tell when the participants are enjoying the food,” said one I-HELP coordinator, in appreciation for the volunteers’ dedication; “it gets quiet in here after they start eating!”*
- ◆ the **South Bethesda Center** also partners with other local organizations on homelessness and food insecurity.

Hygiene kits. Highly valued by recipients, hygiene kits have been extremely important during Covid, and have expanded to include such new essentials as masks and sanitizers. In **Phoenix**, along with hot breakfasts, devotees participated in a hygiene items drive for the homeless as well as a much-in-demand clothes drive. Covid kits for the elderly, along with masks and gloves, were also prepared and distributed by devotees at **Concord, CA**. Some centers, such as **South Bethesda** and **Mesa**, also put together donations of household items for homeless families in transition. The **Loudoun** Center also provided hygiene kits as a part of Aradhana day celebrations, while the San Diego also supplied such kits as well as other items, as discussed in the SSSE section.

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Service (Continued)

Medical service. Devotees from three Sai Centers in the Greater **Phoenix** area have been participating in a twice-a-year blood donation drive for over 10 years. The centers coordinate directly with the blood bank; and the drive has gone beyond Sai devotees to prompt participation from many in the local communities. Medical service activities in **Trinidad and Tobago** included a medical camp, blood donation, and support for sourcing wheelchairs, for physically handicapped persons. The **Southern California Sai Center** also conducted a large, very successful medical camp, reported in more detail in the last issue of SaiLights. Global collaboration in medical fields constitutes another kind of service activity, as **international researchers** aim to bring the best knowledge to bear in caring for underprivileged persons. Project Lion Heart, launched more than a decade ago with Swami's blessing, aims to resume its important knowledge-sharing collaboration with Swami's hospital in Bangalore (see box on page 12).

Adopt-a-road. Adoption of a road or community is another non-food, family service activity, helping not only to keep a city clean but to create a culture of environmental mindfulness. The **Greensboro, NC** center has been participating in the Adopt-a-Street program for several years. In agreement with the City, Center volunteers clean the street, sidewalk, and storm drain, at least once a quarter. Adults and SSSE children participate, the latter taking to heart Swami's message on cleanliness. The teams start by chanting the Sai Gayatri prayer, wear safety vests, go over safety guidelines, and busy themselves for some 90 minutes, ending with thanks to Swami for the chance to serve. The environment is also a high priority for the



Atlanta Sai Center. As part of a monthly Adopt-a-road activity, Sai devotees walk the street, and pick up litter on sidewalks and median strips. Also in **North Carolina**, the **Asheville** Sai Center recently adopted a community and is making a difference (see box).

Other environmental service projects. Other centers have also been engaged in environmentally oriented service activities. **Indianapolis** center, for example, conducted an E-waste recycle drive between Aradhana Day and Easwamma Day, with volunteers helping to drop off items or finding centers for people to drop off their items. As part of a go-green initiative, devotees in **Phoenix** are planting 97 trees/plants in the community to mark Swami's 97th birthday, with the first lot of 30 trees donated to the Maha Ganapathi Temple in Arizona. In the **Baltimore** Center too, volunteers engaged in tree planting and park cleaning (see also the section on Devotion).

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Service (Continued)

Varied service opportunities. Many Sai centers look out for ways to serve communities beyond the usual projects:

- ◆ A cereal drive in May kept Sai devotees in **Orlando** busy, for example, as they sought to help with the breakfast needs of local, underprivileged members of the African American community. The center's aim is to dedicate each month to a different local need.
- ◆ **Sugarland's** Sai Center (Texas) too has found some unusual ways to serve and help meet local needs. Partnering with Second Servings of Houston, the center "rescues" 100-200 pounds of gourmet bread and cupcakes and delivers them to area homeless shelters. For the first six months of 2022, a total of 3200 pounds of food were distributed to the needy.
- ◆ The **Sugarland** Center also helped to restore a cowshed and fix a barn for an area yoga center, and provided an animal shelter with treats, dog and cat food, and cleaning supplies, by way of carrying out a "Pawsitively Purrfect Valentine Seva"! The **Milton** center (Trinidad and Tobago) also supported an area animal shelter.
- ◆ Other notable activities of the **South Bethesda** center include the recycling of 100 eyeglasses for distribution to Swami's hospital in Bangalore, and the knitting of wool hats for newborn babies for delivery to area hospitals (a project begun two years ago and enjoying great popularity with knitters—and

The Eliada Home Service Project – SSSGC Region 3, Asheville, North Carolina

Problem: The Eliada Home houses abused and neglected children, most of them with significant academic deficiencies and behavioral problems, tending even toward violence. For the staff of Eliada, work is enormously stressful, and turnover has been high. A key need identified was a place for staff to relax, away from the children.

The Ambitious Project: Collaborating with the Asheville Group, we at Region 3 adopted Eliada Home as our Adopt-a-Community project. The goal was to turn a long-neglected, dilapidated space into an "oasis for rejuvenation"—too zealous, perhaps, in relation to the many inherent obstacles of bad electrical outlets, plaster walls, and the like. But...

Unexpected help: Challenging as the task appeared, the work has advanced robustly. How? People beyond the Sai community were inspired by our vision to help the staff and ultimately the children, and by the magnitude of the project, and came forward to assist with painting, construction, and electrical work. The project is now nearly completed!

With Swami, all is possible: We undertook the Service, putting our complete trust and faith in Swami. Then...He took over!



SERVICE ACTIVITIES



2022 Aradhana Mahotsavam
Narayana Seva
April 24



SERVICE ACTIVITIES



30 Basic Household Items



Zone 1 Centers' Highlights

Sri Sathya Sai Educare (SSSE)

Zone 1 Centers: Sri Sathya Sai Educare (SSSE) Activities

SSSE classes continued for the most part in virtual mode through the spring of 2022. The situation remains fluid, with active, ongoing monitoring by Sai centers to assess the scope for in-person meetings. What one *can* assert, now into the third year, is that centers across the zone—encompassing parents, teachers, students, helpers, technology experts, and the leadership—have all coped to date with remarkable patience, capability, and good judgment.

“What we need today is not a new system of education. Nor do we need a new social system... We need today men and women who are pure in mind and heart... Without spirituality there will be no purity, morality or integrity. Where there are no men and women of noble character, the state will not flourish.

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 27, July 19, 1994

Integration across the four wings of the centers continues to be significant. SSSE students are active participants in Devotion and Service activities, while Young Adults are often sought out to interact with the children. Students, across the groups, often articulate how much they learn from the Service activities. Similarly beneficial is the exposure to guest speaker sessions, for example, where the children are often encouraged to ask questions. This integration enriches and likely accelerates the learning process. Older children, particularly, exhibit significant internalization of Swami's messages, evident in their graduation day speeches, the ownership taken in designing and executing Easwaramma Day programs, and their study circle presentations.

Easwaramma Day, Aradhana Day, and Graduation Day were the highlights of the SSSE spring season just completed. The hallmark of these festival days is a joyous mix of offerings by SSSE children to Swami, in the form of prayer, Vedic chanting, bhajans or music programs; a recollection of His teachings in some form or other; and/or stepped-up or special service activities.

