



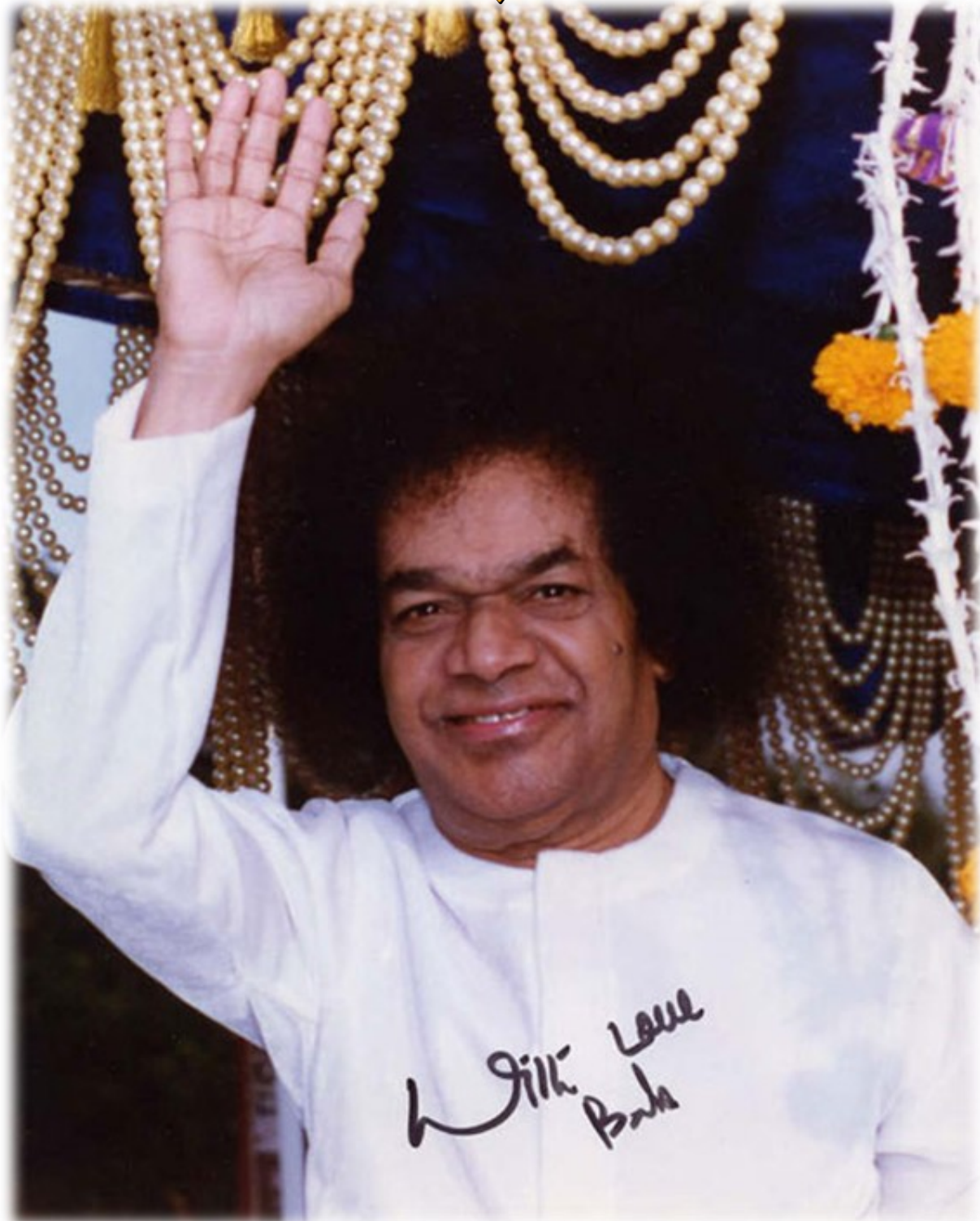
SAILIGHTS



November 23, 2021



Volume 1



Special Birthday Issue

Quarterly Newsletter of the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council, Zone 1

**Offered with Love and Reverence
at the Lotus Feet of our Dear Lord
Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba
on the Occasion of His 96th Birthday**



