

SAMASTHA LOKA SUKHINO BHAVANTU

From Team **venugaanam**

We are delighted to bring to you the May 2013 edition of Venugaanam. This edition begins with Swami's Divine exhortation to all to revere one's parents. Swami also points out the importance of chanting the Divine name and how it should be done. Read this discourse of Swami and know His message in His own words.

In Atmajyothi, we complete the final portion of deliberation on realizing our inner nature and true potential. This edition discusses the application and utility of Vedanta.

Bhargav shares a thought provoking experience in Puttaparthi involving teaching and learning Vedam in the lawns of Parthi. He leaves us with the important message that preaching is easy but practicing takes much effort.

"There is a Divine providence in whose eyes we are all precious and

who values an Afghanistan child killed by an American drone just as much as it does those who died in the collapse of the Twin Towers. Since death is not the end of life, all has meaning", opines Don Mascon. "The sequel to The Soldier's story" continues from the previous edition to discuss the hypothetical after-death experience of a few victims of war.

Belief in God is much more than a matter of style or convenience. In the article entitled "Why I would not Like to be an Athiest", Prakash highlights his rationale behind his belief in a super power.

Lalita Rao opines that "We specialize in building walls around ourselves and finding the differences among each other rather than the similarities". In her article illustrating this statement she shares an interesting experience from her neighborhood

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Sai Krushna Charitable
Trust Newsletter



May, 2013

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in Bangalore.

Swami would often say: "Would I put you in the crucible of fire, if it were not for the fact that you will come out brighter than before. Examinations help you to know where you stand and how you can improve". In the article- "Test is to His taste", Vinod shares an experience from his student days when Swami put them through the crucible of fire.

There have been some significant developments last month. By Swami's grace the civil work, flooring and tiling work, bathroom fixtures work and 1st coat of wall painting for the building for Phase 1 of Sai Krushna Mandir is now complete. The next few weeks will involve the installation of solar fans/lights for all the floors, final coat of interior and exterior wall painting and other small cleaning and fixing jobs to have it ready in time for operations in June. Solar hot water facility is also being considered subject to availability of funds. The members of the SKM construction team are also making frequent site

visits to monitor the quality and quantum of progress. Read more and see some recent photos in the construction update.

A boundary wall for the entire campus also requires to be constructed urgently from the perspective of safety and security for the children and inmates. Interested people may contact the SKM team.

We also invite applications for suitable volunteer families who will be willing to live with and take care of the children. Volunteer families would be provided suitable accommodation and their children would be given appropriate educational facilities also.

Currently, there is a requirement for 2 English medium teachers for the proposed English medium education for the children. Candidates with appropriate background and experience may apply. We are also looking out for a cook for the children's home once it starts functioning from June.

We are happy to have your feedback on how to make 'Venugaanam' a better communication tool. You may kindly mail us at contactus@saikrushnamandir.org. Do feel free to share with us your experiences in following Swami's teachings or on any other theme of your choice.

May 6th is Easwaramma day, dedicated to the remembrance of the Divine Mother who brought the Lord amidst us. Swami has laid strong emphasis on pleasing our parents. The festivity in this summer month is a reminder to express our gratitude and offer the warmth of our love and respects to our parents.

May Swami turn our lives into a celebration of His message of love, sharing and caring.

With All our Prema,

Team 

Sai Krushna Charitable Trust

Revere and Love your Parents

From Bhagavan's Discourse-

15-01-2008

There is a subtle difference between caste and culture. You belong to the caste of humanity, for, **there is only one caste - the caste of humanity**. It is an inborn gift from your parents. On the other hand, the culture is something that is adopted in your life.

Culture teaches you what is to be done and how. It is based upon certain traditions. None can change your caste which is humanity. Based upon your

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inborn caste of humanity, you can follow a culture. Another important point to be noted in this context is that caste and culture devoid of discrimination are not only useless, but harmful too. Your knowledge and sharp intellect are not that important. Discrimination is of utmost importance. You must be able to choose that which is useful and necessary for you. You have to switch on a light when you are in darkness. It is not proper to

switch on a light when there is already light in the room.