Easwaramma Day. So designated in honor of Swami's "Chosen Mother", Easwaramma Day was observed on May 6 (or thereabouts) with great love, energy, and creativity across Zone 1 Sai centers, including **Baltimore, Concord, Edison, Indianapolis, Loudoun, Orlando, Raleigh, and South Bethesda**, to name a few. *These celebrations are covered in detail in the preceding section on Mother Easwaramma; readers are kindly referred to p. 38.*



Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - SSSE (Continued)

Sri Sathya Sai Educare:

From the Desk of One Student

I was fortunate to attend the Sri Sathya Sai Educare, Central Zone, online class this year. It was such a blessing to be a Group 3 student this year. Our class comprised students from Texas centers (**Dallas**, **Houston**, **Austin**), and even a student from **Alabama** joined. Our experience in the classroom was group discussions, fun games, and projects, which brought out important lessons for daily life.

Group 3 students learned about food values, what we should do before and after consuming food, and how to develop healthy eating habits. Our teachers had us track what we consumed every day; and we had other fun activities, such as food puzzles. For our year's final projects for *Aradhana* Day, we worked on making a healthy recipe and water conservation. I made a mushroom pasta and prepared a terrarium by planting a slow-growing plant that required less water.

Sai Mahima Saisivakumar, SSSE student, *Dallas*

Aradhana Day. Since 2011, when Swami ended His earthly sojourn as the Avatar of the *Kali Yuga* (Age), Sai Centers have dedicated April 24 for the special worship and remembrance of His Life, Legacy and Teachings. SSSE children participate actively in the vedic chanting, bhajans, and special service activities associated with these celebrations.

For *Aradhana* Day 2022, SSSE Group 3 and 4 students at the **Indianapolis** center narrated their experiences with Swami and about Swami's life; the center's younger children sang special songs on Swami. Children in **Kansas** kept a gratitude journal and were asked to write down one thing that they were grateful for, one thing that made them happy, and one thing that they feared, placing the last at Swami's Feet. Such exercises reinforce and help children internalize Swami's teachings, in simple ways.



What Swami expects: "Nine Gem-Like Qualities"

At the Concord (CA) Sai Center, lesson plans take on board Swami's expectations as to the "Nine Gem-Like Qualities". This is what Swami says: "The student today has to cultivate in this Kali age nine gem-like qualities—the spirit of sacrifice, humility, the spirit of selfless service to society, friendliness, discipline, adherence to truth, love, nonviolence, and faith in God. The boys and girls who have these qualities alone will be the nation's treasure of virtue and ensure its future."

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - SSSE

(Continued)

Graduation Day. With lesson plans rooted in the five Human Values of Love, Truth, Right Action, Peace and Non-violence, and in the qualities that Swami expects from His students, these principles are indeed the core takeaways for the SSSE graduates. Graduation Day programs across all centers reflect the importance accorded to SSSE by Swami:

- ◆ **Baltimore's** graduation day, featuring five graduating students, was celebrated virtually. The agenda included advice from the students' teachers and talks by the students, highlighting takeaways from the program alongside expressions of gratitude. *The graduates' speeches are covered in the preceding section on Mother Easwamma; readers are kindly referred to p. 39.*
- ◆ **Edison's** program comprised presentations by all four SSSE Groups; an address by the Zone 1 National Education Coordinator, sister Sumana Murali; speeches by Group 4 graduating students and their parents; and certificate and memento presentations.
- ◆ **Loudoun's** in-person Graduation Day, to celebrate another year of spiritual learning, included a fun Bhajan "Antakshari" game, a slideshow of memories, a recap of lessons learned, service activities, and SSSE events—and arguably the most popular, pizza and ice cream!
- ◆ **Raleigh's** graduation program was held as part of a three-day, in-person retreat, featuring soulful singing by Group 4 students and "heart-touching" graduation speeches summarizing their personal learnings from their respective SSSE journeys. Speaking to a large gathering, the graduates highlighted how the Devotion and Service aspects have touched their lives.
- ◆ **South Bethesda's** on-line Graduation Day program featured meaningful and eloquent speeches by the two graduating students, a commencement address from an SSSE Teacher, and a panel of adults who discussed Swami's advice to graduating students, as well as their own experience with applying His teachings in daily life.

SSSE Service activities. Centers' service activities are often family-wide, infused with and enriched by the energy, enthusiasm, innocence, and imagination of SSSE children. Food and other service activities for the homeless are especially popular with the children, as also environmental activities such as tree planting, adopt-a-road, and gleaning and other farm activities.

In addition, SSSE children in Groups 3 and 4 have been actively involved in the Schoolwork Assistance Initiative (SAI) Tutoring Program, in **South Bethesda** as well as **Raleigh**. Preparing get-well cards for nursing homes, as in **Concord**, or holiday cards at Christmas time as highlighted in previous issues of Sai Lights, are other SSSE

SSSE children in San Diego: "Noteworthy and Inspiring"

In **Northeast San Diego**, one Sunday a month has been set aside exclusively for SSSE children to come together, form teams, and serve. The children, whose enthusiasm has been inspiring, participate in large numbers by packing sandwiches for those in need. They also pack school bags, hygiene kits, and other necessities in bags periodically, to bring joy to the children from nearby schools.

The spontaneous love and compassion exhibited by these children on one occasion, to serve a fire-damaged school in Jamul School District with food and other supplies, touched the hearts of that community.

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - SSSE

(Continued)

activities that are well appreciated by the recipients. These activities also serve to help students experience feelings of kindness and compassion.

Parenting Workshops. Parents are key contributors to the effectiveness of education programs generally; and with SSSE, whose end goal is not the accumulation of information but character development and inner transformation, the parent's role is indispensable. The Sri Sathya Sai National Parenting Initiative, "Harmonious Homes: Human Values in Parenting", is providing support to parents in better understanding their role in the context of Swami's teachings. These efforts have been going well:

- ◆ In **Baltimore**, four sessions of the Parenting Study Circles have been held, with discussions focused around Swami's quotes and discourse snippets on good parenting and bringing out divinity in children. Parents felt that the sessions offered a wonderful, sometimes unknown, perspective on parenting, and a better understanding of how to view a child—not as someone we own but as someone whom we should serve. The sessions also helped reinforce key teachings of Swami, with several useful takeaways such as control of anger and exercise of patience when dealing with children.
- ◆ In **Loudoun**, a parent and a Young Adult have facilitated three sessions of Parenting Study Circles. These sessions have been well received by center members, especially new members whose children are in SSSE but who themselves are not familiar with Swami's words on good parenting and parents' role in drawing out the divinity in children.
- ◆ In **South Bethesda**, two successful workshops with modules from Harmonious Homes have been conducted.

- ◆ In **Indianapolis**, several SSSE parents participated in the Harmonious Homes sessions, with a focus on parents' sharing of experiences and discussion of Swami's teachings as well as expectations. Organizers appreciated the time taken by parents to attend the monthly parenting sessions and understand the basis of value-based parenting. Parents too enjoyed the thought-provoking discussions and opportunity for reflection.