"I have come to light the lamp of Love within your hearts, to see that it shines day by day with added luster. I have not come on behalf of any exclusive religion...nor have I come to collect followers for any doctrine...I have come to tell you of this unitary faith, this spiritual principle, this path of Love, this virtue of Love, this duty of Love, this obligation to Love."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

The Sai Avatar: A Lifetime of Love and Service



1926

Sathyanarayana Raju is born to parents Easwamma and Peddavenkama Raju in Puttaparthi, India



1958

Swami's first published writings (in spoken Telugu) commence with the launch of Sanathana Sarathi



1940

Sathya says, "I am no longer your Sathya", and declares Himself to be Sai Baba, Avatar of the Kali Yuga



1960

Swami performs the Vibhuti Abhishekam to the Shirdi Sai Baba Idol on the morning of Shivaratri



1945

Early devotees Subamma and Kamamma donate land toward construction of the first ashram



1962

Swami conducts the first Veda Purusha Jnana Saptah Yagna during the Dasara festival



1947

Baba gives His first public speech in Tamil Nadu state, the first of thousands of divine discourses to come



1964

Swami establishes the Brijbhawan Ashram in Whitefield, just outside Bangalore, as His second abode



1950

Prasanthi Nilayam, the Abode of Peace, is inaugurated on Baba's 25th Birthday



1968

Swami gives a landmark discourse on His being the Avatar and on His Mission to establish righteousness



1956

Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam is inaugurated



1968

Swami inaugurates Dharmakshetra; travels to East Africa; and establishes a college in Anantapur for girls

The Sai Avatar: A Lifetime of Love and Service



1972

The first Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality is held, aimed at inspiring youth



1995

The Anantapur Drinking Water Supply project is launched on occasion of Swami's 70th Birthday



1975

The Sarva Dharma Stupa is inaugurated, symbolizing the unity of the world's major religions



1997

Thousands of youth from many countries attend the first Sai Youth World Conference at Prasanthi Nilayam



1976

The Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Whitefield, is inaugurated



2001

Swami inaugurates the Super Speciality Hospital in Whitefield



1981

Swami inaugurates the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (University)



2006

The Athi Rudra Mahayajna is conducted at Prashanti Nilayam by Baba for Universal peace and welfare



1991

Swami inaugurates the Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi



2007

A World Education Conference is held in Prasanthi Nilayam on Sathya Sai Education in Human Values



1995

Sai Kulwant Hall is established, with capacity to accommodate 20,000 devotees at a time for Darshans



2010

Swami gives a last discourse on His 85th Birthday, at the 29th Convocation of SSSIHL at Prasanthi Nilayam

Source: Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust website

SAILIGHTS

Quarterly Newsletter of the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council, Zone 1

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Message from Zone 1 Chair



Sai Ram!

Congratulations to the Newsletter Team for launching this inaugural edition of SaiLights, the newsletter serving SSSGC Zone 1. This is a wonderful initiative for all of us to **inform** each other on the wonderful activities going on in our zone, to **share our insights** with each other, and most importantly, to **inspire** each other as we continue our journey along the Sai Path. The theme for this initial newsletter, "**Living With Divinity**" aptly sets the stage for how we should all live our lives: With Divinity! Of course, Baba has emphasized that Divinity is always with us, as water is always with the fish in the ocean—above, below, all around, and inside. Our task is to develop that Constant Integrated Awareness which allows us to identify with and realize this Truth. Let us pray that as we all join together to read and contribute to this SaiLights newsletter, the Light of Sai will shine more and more beautifully within each of us.

Sairam,
Dr. Axay Kalathia
Sri Sathya Sai Global Council, Zone 1 Chair



Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,

We are most pleased and privileged to bring you this first issue of SaiLights, made possible by the infinite grace of Swami. In this Special Birthday issue, we:

- ◆ Commemorate Swami's 96th Birthday, with a timeline of key events in His Avataric Life of Supreme Love and Service, a collection of reflections by long-time devotees on the theme of Living with Divinity, and "Swami's Birthday", a poem penned also by a devotee of many years.
- ◆ Share up-to-date information on the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council and on Zone 1, comprising USA, Canada, and the West Indies.
- ◆ Present highlights of Zone 1 activities covering the four wings of Service, Sri Sathya Sai Education, Devotion, and Young Adults.