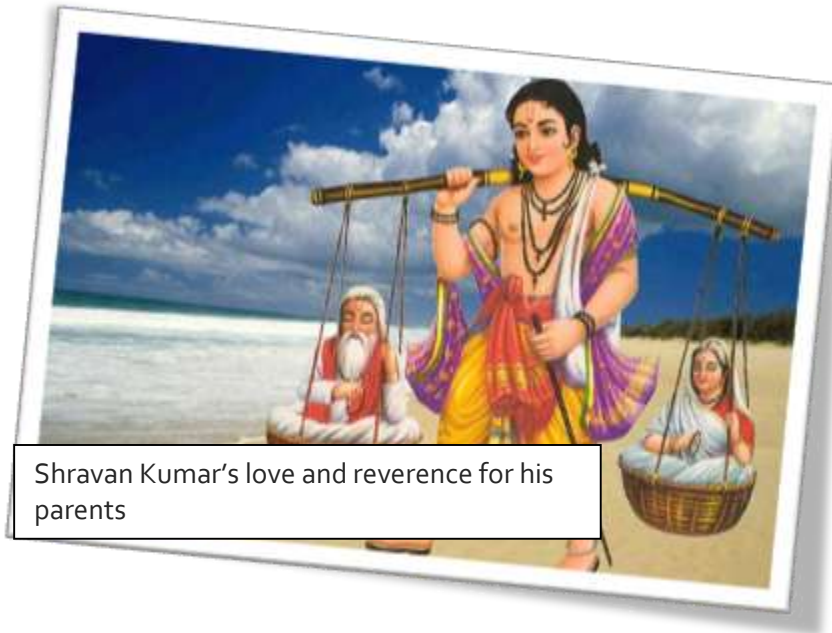
Dear Students!

It is not knowledge or energy that you have to develop, but the power of discrimination. Whatever object you come across, first enquire within yourself: "Is it good or bad, is it useful to me or not?" Before you take up a particular work, think carefully whether it is worth or not. Being a human being, develop the quality of humanness. Do not at all cause pain to your parents who are responsible for your birth. The Vedas emphasise the need for showing utmost reverence to the parents by declaring, "Matru devo bhava, Pitru devo bhava, (revere your mother and father as God).

Children today do not care for their parents. They consider wife, the 'artificial doll', as the central point of their life. They follow the dictates of the wife, ignoring the parents who gave birth to them and nourished and nurtured them all through undergoing several difficulties. You may love your wife- that is good. But, you should obey your parents too. Parents deserve your utmost concern. All others come after the parents. First and foremost, you love your mother and follow her

commands. It is only when you make her happy that your life too will be happy. If she sheds tears

happy and peaceful life. These are the things one has to learn and carefully follow in life.



Shravan Kumar's love and reverence for his parents

for any reason, you will have to suffer for your entire life time. There are very few people today who have recognised the value of a mother's love. If the mother were to say something they try to snub her saying, "Keep quiet; I know everything." Yet others bluntly tell her, "Shut up. You need not advise me. I am highly educated. I have taken a number of degrees. Do I not know?" You may have taken degrees in the academic field. But, did you acquire a degree in general knowledge useful for leading a balanced life? Only the parents can teach that knowledge. One has to serve his father and mother and make them happy, apart from acquiring high degrees. Then only can one lead a

Dear Students!
Do not underestimate the importance of singing the glory of the Divine name.

*Hari Bhajana
Bina Sukha
Santi Nahi....*

Participate in bhajans which bring a lot of peace and confer bliss on you. Bhajan is a

group activity where a number of people come together (Samasti) and sing the glory of God. One important point in Bhajans is that everyone should join in singing the bhajans. There would be a lead singer and all others follow him. If you are not confident of your voice at least repeat the Divine name in your heart. Unfortunately, today people have no time even for that. You may forget any item of work in your daily life. But, you should never forget Namasmarana and Nama Sankirtana. The Divine name is eternal. Hence, constantly contemplate on the Divine name.

Atmajyothi

by Shri Lakshminarayan Aithal

Lakshminarayan Aithal has served for over 3 decades in Swami's institution and is the former Principal of the Sri Sathya Sai Loka Seva Institutions at Muddenahalli. Inspired by Swami's direct message to study the Upanishads, he first learnt Sanskrit and then studied the direct works of Adi Shankaracharya and Swami. Sincere perseverance led him to the reality of Aham Brahmasmi and He realized and experienced Swami's words: "I am God and so are you". He shares the import of the Upanishadic teachings with us in this series of articles.