SSSE ACTIVITIES



Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Devotion



Zone 1 Centers: Devotion Highlights

Centers have for the most part continued to conduct their weekly Devotion meetings, or *Satsangs* (spiritual gatherings), virtually. As of Aradhana Day on April 24, however, some centers are proceeding, with caution, to meet in person. Notwithstanding the challenges, weekly devotional activities have been carried on admirably without interruption, while special occasions have been celebrated with great zeal, hard work, and devotion.

“The value of holy places, sacred theerthas [places of pilgrimage], etc. consists in just this: kindred spirits congregate there and contribute to the deepening of spiritual yearning. You can take sweet and sustaining counsel together, in such places, and strengthen your faith and devotion.”

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 5, January 1965

Weekly satsangs. Weekly bhajans and study circles are ingrained in Sai devotees' lives. With the pandemic and the inevitable restrictions it has imposed, devotees look forward more than ever to the chance to associate with Sai family and stay connected to Swami and His teachings. Some centers, such as **Kansas**, have different activities on different days of the week, which attests even more to the depth of devotees' commitment to spiritually advance. In addition, special satsangs are organized at times when opportunities arise. For example, the **South Bethesda** center had a special satsang with Brother Vedanarayanan, who was visiting the area and graciously agreed to share his personal experiences with Swami. The subject of his inspiring talk: “How to Live with Swami Wherever We Are”.

Ongoing Study Circles. Study Circle sessions across Zone 1 have enjoyed enthusiastic participation during the pandemic, covering a variety of specific and broad topics (see table). As a basis for discussion, centers use Swami's discourses (Sri *Sathya Sai Speaks*) or writings, including the *Vahini* series, sometimes supplemented by Radio Sai *satsangs* to explore a topic more deeply (**Orlando** center, among others). Video snippets and presentations by members—adults as well as older SSSE students and Young Adults—have been other ways to kickstart a discussion. Study Circles offer an excellent opportunity both for increasing one's knowledge of Swami's teachings and for cross-learning and sharing of experiences on how to practice those teachings in our daily lives, i.e., “life application”, to use an SSSE term.

A Sampling of Study Circle Themes

Baltimore, MD	“Who is Sai?”
Concord, CA	Parenting, Devotion, Service Swami's discourses, Samarpan talks
Orlando, FL	Buddha Poornima: <i>Ahimsa</i> Align thought, word, deed Ceiling on desires
Phoenix, AZ	<i>Vahini</i> series Human values and sub values
South Bethesda, MD	How to please the Lord Surrender -Gajendra Moksha Steps in transformation Visualizing God within Role of discrimination in separating permanent from impermanent
Tampa, FL	Upandishad Vahini Unity is Divinity Purity is Enlightenment <i>Sathya Sai Speaks</i> Various Faiths

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Devotion (Continued)

Special occasions. Several special occasions were celebrated in April-June 2022. Aradhana Day, Easwamma Day, Graduation Day, and Regional Retreats were all rich with devotional activities, including ever-uplifting bhajans, beautiful music programs, motivating and thought-provoking guest speakers, and interesting or innovative video or other presentations. Aradhana Day celebrations are covered immediately below. *For the other special occasions, readers are referred to pages 16, 34, and 55.*

Aradhana Day celebrations. Aradhana Day, commemorating the Avataric Life of our Beloved Sai, offers centers, and individual devotees, a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our good fortune in coming into His fold, reflect on His Teachings and on how to put them into practice, and learn from and inspire each other. The celebrations vary in different respects across the centers as seen below, but exalted spirits and love for Swami were no doubt common to all. Indeed Swami says, *"I require from each of you no other gift, no more valuable offering than the heart I have endowed you with."* (*Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume 9, Jan 13, 1969*).



◆ **Atlanta:** A half-day mini-retreat to celebrate Aradhana Mahotsavam featured an inspiring talk by Brother P.V. Shankar entitled "In eternal gratitude of Sai". Dr Shankar shared numerous

lessons learned directly from Swami, including the importance of the "holy company of fellow devotees" and of sharing our love through service.

- ◆ **Baltimore:** About 25 center members, including Young Adults and SSSE children, celebrated Aradhana Day by planting 60-80 trees at the Howard County Conservancy in Maryland. Volunteers also removed weeds and helped clean the park. In addition, a Study Circle focused participants on the question: "Who is Sai?" (see box)

Baltimore's Aradhana Day Study Circle: Who is Sai?

A divine discourse on "Who is Sai" from June 1974, when Swami was 47 years old, holds several salient messages:

- ◆ Sa means Divine, Ai means Mother, Baba is Father
 - ◆ God is realized in the depths of our selves
 - ◆ Swami's Grace is available to ALL who have steady Love and Faith
 - ◆ Swami says: "Crave for Me": make the mind cling to God
 - ◆ The Sai Avatar has come to unite all of mankind through the bond of brotherhood – the common divine heritage that binds man to man so he can rid himself of the animal and rise to the Divine, which is the goal
 - ◆ Swami says: "Contemplate on My Truth, derive joy so that you may be inspired to observe the disciplines laid down by Me and progress toward the Goal of Self-Realization, the Realization of the Sai that shines in your hearts."
- ◆ **Dallas:** Highlights of the two and a half-hour program were a sharing of experiences, early childhood memories, and old Puttaparthi photos

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Devotion (Continued)

by Dr. Balu Karanam (USA President Zone 1); and a music program featuring songs composed by famous saints of India and songs dear to Swami.

- ◆ **Indianapolis:** Center members learnt and sang special bhajans, as well as the Sathya Sai *Chalisa* in Telugu, a long song of prayer glorifying Swami: *"...the dust sanctified by the touch of His Lotus Feet / Placing that dust on my head with devotion I praise Thee..."*
- ◆ **Kansas:** A two-day celebration included an SSSE presentation, Veda chanting, and special bhajans as well as "experience sharing" by a longstanding devotee with decades of personal interactions with Swami as well as a recent graduate of Swami's Institute of Higher Learning, who had been with Swami since childhood.
- ◆ **Loudoun:** The celebration included an uplifting talk and music program with Brother S. Kumar, on the topic "You are in Me, I am in You!". Devotees prepared hygiene kits, separate for men and women, and distributed them at two local homeless shelters.
- ◆ **New Jersey:** Neighboring centers joined hands to organize a massive food service Seva for 1300 of New Jersey's homeless. *Readers are referred to p. 47 for more information.*
- ◆ **Phoenix:** Area centers came together, for combined bhajans and a talk by two students of Swami.
- ◆ **Raleigh:** Aradhana Day was celebrated as a part of Region 3's mini-retreat. Nearly 85 volunteers packaged meals for over 10,000 people, partnering with *Rise Against Hunger* to send food to needy parts of the world. The celebration included an uplifting music program with Brother Sai Subramanian and an inspiring talk by Brother Ravi Mariwalla.
- ◆ **South Bethesda:** The center was honored to welcome, online, Brother Sanjay Sahni from

Prasanthi Nilayam, who gave a beautiful talk on "Swami the human and the Divine", followed by a 45-minute Q&A session. The center observed Aradhana Day also with stepped up service activities for the entire month of April (see box).