Our sincere thanks to all who have contributed to this newsletter, our Zone's collective offering to Swami. It came together remarkably quickly, thanks to your cooperation! We hope very much that you will enjoy perusing it and will continue, going forward, to enrich it with your contributions.

Loving Sairams,
SaiLights Newsletter Team

Formation of Sri Sathya Sai Global Council

SaiLights Newsletter Team

With the Divine Blessings and Grace of our Beloved Swami, the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council (SSSGC) was established on the holy day of Guru Poornima, July 24, 2021. The foremost purpose of the SSSGC is to spread the message and teachings of Swami and to support every Sai Center and Sai devotee across the globe in their efforts to connect directly with Prasanthi Nilayam and to Swami.

Rationale. The establishment of the SSSGC was a response to developments within the Sai Organization in the years following Swami's Maha Samadhi in April 2011. Three important arms of the Sai Organization, as set up by Swami Himself, were the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, the All India Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization (overseeing activities within India), and the Sri Sathya Sai International Organization (overseeing activities in countries outside India). These units were guided closely by Swami and functioned as a unified entity under His Divine oversight; there was little need to formalize communication across the units. Since April 2011, however, it has gradually become clear that the Sai Organization would be well served by an umbrella organization that (a) guides and brings together the three arms, and (b) anchors itself in Prasanthi Nilayam, as the home and heartbeat of the Sai mission.

Vision. Unity is the founding principle of the SSSGC. The vision underpinning the GC's formation is that the Central Trust, the All-India Seva Organization, and the International Organization would all be a part of the Global Council; and that the GC would provide a single forum for all to work together in a spirit of cooperation, friendship, mutual respect, and independence. As such, the GC would unify the entire Sai world across all countries, so that each arm would know what the other is doing, and so that high-level decisions may be made, with transparency and accountability, at the level of the Global Council. As a part of this vision, countries outside India would enjoy large representation on the GC's executive committees that manage the administration of the Sai mission in India and abroad.

Progress to date. As with any new venture, translating vision to reality will take time—and the ever-present Grace of Swami. To date, significant progress has been made in setting up the organizational structures needed to mobilize a rich agenda of activities planned for the coming year—and indeed, leading up to the Birthday

Centennial celebration in 2025. Awareness of the existence of the GC has been slow to spread due to lack of proper information. However, every week more and more Sai Centers worldwide are eagerly joining in unity, once they learn of the GC's noble rationale and vision. And those that have joined are sharing their experience that the day-to-day decision-making and functioning of Sai Centers remain very much in the hands of Center and Regional leadership, with the GC serving only as a high-level umbrella organization and valuable resource.

“Unity is Divinity”. Swami has repeatedly urged us to adopt a spirit of harmony and brotherhood in our interactions with each other, with the recognition that it is the same innate Divinity that resides in each one of us. Embracing this teaching, the Global Council seeks to welcome and represent all Sai Centers and all Sai devotees across the globe, with a view to furthering and strengthening the Sai mission in the years to come.

Readers are requested to visit the SSSGC Zone1 website www.sssgc-zone1.org for more details pertaining to the formation of the Global Council.



Zone 1 Overview of Activities

Dr. Axay Kalathia

Sri Sathya Sai Global Council, Zone 1 Chair

With the auspicious inauguration on Guru Pournima, July 24, 2021, the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council (SSSGC) officially solidified the tradition of Sri Sathya Sai Organizations remaining rooted in Prasanthi Nilayam. In October 1961, Swami declared the launching of a “Seva Samithi”, the first ever Center; the mid- sixties saw the start of worldwide Centers, with the first World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations held in Mumbai in May 1968; and in September 1972, the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust was established. With these landmark steps, Sri Sathya Sai Baba established the guiding institutions for His worldwide mission. The SSSGC officially unites all of them under one umbrella, while remaining connected to Prasanthi Nilayam, the epicenter for the origin and sustenance of the Sai Mission.