The Self neither goes nor comes from anywhere; neither He grasps nor He gives up anything. In the sky, coming and going of the clouds don't change the pure and unpolluted form of the space. Similarly, the egotism, etc. appear and disappear due to delusion in the Self; and He remains eternally changeless in the extremely Pure Form of Awareness (Nitya-Chaitanya-Roopah). We have told, time and again, that the states and the egotism, etc. That appear in them- are not real. If we remember this, the doer-ship, etc, whatsoever don't appear in the Self.

THEREFORE, I AM THE AUSPICIOUS ONE.

Thus, if we have the agreement of the three: the illustration of rope and snake, that of the dream and that of the reflection in the mirror; and if we construe with the Self, we observe clearly that there is neither any selfhood nor the world in us. As the awareness becomes firm, the Awareness that: ' I am verily the Supreme Auspiciousness (Parama-Shiva) who is Eternally Pure and Totally Consummate (Nitya-Shuddha-Paripurna) and who is the Unique Form of Existence-Awareness-Bliss' becomes rooted in us.

Those who have the backing of this Awareness, their ignorance is got rid of and they rise in courage; their licentious behavior is avoided and they naturally have a religiously righteous behavior; they will get rid of indiscrimination and they will double their discrimination; sense of injustice, injury, theft, etc. will disappear and instead, sense of justice, compassion and interest in the welfare of all living beings will be got rooted in their heart; idleness will give way to steady habit of worrying for others benefit; and nowhere grief is noticed. But, they will witness the sport of the Supreme Brahman who is of the Form of Existence-Awareness-Bliss. Therefore, everyone should attain this Auspicious Knowledge: "I am verily the Auspiciousness (Shivoham)". And, even if we don't obtain this Knowledge immediately, at least, we must try to acquire the proper qualification for the Self-Knowledge.

(With this edition, we conclude this series of discussion on Entrance to Vedanta. We shall take up a new topic of discussion from the next edition of Atmajyothi).

Pictures of Phase 1 of Sai Krushna Mandir



The Making of Sai Krushna Mandir Construction Update

With the Divine Blessings and grace of our Beloved Swami, the Phase 1 of the children’s home – Sai Krushna Mandir – will be operational soon. While there are numerous challenges, the SKM construction team is working to ensure that the construction and funding are all moving along expected lines.

It is expected that Sai Krushna Mandir will be functional as a children’s home from June 2013. That way, the children who will be coming will also be able to join during the change of academic

session.

We also invite applications for suitable caretakers/ volunteer families who will be willing to live with and take care of the children. The caretakers would also be paid suitable as per their experience and ability. The ideal volunteer would be one dedicated to Swami’s work. We are open to families coming and joining who feel the inclination to participate and involve in Swami’s project. Volunteer families would be provided suitable accommodation and their children would be given appropriate educational facilities also.



Sai Krushna Mandir after completion

Currently, there is a requirement for 2 English medium teachers for the proposed English medium education for the children. Candidates with appropriate background and experience may apply. We are also looking out for a cook for the children's home once it starts functioning from June. Interested people may contact us on +91 9663222362 or by email. By Swami's grace the civil work, flooring and tiling work, bathroom fixtures work and 1st coat of wall painting for the building for Phase 1

of Sai Krushna Mandir is now complete. The next few weeks will involve the installation of solar fans/ lights for all the floors, final coat of interior and exterior wall painting and other small cleaning and fixing jobs to have ready in time for operations in June. Solar hot water facility is also being considered subject to availability of funds. The members of the SKM construction team are also making frequent site visits to monitor the quality and quantum of progress.

A boundary wall for the entire campus also requires to be constructed urgently and it is estimated that it will cost Rs 10 Lakhs for the same. This is an essential requirement from the perspective of safety and security for the children and inmates. Interested people may contact the SKM team.

The current state of construction is shown in the attached photos.



Phase 1 after completion

We look forward to all your active involvement and participation in this God given opportunity. We also welcome you to come and visit the site and witness the making of Sai Krushna Mandir. From our side, we will keep you updated through Venugaanam and the website. You are free to contact us directly for any further information. We are confident that, just as Swami's bounteous blessings ensured the procurement of excellent drinking water and land, Swami's grace will crown our genuine intentions and He will continue to guide and bless the entire effort.