Aradhana Mahotsavam Month

Special Service Activities, South Bethesda, MD

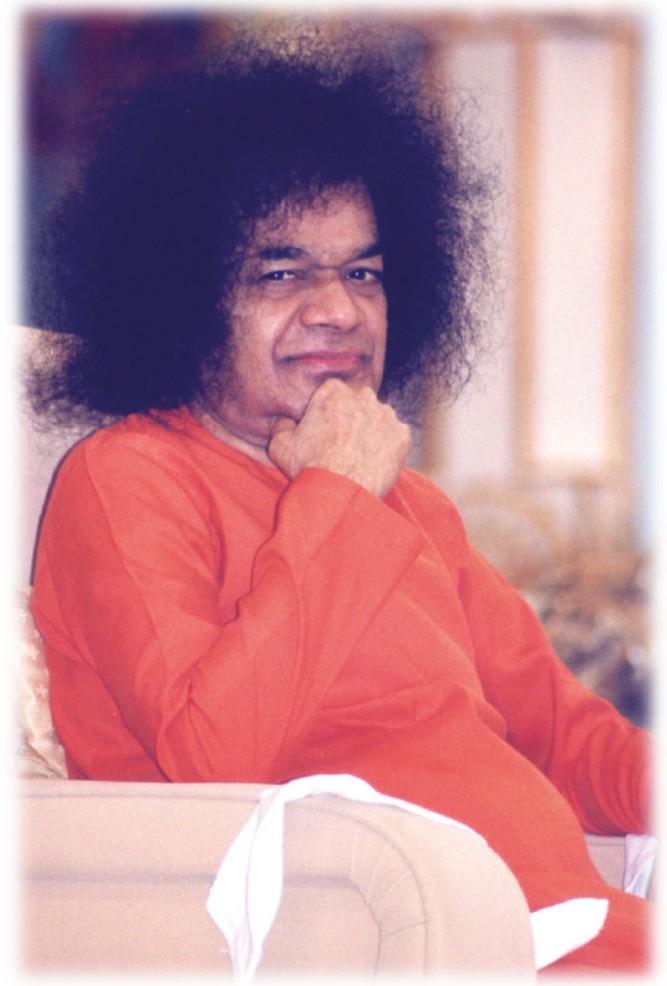
The center partners with several nonprofits in Maryland and Virginia to address community needs. As part of the *Aradhana* month service activities, the center has decided to focus on homelessness and food insecurity. The center has been assisting the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH) in their mission to "Provide Solutions in Montgomery County to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring". To address food insecurity, the center has been partnering with Shepherd's Table, a local nonprofit serving hot nutritious meals to those in need, since 1983. Additional service activities included:

- ◆ Two kits, each with 30 household items, which were donated to MCCH, to help ease homeless families' transition into homes of their own.
- ◆ Breakfast for 200 men, delivered to MCCH's new state-of-the-art facility that will serve as the county's main shelter for homeless men.
- ◆ Preparation of freshly cooked food on Aradhana Day, delivered to Shepherd's table along with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Devotion (Continued)

1008 Sadhana. Devotees are continuing their spiritual disciplines, or *sadhanas*, under the 1008 Sadhana program. This program was launched by the SSSGC in August 2021 as a means for devotees to step up their personal *sadhanas*, as a special offering to Swami leading up to His 100th Birthday. Some centers' efforts are shown below:

- ◆ Devotees in **Virginia Beach**, for example, have been following an online link to pursue such efforts as reading Sai Literature and watching Darshan videos, reciting God's name in prayer and bhajan, doing silent meditation, among other efforts.
- ◆ Many members of the **Phoenix** center chant the Gayatri mantra as a part of this program and participate in Study Circles, discussing life lessons and implementation.
- ◆ The **Kansas** Center has been reciting 15 minutes of prayers each Thursday, as a special service for the well-being of all; the prayers include Ganapati Prarthana, Gayatri and Sai Gayatri mantra, Hanuman Chalisa, Durga Suktam, Kshama Prarthana, and a solo bhajan.
- ◆ The **Orlando** center is practicing weekly *sadhanas* of Gayatri chanting and Jyoti meditation at home.



DEVOTION ACTIVITIES



Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Young Adults

Update from the SSSGC-YA National Team

by Ketan Kharod,

SSSGC USA National YA Male Advisor

Sai Ram! On behalf of the National Young Adults (YA) team, I hope all of the Sai Young Adults are staying safe, healthy, and enjoying life while putting Swami's teachings into practice. Since the last newsletter, Dr. Alekhya Rao, the national female YA coordinator, stepped down from her role in advance of the new role tasked to her – that of becoming a new mother. We are all grateful for Alekhya's vision, leadership, and commitment to the Sai YA program, and wish her and her family all the best going forward while we embark on the process of selecting her successor.

Keeping with the theme of transition and new beginnings, this time of year is also when high school students graduate from SSSE and can become active as Sai Young Adults, often in new locations due to work or university. The same may be true for already-YAs who move over the summer, whether for work, graduate school, or just the adventure of living in another part of the country. In addition to keeping Swami and His teachings close to our hearts during these moves, having a nearby Sai center or contact is often a source of comfort in a new location. For that reason, our national and regional YA teams are trying to establish an informal YA network so that no YA or graduating SSSE Group 4 student should feel alone in a new environment. Similarly, there are plans in the works for informal virtual workshops or panels on practical tips on living a Sai-filled life, particularly geared for new YAs but worthwhile for YAs of all ages.

Finally, we constantly hear how YAs around the zone are active – whether in their personal sadhana, or with the Sai organization through their centers or regions (or beyond), not to mention the upcoming Prasanthi Pilgrimage in July. These efforts – grounded in love and selflessness – are needed

more than ever given the social and political disunity we see around us on a daily level, so let us pray that each of us can continue our good work in whatever form so that our lives truly can become His message!



Young Adults (YAs) continue to play an important role in Zone 1 activities, contributing through their programs within the YA groups, as well as by joining hands with the other wings of the organization. Considerable synergies are realized from such cooperation, as YAs energetically support the Service and Devotional programs of their Centers and mentor the activities of their younger cohorts under SSSE programs. YAs receive strong encouragement and support for their various initiatives, in preparation for their future role as leaders in the Sai Organization.

The various ways in which YAs have been participating in the Sai organization are highlighted here:

Atlanta: Young adults at the Aradhana Mahotsavam Celebrations in Atlanta concluded the program with some “mesmerizing music”.

Baltimore: As part of Easwaramma Day celebrations, YAs shared with other Center members, including SSSE students, their progress in various sadhana practices. These practices,

Zone 1 Centers' Highlights - Young Adults



originally planned for one month and now being extended, included reduction of water consumption, time management, meditation/chanting mantras, and physical exercise and healthy living. This satsang was well received and several center members were inspired to take up these sadhanas themselves. For the summer, the YAs are planning to conduct YA Study Circles, with rotation of moderators among themselves. In addition, the yearly YA panel discussion for SSSE 4 students aims to introduce the YA program to these students, as well as talk about the college application process.

Concord: YAs work alongside other center members, especially in collecting and donating food items, bag lunches, masks, gloves, and so on to homeless shelters.

Edison: YAs participated in all Center activities, including service and devotional programs as well as special celebrations such as Easwamma Day, Swami's birthday, Dasara, Guru Poornima, and so forth, and do not undertake separate YA programs.