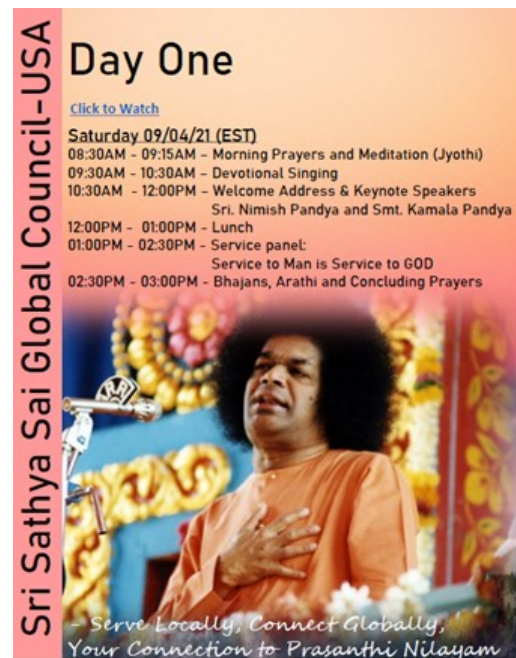
The Zone 1 family consisting of USA, Canada, and the West Indies has been blessed to be a part of this Divine organization, under its guiding theme of Unity. We are grateful for the opportunity to cooperate and collaborate closely with each other, with other nations from around the world, with the dynamic Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization of India, and with all the institutions managed under the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust.

Developments since Inception

A team of Senior Zonal Advisors helped guide the initial selection of national and regional officers. Center activities consisting of devotional singing, study circles, children’s spiritual education classes, and service projects have continued with zeal, moreover with a resolve by Centers to focus more intensely on Swami and His teachings.

- ◆ The children’s program “Sai Educare – Blossoming of the Divinity Within” has been developed with in-person and online programs, all based upon the core human values present in all cultures and traditions, and using Swami and His teachings as the focus.
- ◆ Young Adults too have been a priority, with vice chair positions set aside for YAs on each Zonal committee, and zone-wide programs conducted, including town halls and open-mic sessions. In addition, three

courses have been developed for YAs, covering Awareness, Human Values in the Workplace, and Leadership, with planned certifications from the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in Puttaparthi.



- ◆ On the devotion front, a “1008 Sadhana” Program has been developed and launched as a collective offering leading up to the Grand Centennial Celebrations planned for November 23, 2025. An inspiring Retreat was held, virtually, on Labor Day featuring Keynote speakers from India, namely Mr. Nimish Pandya and Mrs. Kamala Pandya as well as Mr. Sai Surendranath. Retreat highlights included morning meditation, prayers, devotional singing, children’s items, and two amazing panels on “Finding Purpose in Real Life” and “Service to Man is Service to God”.
- ◆ Other well-received initiatives include the outstanding weekly program “Awake, Unite, and Inspire” aired on international radio and featuring interviews with eminent devotees. Finally, the entire zone is currently preparing for a historic, first Zone 1 “Pathway to Prasanthi-Parthi Pilgrimage”, to take place in Prasanthi Nilayam from July 10-17, 2022. Gratitude letters to Swami from all Zone 1 devotees will be collected, to be offered at the holy Mahasamadhi in Prasanthi Nilayam.

Zone 1 Overview of Activities (Continued)

Zonal Committees

Zonal Committees have been formed to further unite and connect our zone by offering expertise and guidance for incorporating Swami's teachings in many practical areas of our lives.

- ◆ The **Zonal Disaster Relief committee** has coordinated a drive to help Haiti victims, a helpline was formed to assist Hurricane Ida victims, and a database of disaster volunteers has been created.
- ◆ The **Zonal Medical committee** has obtained approval from the medical directors of Swami's hospitals for our healthcare professionals to serve in rotations, has discussed collaboration with the Indian organization for service in mobile clinics as well as with various districts throughout India, as well as obtained approval from the ashram for conducting medical camps for Guru Purnima and Swami's Birthday in 2022. A volunteer database of over 55 healthcare professionals willing to join in these ventures has already been collected, with the opportunity for many more to join in the coming months.



- ◆ The **Vedas and Sacred Chants committee** celebrated the Dasara festival by featuring a nightly weeklong program highlighting chants from throughout our zone, along with speakers describing Swami's teachings and experiences regarding the Vedas.
- ◆ A **Zonal Ladies Wing** has been formed to unite

women under the Sai banner to understand and implement Swami's invaluable teachings for and about women.