Teaching Vedam Learning Life

by KVRK Bhargav

Bhargav is a student of Swami who after completing his B.Tech in Textile Engineering graduated with an MBA from the the Sri Sathya Sai University in 2001. Ever since, he has had the great fortune of waiting for Swami's direct guidance. He has been blessed with many interactions with Swami. Currently, he helps out at the University Administrative Block.

It was the sylvan surroundings of the Institute lawns next to the humanities block, with verdant grass, circumvented by tall coconut trees and beautiful marigolds and dahlias in full bloom. Felt that I have been transported to an ancient gurukula. I was quite excited to teach a formal Vedam class in this serene

ambiance. The students started trickling in and by 6 pm the class had full attendance. I suggested we sit on the ground in conformance with the Vedic traditions. One of the pupils was skeptical and with some trepidation said, "Sir, the grass is wet here and we will have a lot of distractions due to mosquitoes". I

prevailed over them with a small pep talk on one pointedness, perseverance and importance of austerity.

After the pep up session, I felt, I overdid it, as one of the members of the world's deadliest air force, deadliest because it is responsible for millions of deaths and casualties of human beings with missiles like malaria, dengue, *chikungunya* and so on; hovered around me with a buzzing sound and did a reconnaissance of a possible bunch of soft targets to get its troops.

But the arrows of my pep talk had lodged in the bull's eye of the heart of the students and they all were

charged up for the challenge. Now there was no taking them back. We started the class and I was busy teaching them the *rudram* carefully explaining the subtle nuances of some intonations. While chanting, I saw that a horde of these blood thirsty beings had already made themselves ready for a grand feast. Today they wanted to try a different dish which had the flavour of charged incantations of Vedam. The boys were sitting cross legged, erect with a steady gaze at me trying to concentrate on what I was chanting. My gaze was sometimes getting distracted, seeing these parasites feasting on their motionless bodies. Without moving a limb, without turning their gaze at them and without even trying to shoo away the winged insects, they were pictures of steadfastness sincerely repeating the verses uttered by their teacher.

One of the mosquitoes pleased with the one pointedness and restraint of the pupils wanted to test the guru also. It flew from one of the arms of a disciple and did a smooth landing with the grace of an F-16 Stealth fighter on my right forearm which was resting supplely on my knee and made itself comfortable as if it heard my pep talk and knew that I will not disturb its meal. It got its natural straw ready for a bloody drink and pierced the skin of my forearm. Gathering all my strength, I resisted the feeling of scratching my arm. At that point, I was teaching the third paragraph of Rudram, which beautifully describes that God is imminent in every person, be it a thief, a robber, a hunter, a dacoit, a pick pocket or a smuggler. While chanting this verse, I felt I was describing that wretched mosquito sitting on my hand and having a delightful 'vedam' feast.

It was taking a longer time to fill its belly today to increase my discomfiture. This made me restless and I tried gently moving my hand up and down in sync with the intonations a couple of times but it was determined to teach me a lesson. Raj Shekhar blurted out, "Sir! That 'namo' which you chanted just now is not up but down." I corrected the intonation and continued the class with my whole attention focused on my forced blood donation.

Finally this pesky insect filled its belly removed its proboscis and left perhaps little disappointed at my inability to pass its test. I heaved a sigh of relief when came the second shocker. "Sir, you have skipped the fourth paragraph of *rudram* completely," said Sai Chand complainingly. He paused, condescended to me with an advice and said, "Should we go inside a classroom as we will have sufficient light and fans?" skirting the real issue. I gave a cold shoulder to the idea evading an eye contact with him and tried to concentrate on the fourth para of *rudram*.

My fidgeting was noticed by the pupils but pretended as if they have noticed nothing. I looked deep into their eyes, especially at Sai Chand, a bubbly, mischievous boy and felt as if below the masks of one pointedness and concentration they were hiding their laughter and scorn for someone who doesn't practice what he preaches. The treatment meted out by the mosquitoes was same to all like the sun which shines equally on all. But, they followed the dictum of their guru whereas the guru fell by the wayside in following his own dictum.

I learnt the hard way what Swami often says, ' Be *Acharyas*, first practice and then preach.

The Soldier's story (continued...)

by Don Mascon

Don gained a 1st Class Honours degree in Physics from University College, London in 1957 and worked for the following 10 years for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority at Harwell and Culham. He then left the UKAEA to study medicine at Oxford University. Mr Mascon retired in 2002 as Emeritus Professor of Immunology at Oxford. Since retiring he has written a short history of his family and has written a book, Science Mystical Experience and Religious Belief which was inspired in part by his scientific studies and part by the fact that his mother was a psychic.