Indianapolis: The YAs are considered the main strength of this Center. They contribute to several service activities, including the Soup Kitchen and other activities for serving food to the needy. At the recent Aradhana Day commemoration, YAs performed some special Qawwali music that was appreciated by all.

Kansas: YAs participated actively in all Center activities (please see respective sections on Service, SSSE, and Devotional highlights for this Center). In particular, they have led activities such as service, bhajans, veda chanting, study circle, and assisting with audio/video support and conducting Q&A sessions for special satsangs.

Loudon: YAs continue to contribute to the Center's monthly activities for serving the local community. In addition, they share their experiences in the real world--in college, work, and adult life more

generally—with the SSSE children, and show them how SSSE has helped the YAs navigate such challenges, through a series called "Sai Applies". The children, for their part, have found such interactions quite motivating and useful.

Raleigh: At the mini-retreat in North Carolina, the YAs had a breakout room where they put forward their ideas and inputs on how to further the YA program on a large scale and how to follow Swami's teachings in a college setting.

South Bethesda: YAs have been very active, undertaking a range of initiatives. YA women provided a home cooked meal and snacks to the women and children at the Helping Hands Women Shelter, as well as feminine hygiene products to women in the Lighthouse shelter in Annapolis--items subject to a luxury tax and therefore not readily accessible to them. YA women also participated in the Schoolwork Assistance Initiative (SAI) Tutoring Programs, tutoring children in grades 1-5 in math and English over Zoom sessions. This was an enriching experience for the women and kids alike, each learning something from the other. YA women continued to work on the Kits to Heart program, making kits for patients undergoing cancer treatment, which contain cards, pillows, scarves, bracelets, and other handicrafts. Both YA women and men also met regularly to discuss various spiritual topics and how to apply Swami's teachings to dilemmas in work and school. This has been a great way to bounce off spiritual ideas off like-minded peers and discuss problems faced in society.

Young men and women! The prosperity and well-being of the world depend on the conduct of the youth. Only when their conduct is good, the world can have an ideal future.

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 30 (1997)

Sai Pearls



Sai Pearls - Poems from Devotees

Swami, You are all I need!

Swami, in all my ups and downs
May my head in front of You, bow down
Swami, be it sweet or sour
May my heart only to You, pour

Swami, when I bloat in happiness
May I seek only Your nearness
Swami, when I sink in sadness
May I only remember Your dearness.

Swami, when I take every step in life
May only You and You be my drive
Swami, when I falter and plead forgiveness
May I learn to live in Your Awareness

Swami, when I do something right
May I always know it is by Your Gracious Sight
Swami, please bless me
To be a worthy daughter of Yours

Swami, please be with me
Through years as this mind matures
Swami, may You always precede
In my every thought, word and deed

Swami, You are all I ever need
May my mind from all other thoughts be freed

Remya Hariharan,
Sri Sathya Sai Center of Charlotte, NC



Sai Pearls - Poems from Devotees

Retreat: What a refreshing treat!

Don't retreat from this retreat
It was truly a refreshing treat
Many hands came together as one
To make the three days so much fun
Transporting us all to Puttaparthi
Suprabatham, Nagarsankeerthan, even dhal and chapati
There were bhajans, guest speakers and workshops too
SSSE spaces, ice cream cups, too good to be true

Swami is, I am and I will
We tasted Divinity to our fill
We also had some chances to just chill
Treasure hunt and Escape room were such a thrill

In "Swami is" space we got to experience
God's powers are omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience
That is all powerful, always present and all knowing
Truly like an avatar all glowing

In "I am" space we learned we are unique
Not superior or bestowed with cool technique
Just like different colored lamps have the same light inside
We all are one shining our Divine light outside

Finally "I will"..., which had wonders to bring
If only we determine to do the right thing
Love all beings all nature all the time
Serve them with patience, mindfulness and end this rhyme
So don't retreat from this retreat
It was truly a refreshing treat!

Kanakadara Lakshminarayanan,
Sri Sathya Sai Center of East Brunswick, NJ,
Sai Nursery Guru.

Written from the perspective of how a child would've experienced the SSSGC Region 2 Retreat.





Sai Nuggets



Life is a Game: Play it!



Each sentence below conceals within itself a **virtue** like love, sincerity, sacrifice, etc. which is spelt out in consecutive letters in the sentence.

For example, in the sentence -

Of your benevolence and blessings, let me have my fill, **O venerable** one! (4)

As you can see, '**love**' is there but hidden. All the 14 sentences below similarly have noble virtues hidden in them in two or more words, and all you must do is search these noble values out.

The number of letters in the word are indicated next to the sentence.

Try this out and you will know how spiritual and how smart you are.

'Find the Virtue' puzzle

1	Like the compass, I only look towards one direction, that is, God. (10)
2	After Aarthi, as Baba rose up from the sofa, I thankfully bowed in reverence. (5)
3	Isn't it insane and inhuman to exploit ruthlessly a fellow human being? (5)
4	My friend's hippie attitude is OK as long as he is kind and loving. (10)
5	Listening on the tape ace singer Ravi's devotional melodies, I lost myself. (5)
6	One particular bhajan of Ganesha rings in my ears all the time. (8)
7	Mr. Chari typifies an affluent person dedicated to the Lord's work forsaking all riches. (7)
8	All vices are perilous, there is no greater or lesser vice. (7)
9	Talking sweetly and not placing the phone stylishly is phone etiquette. (7)
10	Mr. Alfred Tole ran ceaselessly 10 miles celebrating his orphanage's tenth anniversary. (9)
11	The disciple's implicit yes to whatever the master said, pleased the master. (10)
12	The signs could change in our zodiac, our agenda to experience God, however, will never change. (7)

Spiritual Good Practices for Sadhana



Spiritual GPS: EGO Busters!!

What language do you speak?

Schools often teach children a second or third language—it is a wonderful way to expand the child’s mind! Adults, too, take language courses to stimulate the brain. But...is there a language to expand the heart? And is anyone teaching it?



The language of **Humility** is one that we would all do well to learn. And it is not a moment too soon to *unlearn the language of Ego*. Some of the terms below belong to the language of Humility, some to the language of Ego. Can you recognize which is which? Which do you think you use more often?



“We” “Please” “I’m never wrong!” “I understand” “I object!” “I” “Mine” “Would you like?” “Don’t question me!” “How nice!” “I’m sorry!” “What a silly idea!” “Well done!” “Thank you” “My idea is best” “I expect!” “Would you consider?” “My achievement” “Shall we agree?” etc., etc....

You get the gist. Swami has told us repeatedly, the words we use matter. He asks us to speak lovingly, respectfully, obligingly, and sweetly. Without boasting. And with humility. So: *Parlez-vous Humility?*

How can we destroy the Ego?

Swami says: “Egoism will be destroyed if you:

- Constantly tell yourself, 'It is He, not I.' 'He is the force, I am but the instrument.'
- Keep His Name always on the tongue
- Contemplate His glory whenever you see or hear anything beautiful or grand
- See in every one the Lord Himself moving in that form
- Do not talk evil of others, see only good in them
- Welcome every chance to help others, console others, or encourage others along the spiritual path
- Remain humble and not become proud of your wealth, status, authority, learning or caste, and
- Dedicate all your possessions and mental skills and intellectual attainments to serving the Lord.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume 4, 1964

Did you know?