- ◆ A **Zonal Cultural Integration and Outlook committee** has been formed to help explore and enhance engagement with people from a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and religions.
- ◆ A **Zonal Social Justice committee** has formed to provide a forum to discuss important societal issues impacting our lives using Swami's teachings as the foundation.
- ◆ A **Zonal Call Sai committee** has been formed to set up a network of volunteers to connect devotees willing to serve members.
- ◆ A **Zonal EHV and Sai Tutoring committee** has been formed to help develop and enhance the dissemination of Swami's human values to our communities.
- ◆ A **Zonal Educational Programs committee** is currently collaborating with other zones to develop education programs in conjunction with the SSSIHL for the YA's.
- ◆ A **Zonal Environmental committee** aims to implement awareness of environment-related issues and recommend tips and best practices for use by devotees at Sai functions, work, and home.
- ◆ Last but not least, our **Zonal Media/Tech committee** has been working ceaselessly with over 25 expert volunteers in various fields assisting officers, committee chairs, and devotees, while also launching and maintaining our websites and online programs.

The volume and quality of loving service that devotees have dedicated to developing Swami's organization, over a period of barely three months, has been amazing and incredible. It is only His guidance and grace that have made these accomplishments possible. We continue to collectively pray to Swami for more opportunities to unite and serve in order to make this beautiful world a happy, healthy, and holy abode.

Please see <https://www.ssgc-zone1.org/announcement/sssgc-zone-1-organizational-structure/> for more

Zone 1 Highlights - Service

Overview

Sai Centers in Zone 1 engaged in a wide range of service activities over the past quarter, as Sai brothers and sisters sought with energy and enthusiasm to follow Swami's injunction to "Love all, Serve all".

Many activities were of a long-standing and recurring nature, e.g., serving meals to those in need and providing support to build up the stocks of food banks.

Several Centers responded to crisis needs arising within the community or beyond, as in the case of Haiti's earthquake and fires in California, as well as support for refugees from Afghanistan following events in the summer of 2021.

Response to the COVID virus took different forms across Sai Centers, ranging from support for vaccinations and sewing cloth masks to providing school supplies and saying special prayers. Increased attention to seniors was also evident, including seniors *within* Sai Centers, in response to the sense of isolation and vulnerability experienced by many since the onset of the COVID virus.

Young Adults and SSSE students participated actively across the board, not only engaging in Seva but beginning increasingly to internalize the value of doing service.



Providing hot meals, donating to food banks

Baltimore Center: Bringing Produce to Food Banks

Center members participated in Harvest Seva activities at First Fruits Farm (FFF) in Maryland. FFF donates all fresh produce to the Maryland Food Bank and other local shelters serving families in need. In July 2021, about 45 YAs and SSSE students and their families harvested about 1,000 pounds of tomatoes and 500 pounds of green bell peppers. In September 2021, the group met again, along with other volunteer groups, and harvested some 37,500 pounds of potatoes. The Seva also gave Center members a chance to see each other in person while doing Seva in an outdoor, safe environment.

While some Centers had to halt their Narayana Seva activities due to the virus, several others were able to continue responding to their communities' needs. Center members in South Bethesda, Maryland, for example, enthusiastically prepared and delivered cooked food to three local service organizations, including the Interfaith Works Women's Center, serving those experiencing poverty and homelessness. The Loudoun, Baltimore, Kansas, and Indianapolis Centers, among others, also provided hot meal service to homeless shelters. Support for food banks was also important, as with the Orlando Center and Centers in Alberta and Toronto, Canada. In some cases, such support involved "gleaning" Seva to gather up post-harvest fruit to give to food banks, as with the Loudoun and Baltimore Centers.



"LOVE ALL SERVE ALL, HELP EVER HURT NEVER."

-Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Zone 1 Highlights - Service (Continued)

Responding to crisis

Several Sai Centers were quick to respond to natural disasters in recent months. A major earthquake in Haiti in August 2021 inspired Center members from multiple states to respond to the call of duty, by helping with the transport and distribution of supplies to the point of need (see article on p. 13). A different kind of natural disaster—wildfires in California—left thousands in need over the summer, bringing out the best in members of the Tri-Valley Center as they sought to meet the multifarious needs of their brothers and sisters who survived the disaster. Sai Centers in some states also extended support to help refugees from Afghanistan resettle in the United States, following the end of conflict. Members from the Loudoun, South Bethesda, and Indianapolis Centers collected and donated new and gently used household items as well as personal and baby items to help the refugees.