As the soldier and his new muslim friend walked towards the group in the distance they discussed their recent experience. "I can see how Nahal's action brought us together", said the soldier. "After all we were not evil people, just very foolish and misguided, but there are people who are truly evil, those who torture and murder children for example. What about them?" The soldier was sorry to raise this problem and thereby disturb the peace and harmony that surrounded the two of them, but he

felt that he had to know. He wished that he had asked Mike and Nahal when they were all together. He had forgotten that Mike and he were in telepathic communication but was reminded of this fact when he found that Mike was now walking with the two friends.

“Your question does you credit” said Mike. “The answer is not simple. First you must realize that those who do evil deeds with apparently mindless cruelty are never themselves happy. Happiness follows acts of loving kindness as you are aware, but those who are cruel have lost sight of this truth or have never experienced it in their own childhood. Instead they inflict pain on others in a vain attempt to reduce all to the same level of misery that they themselves experience. You will realize that this is a vicious downward spiral. However, when an evil person dies they enter this discarnate world where physical pain and bodily death have no meaning. Now they can have no victims and they feel the full pain of the evil that possesses them. As the Buddhists say, hell exists only in the mind,

but of course, it is no less real for that. In this dark state they cannot share the pain by the evil acts that they performed while on earth. They undergo a gradual disintegration of the ego until all that remains is the divine spark that all living things possess. This spark returns to the ocean of unmade souls which is the source from which new beings emerge.”

Mike now looked very serious. “Now.” he said “you know the meaning of the death of the soul. Mike had gone some way to answering the soldier's question but there was much more he would like to know. Mike responded to the unasked questions. “Yes,” he said. “There is much more for you to learn, but this is not the time.” By now they had reached the group of those waiting to welcome them and the soldier started to introduce his Muslim friend to his relatives. As he did so he realized that he had been introducing to his loving relations the suicide bomber who had killed him. He laughed.

Why I Would Not Like to Be an Atheist

by Prakash Srinivasan

Prakash is a student of Swami who completed his B.Com, MBA and PG Diploma in Culture and Philosophy from Sri Sathya Sai University. He is a talented singer with the enthusiasm for Swami's work. Prakash is currently working at HP, Bangalore.

I have always been surprised as to how atheists lead their life. It is not that they are not successful and they do not have a prosperous life (finally it depends on destiny) but I would like to focus more on the emotional aspect of it. I feel that atheists are missing a lot of things by not believing in God. It is not that they are bad people, there are so many honest and committed people who I have read are atheists but this is the one last thing that I feel anybody must not do!

I would like to confess at the start that I am not a very religious person but at the same time I have a lot of faith in the concept of God. One motto which I am trying to practice is that I must just not pray when I am in trouble but pray and thank God daily and as frequently as possible. To be selfish towards God is one of

the worst things I could do and hence this thought.

Let me put forth a few rational points which I feel really proves that God *does* exist.

The Magic and Harmony in Nature and Creation: Nature is one of the greatest marvels that we will ever see. The million things happening in nature with such clockwork precision cannot definitely happen if it's not the handiwork of a supreme and monstrously powerful being. The simplest example is the seed becoming a massive tree. So it's impossible for me to think that all this was just random and by chance! I can actually write an entire article on just this point as there are a thousand examples of the daily miracles that happen in nature. We miss everything and take it for granted.

The Experience of Love: When we believe in the concept of God, we feel a strong sense of belongingness and we feel secure. It is almost like the kangaroo baby in the mother's pouch. It is not at all necessary that we need to believe in the things that we can only see. There are many intangible feelings (love/hope/confidence/enthusiasm) which are deeper and long-lasting than the tangible ones. I really wonder how atheists would tackle all the calamities of their life, if God is not a part of my life then it would be more desolate and dark in such times. I will fall back on God when I have a problem. If God does not solve my problem immediately (which happens quite frequently), then I take it that he wants me to solve it myself and learn in the process. Don't we talk about learning on the job (thro mistakes) and training in corporate life, then why is it not applicable to our life itself? When our problem is not solved, we blame God and question his very

existence. We are missing the point



that he wants us to learn and, believe it or not we do come out stronger, patient and more resolute after the whole episode.