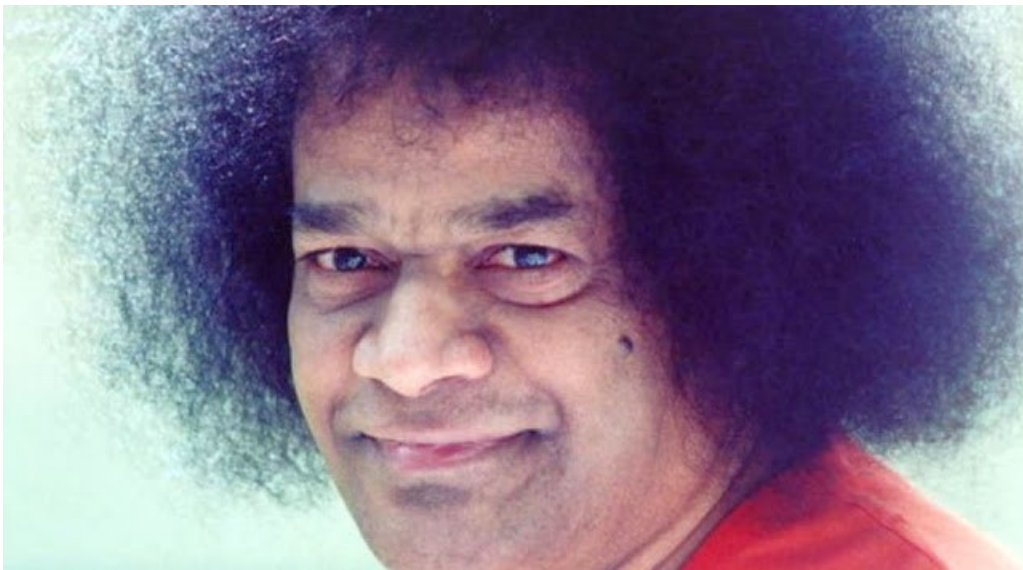


“What is the inner meaning of the inhalation and exhalation processes, i.e., So Ham? ‘So’ means ‘That’ (God); ‘Ham means I’. The sum and substance of this is that we have to take God into us (‘So’ inhalation) and leave out ahamkaram, i.e., ego (‘Ham’ exhalation). This is called Hamsa Gayathri. This inhalation and exhalation process goes on continuously, 21,600 times in a day in us. This means that you welcome God into you and drive out ego from you that many times.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume 31, 1998



Gratitude Letters



Gratitude Letters



My beloved & dear Swami, my Teacher, my Friend, my Guru, my Father - You are my everything. Thank You for Your grace to know of You in this lifetime. Before knowing You, I lived in darkness, and had an egoistic life, caring only for myself and my loved ones. You explained to me what human values are and taught me to think, reflect, and be compassionate.

You helped me understand that humility, love, kindness, mercy, honesty, and selfless service lead to God. I ask for Your blessing, my Teacher, so that I may be a good student of Yours and follow all Your teachings. I ask You, my dear Lord, to hold my hand tightly so that I will always be with You and when the right time comes, bless me to realize the Truth. Thank you for everything, my Father!

With infinite gratitude and love,
Bella Usnunts, Kansas Center, KS



Dear Swami,

Thank you for everything that you have given me. A loving family, amazing gurus and the extensive knowledge I have learned due to SSSE. Thank you for guiding me through every obstacle I have overcome, though there may be more as I grow. Thank you for teaching me dharma, devotion and how to endlessly love. Thank you for teaching me how to be compassionate, kind and always look at others positively. Thank you for giving me all the available resources that I will be able to use as I continue both my spiritual journey and education. Thank you for giving me a roof over my head, food to eat, and water to drink. Thank you for giving me older role models to respect and learn from, friends to love, and you for being everyone of these people all in one; a best friend, father, mother and guru. Thank you Swami!

Sravika Bolla, Baltimore Center, MD



Many years ago, I was Chief Guest at a College in Erode and participated in bhajans at the Erode Samithi in the evening. After Bhajans, I was to travel to Bangalore and had no plan for Puttaparthi that visit. The convener said that I should go to Puttaparthi directly from Erode. I was surprised and followed his words and proceeded to Puttaparthi. I reached Puttaparthi at midnight.

Mr. Patel waited for me at the gate and took me to his house. I went straight to Suprabhatam at 4.30 AM. It was a long queue at Darshan and I did not know what to do. Then a Sevadal came and seated me at the front of Kulwant Hall. I attended the morning program and had a two feet Darshan of our beloved Swami.

Looking back at this miracle, it is truly Swami's Grace that he sent me to Puttaparthi unexpectedly by using the Convener of Erode as an instrument.

Viswanatha Srinivasan, Kansas Center, KS



Our Dear Loving Mother Sai,

We will be ever grateful for Your Love, Grace, and Blessings! We cannot thank you enough Dear Maa, for always being with us during these troubled and uncertain times in this World. You are so loving to make us feel your presence in every action of ours and in every second of our breath by assuring us that "Everything will be ok, and this too shall pass". What a great Treasure we have, our Sai, the precious Gem who is always with us with his blessing: "Why Fear When I Am Here". How profound. Swami, we are your flowers, the Sun flowers that look up and follow the Sun. Thank you for embracing us, lifting us, and holding us in Your Arms and making us feel secure. We pray to You that we can feel Your constant Presence!

Padmavathi Sreenivasan, South Bethesda Center, MD

Gratitude Letters



Dearest Swami,

Thank You for bringing me into Your fold during the early months of the pandemic. Thank You for further showering Your grace on me by giving me the opportunity to facilitate the study circle for Greensboro Sai Center and thus fast tracking my journey towards You. Through that opportunity, You have blessed me with countless hours of contemplation on Your teachings and leelas. You have graced me with many insights, miraculous experiences and guided me each step of the way and thus given me the sweet experience of Your omniscience and omnipotence. In the process, You helped me grow in my understanding of You and in my love for You. Please continue to utilize me in Your service. You have brought me this far; I rely on You alone to cross the rest of the distance and reach You. You alone are my savior.

Your Loving Child,
Amar Gunda, South Bethesda Center, MD



My Beloved!

I get glimpses of your Love in various places, at various times, through various beings. All of those experiences make me want to taste more of Your Love. However, I still hesitate to take the plunge and live for You and You alone. I'm afraid that the trials may be too hard to bear, and I tell myself that it is not wrong to be happy with the way things are. And so, I inch along, continue to sing your name and show up at most Sai Center activities. The activities planned for Your centennial birthday celebrations in 2025 seem to be a good way to take our relationship to the next level. I don't know what the next level is... but if I let Your Will be done, it will end up being much grander than my imaginations, and all the people will rejoice in Your glory!

Devotees, Mesa Arizona Center, AZ



Dear Swami,

I don't think I have the words to describe how much I have seen your unwavering hand guiding me through my life. I have seen it through my good times and my bad times as well. Without your support, I wouldn't have been able to be in the place I am today. Even though I still have more to see as I get older, the rewards were equally as valuable as the important lessons you have taught me. With your grace, I was able to achieve the things I had hoped for while also in the times of grief and sadness you reminded me to always remember the importance of your presence and to never forget that you are always beside me, behind me, and through me at all times. THANK YOU SWAMI for showing me the right path and guiding me there.