Supporting communities' response to COVID

The COVID virus drew a wide range of responses from Sai Centers. In Florida's Orlando Center, a team of 20 nurses and paramedics as well as other volunteers participated in the Asian Pacific Islanders Initiative to vaccinate the Orlando area community in April 2021. Center members also helped communities facing mask shortages by sewing cloth masks. Heeding Swami's teaching that praying for others is a most powerful Seva, the Kansas Sai Center started a new "Special Prayers" service activity. The activity, which took the place of other in-person activities that were restricted by the virus, entails a weekly half-hour prayer session for the well-being of all. In another kind of COVID response, the Phoenix Sai Center gifted urgently needed supplies to schools in the Phoenix area, to help meet high demand during the pandemic. Center members in Loudoun and South Bethesda donated school supplies and backpacks in abundance, to support local school children and teenagers in need. Finally, several Centers responded to the increased vulnerability experienced by older people in the wake of the pandemic.

Other Service Activities

Zone 1 Sai Centers engaged in a variety of other, including some innovative, service activities:

Centers in Phoenix, for example, conducted a blood drive, benefiting 56 people in community hospitals; a non-perishable food drive to support the Navajo Nation



Tri-Valley Center: Supporting Wildfire Survivors

In California, Dixie wildfires set off in July 2021 had burned nearly 1 million acres by September 2021, leaving great devastation and 1,100 wildfire survivors in their wake. Sai Center volunteers from Tri-Valley (just east of San Francisco) worked with the local crisis intervention center to arrange food items and supplies needed for 225 wildfire survivors. One early morning, Center members cooked meals and traveled 220 miles to the crisis center to serve lunch and to also provide grocery cards, tee shirts, inner garments, socks, and hygiene kits to the families affected by the wildfires. Young Adults and SSSE children participated in the Seva activity.

Zone 1 Highlights - Service (Continued)

community in three remote areas; and a pet food drive to support the Arizona Pet Project organization.

Devotees in South Bethesda offered 100 new pillows to meet the needs of a local Interfaith Emergency Center; and lovingly knitted and delivered 100 wool caps for newborns to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of a local hospital under the “Knots of Pure Love” program, which enjoys the enthusiastic participation of many women devotees.

A program called “Sai Jeevan” (or Healthy Living) was initiated by Zone 1, under which physicians meet online, once a month, with Center members to increase awareness about heart health, diabetes, high blood pressure and other issues, along with tips and tools for healthy living and improved nutrition.

Helping Seniors Cope with COVID

In Raleigh, Sai Center members provided meals, fresh fruit, and hygiene care supplies to older adult communities in impoverished areas. The Center also formed a Seniors Group to facilitate discussion on how to cope and connect with Swami during the challenging times; a service activity to offer prayer beads bracelets to hospitals was taken up. Concern for older or former, isolated Center members also prompted seva activities in Canada’s Victoria Park Centre, where a reunion was arranged—with plenty of food, fun, and bhajans—to reassure the elders of the ever-present support of the Sai family. Similarly, the Centre also initiated Zoom study circles to provide the benefits of satsang, or spiritually uplifting company, to devotees who felt alone and confined to home during the pandemic. In addition, the Victoria Park Centre initiated a project to help vulnerable women in Sri Lanka. In Alberta’s Sai Samarpan Centre, provision of food packets to Operation Friendship Senior Society is ongoing, albeit restricted to once a month, due to the pandemic. The Alberta Centre also started a Sai Family Bonding initiative, to promote togetherness and help maintain good mental health among Sai Devotees during the pandemic.

Strengthening Local Communities through Skill-based Sai Service

Geetha J. Kamath, M.D.

SSSGC-Zone 1 Medical Committee Chair

When I first started my medical practice, I was doing non-medical service activities on the weekends. Swami soon corrected me in an interview I had with him, and said that one must use one’s talent and skills to serve society. Swami’s guidance led me to coordinate the first medical screening camp. The second important instruction I received from Swami was to serve and strengthen our own local community. He told me to find out what our community needs and address those needs. This instruction prompted me to work in the St. Petersburg Free Clinic and subsequently start treatment camps that people of our community needed the most, including Dental Hygiene, Dental treatment, Eye care, Podiatry and Personal Hygiene Camps.