The concept of unconditional love is always taken only in the context of

God and not among humans. So, why not try to experience that feeling by believing in God? We are ready to try out a hundred other things in life but when it comes to God our priorities are very rigid with no compromises whatsoever. Instant results are very rare in life and more so in the case of God.

The God concept makes us more united, humble and thankful for the countless blessings we have received in our life. Whom should we be thankful to when we know that we have almost every comfort that we need? We will understand our good fortune only when we see a hundred other people daily who do not have even the basic necessities of life. God is the one umbrella under which all of us are taking shelter and the sooner we realize it the better our life will be.

Experiencing Oneness

by Lalita Rao

Lalita Rao studied, worked and lived in Boston, USA for more than two decades. After moving back to Bangalore two years ago, she has been working at the Public Affairs Foundation, Bangalore. While in Boston, she served as a youth adviser for the Northeast Region (Region 1) of the USA Sathya Sai Organization, and was a Sai Spiritual Education (SSE) teacher and coordinator at the Boston Sai Center for many years. Currently, she is also closely associated with the development of the Sharavathi Kannada Higher Primary School in Hosadoddi village. She lends her enthusiasm, professionalism, time management and sincerity to every activity she takes up.

Swami often tells us that we are all one; that we may assume various physical forms, but we are all from the same divine source. Although we have heard this from Him continuously, we don't experience this oneness too often during our humdrum everyday life. We specialize in building walls around ourselves and finding the differences among each other rather than the similarities. The walls we build are double-bricked, well cemented and hard to knock down!

Still, once in a while, we get glimpses of this oneness. We will think of someone, and out of the blue, they will drop by unannounced. I was just thinking about you this morning, I would say. Although it would sound facetious at that moment, it would indeed be true that we had talked about this person or wondered about their well being. You think of someone and they call. Or, you see them in the news! I remember I was so stunned once, years ago, I was walking to the library on the Northeastern

Univ. campus. Randomly, without any context, someone's name and face flashed in my mind: Raman Lamba, who was a cricketer at that time. No reason. Totally random. I went into the library and sat at a computer terminal. As I read an Indian newspaper online, I saw a news item: Raman Lamba was playing in the Bangladesh league. He was hit on the head by a ball and had died. Coincidence? What are the chances? Not even remotely connected, in anyway. Or so I thought. Oneness... somewhere, somehow, we are all connected by something. Something – I don't know what – some layer of my consciousness had acknowledged what had happened to Raman Lamba, and thought of him literally a few minutes before I read this news item on line.

Why is it that we experience this oneness only momentarily then? Why are we not usually tuned into this thought that we are all one, from the same source, and that the only difference between us is that we occupy different bodies for just this moment in time?

Everyday Forms of Oneness

Something that happened yesterday brought home this message in a nice way. Please bear with me as I set the elaborate stage leading up to today -

My parents and I live on a small street in south Bangalore. Houses are spaced close together, and if I have good eyesight and look hard enough, I can see an ant crawling on the opposite house's wall. That is how close the houses are. Our neighbors are mostly long term residents, barring a few new renters. Yet, while cordial and amiable, only a few are friendly and forthcoming. This is just the "Bangalore culture", someone told me. It is nothing personal. There is one family diagonally across from us, however, that doesn't get along with most of the people on our street. The father and daughter are quick to anger, berate passersby loudly and abrasively, and generally succeed in keeping away most people from their premises. The mother is present, but I have never heard her voice before. Skirmishes on parking and other issues have left us studiously avoiding them as much as possible. Having moved here only this past year, I noticed their fights with all and sundry, but didn't have any direct personal experience with them.

Even within their own family, the only daughter's behavior was anything but pleasant. The whole street often heard her loud and violent fights with her father, often while under the influence of various toxic substances. Whenever this happened, my heart went out to her and the family –

they needed some intense love and energy sent to them. And that is the best I could do – send them love and positive energy and pray for them. Everybody talked about them, but no one was friendly. With good reason, it seemed; so I am not blaming them.

A few months ago, we heard (and saw) that the daughter's engagement ceremony was performed. Everyone commented on who the 'lucky' bridegroom might be [read: sarcasm and derision!]. They commented on how she lost weight, and how she might have accomplished that. And on and on.... keen and intense interest without any direct contact.

Fast forward to yesterday – a beautiful mantapam/canopy of leaves, flowers and fruits was erected in front of their house. I have never seen anything like it before. Rumor, via the car washer on the street(!), was that the wedding was on August 6th (today). No one knew who was invited on the street. Maybe some. Maybe none.