Your loving child,
Saisumana Peddibhotla, Baltimore Center, MD



Dear Swami - We are ever grateful to you for bringing us all together for the SSSGC Region-2 USA Memorial Day retreat in person. Your presence was felt in all the activities. It was a blissful weekend made more special by meeting all our sai brothers and sisters in person to reconnect, get inspired and recommit our faith in You. We experienced Your beauty in the venue in which Prashanthi was recreated, Your inspiration and guidance in the talks and experiences of devotees, Your bliss in the soul-stirring Bhajans and devotion programs, You in everyone we served. You kept us all energized by the amazing prasad to continue soaking the bliss and love. Your ever loving children were immersed and engaged to learn "Living Life His way". With your grace we hope to have moved little closer to imbibing the message that you embodied "My Life is My Message" and one day we would exemplify and show that we are indeed Living Life Your way.

Seeking Your Love and Blessings for All. Jai Sairam
Srikanth Nagarajan, Edison Center, NJ

Gratitude Letters



Gratitude is Living for Sai

Swami! You are my eternal mother who gave birth
To love, compassion, and gratitude on this earth
You taught me to live every moment with faith
You brought me to your divine feet with your grace

Gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness to you Sai
For all the things showered on me out of love
Gratitude is to remember your pure love Mother Sai
Gratitude is to surrender my ego at thy feet Father
Sai

Gratitude is my ability to live with ideals of Sai
Gratitude is my inability to live this life without Sai
I am grateful for every good thought sown in my
heart
I am grateful for every experience granted in my life

Gratitude is not to be shown on mere lips
Gratitude is not to be worn out in a glimpse
Gratitude is not merely loving you O Sai
Gratitude is living my only life for Sai

Sharmila Sanka, *Indianapolis Center, IN*



Mother O mother Saima, You mean the
whole world to me Saima

How can I thank you Oh dear Saima, for
your Blessing and Love Saima.

Swami, I don't have enough words to show my
gratitude. If I will start counting your Blessings, this
life will not be enough for it. Swami, even if we peel
our skin and make slippers for your feet, we will not
be able to express even an atom of the gratitude that
is flooding our hearts.

Each and every moment whenever I see Nimai (My
Elder Son Arihant), every time my heart fills with
gratitude, thank you so much Swami for giving new
life to him.

I clearly remember It was 28 August 2010, I got

discharged from Scrips Hospital Encinitas and came
back home very joyfully with 2 days old Nimai
(Arihant) at 5.00 pm.

Around 8:00 o'clock he was down with high fever. I
was so worried, but my husband (Amit) told me not
to worry as Doctor had said he has given him vaccine
because of that he could get fever. If he gets fever
just give him Tylenol (paracetamol) so I gave him
medicine.

After one hour also his fever did not come down.
Then I called my elder sister (She is a Doctor). She
asked me to do cold water sponging for him. I did it
but after hours also fever did not reduce.

Then I told Amit to take him to the hospital. He
called the hospital, they said to wait till morning or
call 911. But that time we did not know exactly how
911 works? What we heard was that for a medical
emergency, calling 911 is very expensive, it's not
affordable for a middle-class family, so we decided to
wait.

But I was so restless, tense and nervous. I was feeling
ominous. Both Amit and I were calling out to our
Lord, chanting His name. We applied Vibhuti on his
forehead. I was holding him on my lap and watching
him. Around 11:30 at night, I observed that his lips
were getting little discolored. It was turning light
blue. I called my sister and told about his lips. She
asked me to look at his nails. I was shocked to see his
nails were also a little light blue. She told me to take
him to hospital immediately.

Without thinking much I called 911. Within 10 mins
police with fully equipped ambulance and doctors
came to our place. We ran to the ambulance
immediately. The doctor put Oxygen on him and
connected to the Heart Rate Monitor and we rushed
to the hospital, it was 15 mins from our home. On
the way to hospital Nimai's heartbeat started coming
down rapidly. Both doctors and nurse were very
tense. Suddenly his heartbeat became very slow. The
Doctor said that my dear child was dying and that
they could not do anything. And then it happened.

Media Links



Media Links

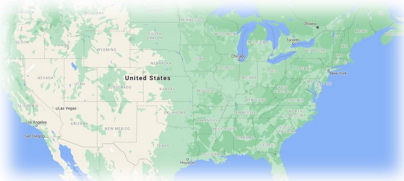


SRI SATHYA SAI GLOBAL COUNCIL

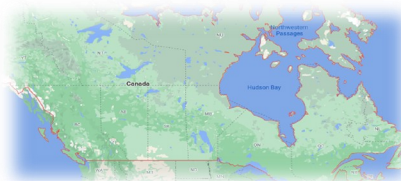
Zone 1 - USA, Canada, West Indies

Please do visit the SSSGC, Zone 1 official websites for the latest announcements and relevant registration and informational documents and videos:

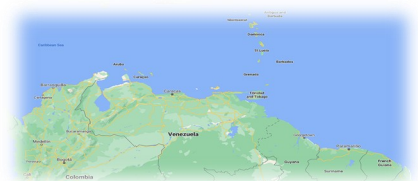
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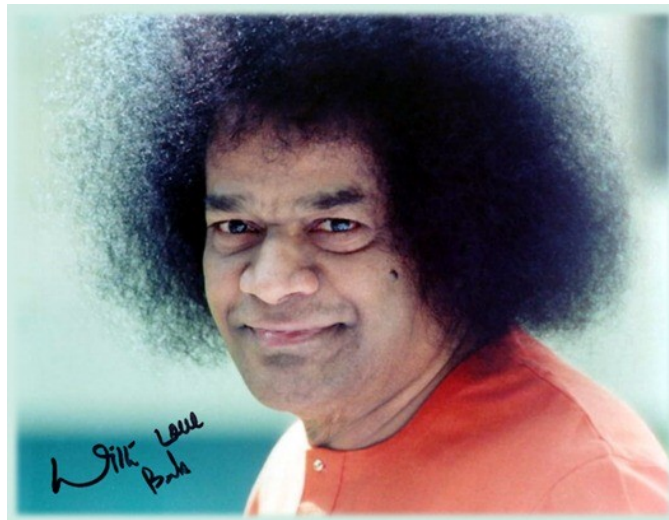
Life is a Game: Play it! - Solutions



Each sentence below conceals within itself a **virtue** like love, sincerity, sacrifice, etc. which is spelt out in consecutive letters in the sentence.