This model only strengthened under Swami’s direct guidance. With Swami’s grace, we can expand on this model in every community where there is a Sai center.

“A person should strive to use every talent and skill they have, not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the entire world. Understand that society is the source of whatever pleasure one derives and whatever wealth one achieves in life. We owe everything to society and should be grateful to society for all that we receive from it. We have to repay this debt by helping at least as many people as we can. With a genuine keenness or readiness to serve others, one can attain happiness in any group or community, and the very eagerness to serve others will endow you with the power and skill necessary for the required service.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba



Zone 1 Highlights - Service (Continued)

Coordinating Earthquake Relief Efforts in Haiti

Disaster strikes. On August 14, 2021, the island nation of Haiti suffered yet another calamity: a disastrous earthquake of magnitude 7.2 hit Les Cayes, a remote but populous area in the southern part of the island. The quake caused over 2,400 deaths and scores of injuries and rendered more than 400,000 persons homeless.

Duty calls. Haiti is located outside Zone 1 of the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council; but our Sai brothers and sisters of SSSGC-USA responded immediately, to serve alongside others in relief efforts. The first step in disaster relief is to identify needs on the ground, sites for collection and storage of supplies, transportation modes, and on-site distribution of aid. The Sai Disaster Relief Team of SSSGC sprung into action to gather resources from within the US and with partners in Haiti, to support transport and distribution activities in Les Cayes.



Swami's Divine Drama unfolds. Our dear Lord Sri Sathya Sai Baba has said, "show me your availability, and I will give you ability!". True to this promise, leads previously unknown started to appear on the scene and a string of activities was set in motion:

- Valdor Apparels USA, which has a strong presence in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and regularly undertakes service activities within the island, stepped forward to help. With a dedicated volunteer base aligned with Swami's teachings of Selfless Service, Valdor offered

support for transportation (from Miami, Florida to Port-au-Prince) and distribution of relief supplies.

- A list of supplies was identified by August 21, in consultation with partners in Haiti.



- A supplies collection warehouse, Jaya Inc., became available in Miami, as miraculously as did some other critical elements of the relief effort.
- An action plan was put in place by the Sai Disaster Relief Team and a call for service announced on August 25.
- Through September 16, hygiene supplies arrived at Jaya, Inc., whose amazing staff received shipments and extended support to local volunteers in sorting and packing the relief supplies.
- By drive's end, a total of 7 pallets was prepared for shipment by cargo liner to Haiti. Valdor will coordinate transport and distribution of relief supplies to our brothers and sisters in Haiti.

Lessons learned. Every service activity offers lessons learned. Perhaps the biggest lesson of the Haiti relief project was that Swami's Divine Hand is ever ready to support our human efforts. The supplies drive inspired many unexpected volunteers, some of them complete strangers to the Sai Organization and a few not aligned with the SSSGC. As the divine drama unfolded, so many things fell into place, one after another.

Zone 1 Highlights

S E R V I C E



Zone 1 Highlights

Sri Sathya Sai Educare (SSSE)

Overview

Sai Centers continued to hold SSSE classes online through the summer of 2021, as the environment remained unsafe for children to return to in-person classes. However, SSSE Gurus, parents, and most of all, children—especially older children—have adapted impressively to the new arrangements, judging from all the lessons and takeaways being internalized and articulated by the students, as illustrated later in this section. Apart from the ongoing and fundamental study of the Five Human Values, SSSE students focused their efforts on service activities, chanting of Vedas, and assimilation and internalization of Swami’s teachings.

Participating in service activities

Service featured prominently in SSSE activities, as a variety of seva efforts, focusing on underprivileged communities, inspired compassion as well as gratitude in young and older children alike. Some of these efforts are highlighted in the Zone 1 Service Highlights section; a sampling of others is presented below (please see also the box on the Doylestown Sai Center).