Thoughts That Fly

As I stood on our porch and admired the lovely handiwork of the guy who erected the canopy, I felt for a moment that maybe we could send flowers to the bride, just to congratulate her and wish her well. I had never spoken to her, never made eye contact (not for lack of trying on my part!). Yet, this was a big day in the life of this family – the only daughter, despite whatever trials and tribulations we had all witnessed, was getting married. What was the harm in wishing her well? Even if we were not invited?

I gingerly broached the topic with my parents. Do you think we should send her some flowers? Having lived on the street longer, and experienced the unpleasantness, they were understandably chagrined at my idea. One would think I was proposing to gatecrash the wedding or something! Oh, no! They will think we are trying to finagle an invitation or something!! was the immediate response. I could see they were torn, though. They had nothing against the girl or the family. Yet, considering the past, they were not in a position or mood to be so forthcoming as to acknowledge the wedding without being invited. Well, I tried to negotiate, what if we send the flowers after the wedding? That way, they will not think we are trying to get invited to the wedding. In my head I am thinking, really, do you REALLY think I need an invitation to ONE more wedding? I have attended more weddings in the last one year since I moved here, than in the last fifteen years combined. Ok, maybe a slight exaggeration. But only slight. Not really that far off from reality.

Anyway, my idea was shot down and I reluctantly let it go. We could still send her our best wishes and energy in our hearts I suppose, without the flowers, I thought.

I went to Sunday evening bhajans at Sai Gitanjali and returned home around 8.30 pm. As I entered, I noticed a large wedding invitation on the coffee table. My mother caught my eye and grinned sheepishly. The wedding invitation has come. She said. **Maybe they read your thoughts from this morning.** How did that happen? I asked her. Well, the bride's mother and aunt came by an hour ago and invited us to the wedding.

The wedding was less than 12 hours away. Out of the blue, they just decided to come and invite us. No word had been exchanged in the last three years; but the invitation came twelve hours before the wedding. Ha... made my day. Not because I wanted to go to yet another wedding, but because it reinforced the power of positive thoughts and vibrations. The ice was broken.

So, are you going to go? I asked my parents. My father was otherwise occupied; I was going to go to work. That left my mother to attend the wedding at the nearby temple. I have to ask Riaz, She said. Riaz is another neighbor a few houses away; both he and my mother consider themselves long suffering members of the grievance club against this family! After much back and

forth, she knew that it was the right thing to do. And it was arranged in such a way that only she could attend! Can you come with me, and go to work an hour late? She asked. Nope, I replied. This was something she had to do.

And she did. To her credit, she got ready, went to the wedding all by herself. It was a small crowd at the temple. She sat through the wedding, blessed the couple and returned home. Her presence was acknowledged and appreciated by the parents and the bride. It wasn't so bad, she said. Maybe this will end the unpleasantness on the street.

I remember a speaker on Radiosai saying recently - **if there is a problem, add some Love. And if it still persists, add some more Love.** How many times has Swami told us – Love is the way, Love is the only way!

The power of our thoughts is amazing. And sometimes scary, I admit! I guess the light bulbs are all connected to the same source, after all. If this is what a fleeting thought can do – reach out and touch the person we thought about, imagine what the constant ruminations and churnings in our head can accomplish! The domino effect of all our zillions of thoughts can stir up a tsunami! All the more reason to indulge only in positive thoughts and vibrations, right?

It is said that every spiritual Master puts his devotees through the crucible of test of faith before He blesses them with His benediction. As Swami says, these tests play the same role in a devotee's life that the goldsmith's hammering, melting, annealing and shaping do to the gold. Both the processes result in the emergence of a shining jewel at the end- one that is a valuable metal, the other an invaluable character. Both processes are no doubt associated with tribulations and trials from the perspective of the receiver- but then who better than the Master goldsmith would know how to form a jewel better. No wonder then that Swami says "Test is to My taste".

I recall an incident of severe testing that we underwent during the period of our stay as waiting boys in Parthi. For those to whom the term is new, waiting is a period after the official completion of an academic course during which some students would stay back to be with Swami.