'Find the virtue' puzzle solutions

1. Like the **compass**, I **only** look towards one direction, that is, God.
2. After Aarthi, as Baba rose up from the **sofa**, I **thankfully** bowed in reverence.
3. Isn't it insane and inhuman to exploit **ruth**lessly a fellow human being?
4. My friend's hippie attitude is OK as long as he is **kind** and **loving**.
5. Listening on the **tape ace** singer Ravi's devotional melodies, I lost myself.
6. One particular bhajan of Ganesh **aring**s in my ears all the time.
7. Mr. **Chari ty**pifies an affluent person dedicated to the Lord's work forsaking all riches.
8. All vices are perilous, there is no greater or lesser **vice**.
9. Talking sweetly and not placing the **phone sty**lishly is phone etiquette.
10. Mr. Alfred **Tole ran ce**aselessly 10 miles celebrating his orphanage's tenth anniversary.
11. The disciple's **implicit y**es to whatever the master said, pleased the master.
12. The signs could change in our zodiac, **our age**nda to experience God, however, will never change.



Sri Sathya Sai Awareness Course—2022



The following are the amazing acronyms that participants of the Sri Sathya Sai Awareness Course created during the five-month course period in 2022. In each session, the participants created a set of acronyms that provides the essence of the guest speaker's presentation and the discussion of the entire session. These acronyms are a type of mnemonics that provide profound, relatable, and easy to remember 'pearls of wisdom' which can be assimilated and integrated in our personal sadhana and life applications. The SSSEP team sincerely thanks each and every participant who has contributed their time, effort, creativity, and innovation in developing this list of useful acronyms.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

SRI SATHYA SAI AWARENESS COURSE

- S** See no evil, see what is good
- R** Realize you are Divine
- I** I am God, so you are too
- S** Service to Man is service to God
- A** Always be cheerful
- T** There is only one religion, religion of Love
- H** Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray
- Y** You are in the light, then the light is in you, then

- A** All things are beautiful when you see through the

- S** Sanctify your words
- A** Adore the Divine
- I** Illuminate your thoughts

- A** Align your actions
- W** Watch your words
- A** Awareness is the goal
- R** Realization is the path
- E** Engage in words and actions
- N** Never fail to rise
- E** Energize yourself to
- S** Sincerely pursue your goal by doing
- S** Sadhana and Seva
- C** Conquer the ego for
- O** Oneness is the goal
- U** Unify within
- R** Realize the light

- S** Sai resides in
- E** Everything and Everyone

GOD IS

- G** Guided by the light of Truth within
- O** Omniscient that You are
- D** Dwell in the pursuit of the unchanging Truth

- I** Inwards the journey you must direct
- S** Sanctify, Purify and Unify with All

List of Acronyms



I AM

SESSION 2

- I** Inward journey towards the light
- A** Attain freedom from fear and worry
- M** Meditate on the truth of God is One

BABA

- B** Being Be
- A** Awareness Aware
- B** Bliss Be
- A** Atma Alert

LOVE ALL SERVE ALL

SESSION 3

- L** Light your path with Love
- O** On the journey to know You
- V** Varied experiences in the direction
- E** Equanimity, sanctity with introspection
- A** All perceived different yet unified with every inhale
- L** Love expresses itself as service to avail
- L** Lift the spirits of another, see God without fail
- S** Setting an example, God walks the way
- E** Engaging in the very actionable play
- R** Responding to prayers to rise the common man
- V** Verily start with hands to serve one and all
- E** Engage with purity in intentions, answer every call

SERVICE

- S** Serving others
- E** Energizes and fuels
- R** Reflections of our
- V** Virtues leading to
- I** Introspection and
- C** Constantly integrating
- E** Everything with Sai

SESSION 4

- A** Adore the path and the passenger with you
- L** Leading and enjoying the journey anew
- L** Letting the light touch all around and you

BRAHMAN

- B** Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara, Trinity -You are
- R** Resounding that Self 'I' is the truth so far
- A** Atma is Rama, Krishna, Ananda the bliss
- H** He is the only constant, the very premise
- M** Man to Brahman, I am I from word, form, and name
- A** Acknowledge the journey, understand, experience that's the aim
- N** Nothing holds you, be aware, collect no claim

SESSION 1

FAITH

- F** Fearlessly Full
- A** Always Awareness
- I** I In
- T** Trust The
- H** Him Heart

List of Acronyms



GOD IS

- Giver Of Delight
- Grace Of Divine
- Grace Optimum guaranteed
- Grace O' Demystified

SACRIFICE

- S Selflessness
- A Awareness
- C Caring and
- R Righteousness
- I Invariably
- F Forever
- I Inches the
- C Consciousness to the
- E Eternal.

SESSION 5

BE STILL

- B Be in the moment
- E Engage with the elements
- S See yourself as your
- T Thoughts move along
- I In the present
- L Living, breathing, connecting
- L Loving and realizing, you are Divine

BE PRESENT

- B Be
- E Ever vigilant &

- P Persistently
- R Rooting in
- E Ever present
- S Source of
- E Energy that's
- N Now &
- T Timeless

SESSION 6

SELF INQUIRY

- S Seeing
- E Everything in
- L Love
- F Fullness
- I Involving
- N Non - Stop in
- Q Quest of Eternity
- U Using
- I Inner-vision to
- R Realize
- Y Yourself

GYANA

- G Going within
- Y Yearning for His presence
- A Aligned with your being
- N No to all distractions
- A Awakened by His grace

List of Acronyms



- G** God is One
- Y** You are part of Him
- A** Attachment slows realization
- N** Not the body, mind, or senses
- A** Apply one teaching, Advance with inner vision

SESSION 7

COMPASSION

- C** Center your thoughts in Love
- O** Oblige in Words and Actions
- M** Man is not separate from God
- P** Persist in the path of Seva
- A** All are alike, Be alike to all
- S** Service is an offering to Him
- S** Selflessness and Sacrifice is the true spirit of Sadhana
- I** In the path of seva (service), lose the ego
- O** Only then man rises to be Divine
- N** Never forget you are an instrument not doer

- C** Caring
- O** fOr
- M** Mankind for
- P** Peace
- A** And
- S** Serenity and to
- S** Support
- I** In their
- O** Onward
- N** New journey

FORGIVE

- F** For ourselves
- O** Out of hatred
- R** Rid of anger
- G** Giving to live
- I** Inspired to serve
- V** Verily divine
- E** Ever-present, Everlasting love within

SESSION 8

- L** Living
- O** Our
- V** Values
- E** Everyday

- S** Selfless
- E** Egoless
- V** Voluntary
- A** Act

- P** Pursue the path of Divinity with Seva
- U** Unify your thoughts, words, and actions
- R** Recognize that God presides in the heart of all
- I** Ignite the lamp of Love in your heart
- T** The quality of your seva is preceded by the motive
- Y** You are part of God; God is part of you

List of Acronyms



SESSION 9

ATTITUDE

- A** Acquire the attitude of compassion
- T** True Love must be distinguished from attachment (to persons and things)
- T** Transform every daily act as worship
- I** Ingratitude is a grievous sin
- T** The act of seva broadens the heart, widens the vision, and deepens your compassion
- U** Utilize knowledge and skill to benefit society
- D** Dedicate every action to the Divine with detachment
- E** Engage in the action of service not on the fruits of action

HOW TO RECONNECT WITH YOUR SELF?

- SACRIFICE** softens
- COMPASSION** deepens
- SELFLESSNESS** ripens
- REALIZATION** heightens
- LOVE** transcends
- ONENESS** enlightens





**“Take refuge in God.
Let God be your Guru, your path, your Lord.”**

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 18, July 2, 1985