Test is to His Taste

By Vinod Cartic

Vinod is a student of Swami who after completing his B.Tech in Chemical Engineering from IIT Madras, graduated with a gold medal in MBA from the Sri Sathya Sai University in 2007. He received direct instructions and guidance from Swami to start Sai Krushna Mandir, the children's home project that he is currently involved in. Faith in Swami and his word drives Vinod to spearhead this project. He also works as an independent consultant at Frost & Sullivan

For some this would be a period of living and staying in the Avatar's presence, for some, it was a period of waiting to

get His guidance, while others wanted to serve Him directly at Prashanthi Nilayam and awaited work orders from the Master. The reasons for such waiting were in fact as numerous as the number of waiting students itself. Most often Swami Himself would tell the students to wait as He would guide them at a suitable time.

We were about 16 students who had been blessed with an opportunity to wait for Him. The period of waiting ranged from a few months to some who had waited for three fourths of a decade. Our lives literally revolved around Swami and His physical presence. Mornings were marked by getting up early, some exercise followed by a quick breakfast and rushing for His darshan. As most of us could chant Vedam/ sing bhajans, we were also part of the Vedam / Bhajan group respectively and had the double blessing of voicing His glory loud throated in His presence. Morning arathi would give way to lunch followed by some small service activity/ individual tasks and we would be back for afternoon darshans and the evening bhajans and arathi. Dinner and sleep would follow to awaken us to another beautiful day in His presence. Literally, bhajan and bhojan were our two fields of specialization in this period of waiting. Swami was the center and reason of our lives in every sense and we probably spent more time thinking of Him then than in any other period of our student life. Life seemed very complete in itself- we were complacent in our good fortune of living in the Lord's presence. The accusations of laziness and lack of initiative that well-meaning friends/ relatives/ elders cast was unable to make any deep impact on our psyches filled with the thrill of His presence.

It was in this atmosphere of peace and calm in our lives that Swami threw a storm that threatened to rock our lives. It was the period of Ganesh Chaturthi 2009. As we went to occupy our places to sing before Him one morning (our places, as if they belonged to us forever!!), we were informed by the senior authorities in Prashanthi Nilayam that Swami had commanded the waiting boys to sit along with alumni and they would not be allowed to sing/ chant Vedam in His presence henceforth. This meant that we would be sitting in one corner of the Sai Kulwant hall away from His direct glance and having just the possibility of one slight glance during darshan if Swami took a full round. All chances of interaction with Him would be minimal (read zero) and we would not even have a 'fair' opportunity of giving a letter to Swami. Not only this, we were also informed that Swami was unhappy with us and He wanted all the students who were waiting to go out and seek jobs. Swami would bless them the moment they came back after securing job offers.

It took us an hour or so until after that morning darshan to realize that this was more than a bad dream- that it was a command that threatened to throw us far from the physical presence we so much valued. Our minds took it lightly at first, thinking that Swami must be playing a prank on us. At its highest state of optimism, we thought that Swami might probably grant us a personal audience that evening. None of that happened- neither that day nor in the week ahead. In fact, Swami literally was avoiding any eye contact with any of the waiting boys. The same students who had enjoyed His attention over the past few months, were now deprived of the very warmth that sustained their lives. The cold treatment had begun and we felt like dying patients from whom oxygen cylinders had been removed. The absence of darshan and bhajans was not the end- in a few days time Swami had sent word through the authorities that within 20 days time, all the waiting boys would have to leave Parthi – either by choice or forcibly! The ultimatum was loud and clear. Unknowingly, we had earned His wrath even though we thought that our waiting was an expression of our love , gratitude and respect for His command.

Was this to be the end of our good fortune? Had we done something so objectionable in waiting for Him that we were to be treated as abhorable residents in Parthi? Did not Shabari/ Mother Seeta/ Bharatha/ the Gopalas and Gopikas all wait for the Lord and thereby win His grace by their faith and patience? The Lord when in Shirdi had said Saburi (patience) was the crown of all virtues- He had repeated the same to us many times in Parthi- why then this sudden calamity befalling us? How could we leave the Lord without getting His direct command and guidance? The barrage of questions found no convincing answers even as we stared blankly at the incumbent destiny to befall us - leave His presence and that too after making the center of our lives upset with us. There was pain, confusion, and a sense of bewilderment that only Swami could clarify directly. In obeying His command to wait for His guidance, where and how had we displeased Him? We struggled vainly within ourselves introspecting as never before only to find that the deadline of 20 days was fast approaching.

To be continued in the next issue of Venugaanam.