- Caring for the vulnerable: Children in the Loudoun Center collected over 5,000 pop tabs to help families cared for by Ronald McDonald House Charities of Greater Washington D.C., helping many families of seriously ill children. The activity included writing “Notes of Encouragement” to such families, giving

children a chance to bring comfort to those in pain. Writing letters or cards was also an SSSE activity in the South Bethesda Center as well as in Phoenix, where children wrote letters to elders as a service for



Swami’s 96th Birthday.

- Supporting food service: SSSE children in Centers throughout Zone 1 helped to provide cooked meals as well as non-perishable foods. In Raleigh, for example, their activities supported a women’s shelter and an Interfaith food shuttle.
- Tutoring services: SSSE children in Raleigh are also providing tutoring services to other children who need help with their schoolwork. Children in New Jersey, meanwhile, continued to tutor (online) orphaned or otherwise disadvantaged children in India, helping them with Math, Physics, Biology and English.



Zone 1 Highlights - SSSE (Continued)

Learning to chant Vedas

Swami has said that Vedas are “*the means of establishing a link with the divine*”. Several Centers are giving importance to the teaching of Vedas. Centers in Canada are training children in Vedas and Bhajans for the Global Akhanda Bhajans. In South Bethesda, a Vedic mantra and Shloka curriculum has been developed for all SSSE Groups, with several volunteers conducting one-on-one instruction to help children learn. Veda lessons are also a part of the Indianapolis Center’s SSSE program, recently featuring the Narayana Suktam. Also with a view to studying scriptural texts, SSSE Group 2 children in the Baltimore Center participated in a Summer Book Club, studying selected chapters from the Bhagavata Vahini, which is Swami’s retelling of the Srimad Bhagavatam, a Hindu scripture about the divine incarnations of Vishnu. In a similar vein, children from the Loudoun Center have been making presentations, each month, on the festivals celebrated in Prasanthi Nilayam, touching on the importance of traditions, cultural celebrations, and the brotherhood of mankind.



Internalization of Swami’s Teachings

Several Centers have prioritized activities that help children deepen their understanding of Swami’s teachings and draw practical lessons for their daily lives. Study Circles and similar activities are helping students—especially older students—reflect on Swami’s teachings

and make them their own, examining the impact of the lessons and their life application. Shown below are examples of these efforts, which are yielding impressive results, as captured in part in the box “What are our SSSE students learning?”.

- For the Kansas Center’s 29th anniversary celebrations, students each prepared a short video clip discussing how they were implementing one of the Five Human Values in their daily lives; similar SSSE presentations are being planned for all special occasions going forward, to motivate *all* devotees to follow Swami’s teachings
- Groups 3 and 4 in South Bethesda also prepared audio recordings on the practical application of Swami’s teachings and the impact of SSSE on their daily lives. A recent Study Circle focused on *Shreyas* and *Preyas* (spiritual and worldly paths), illustrated with stories and interactive scenarios. Workshops earlier in the year covered similar ground, including the implementation of spiritual knowledge in daily life, unity of humanity with divinity, and science and spirituality.
- The Baltimore Summer Book Club, noted earlier in this section, drew the following prescriptions from their study of the Bhagavatha Vahini: (i) keep good company; (ii) express love for God through selfless service; (iii) be accepting of life as it comes, believing that God knows best and has a plan for each of us; and (iv) develop faith in God by offering every act to Him at the start, as such an attitude will win His Grace.



Zone 1 Highlights - SSSE (Continued)

Practicing Love All, Serve All

Group 3 SSSE children, Doylestown Sai Center (PA)

Going to Walmart monthly to buy beans, rice, cereal, and sanitary items

"I was very disappointed that I couldn't give people what they needed in person (due to COVID), but by doing this service, I knew I was helping many people and that itself satisfied me...It is nice to be able to do a service project in these COVID times". - Vedika Deshpande

Donating fresh food to a food donation bank; cleaning euonymus plants at the county park

"This activity (food bank) left me with a sense of goodness inside myself and connected me to these people through love and kindness." "This (park service) was good, as the species could then grow more easily; connecting to the environment made me realize that divinity is infinite". - Aravind Alwar

Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro to give underprivileged children a learning opportunity

"At first I didn't want to go, but then I realized how big this opportunity could be for the other children...The whole reason we went was to see Arusha (Tanzania); I was shocked to see the schools we visited, some didn't even have bathrooms or roofs. The experience made me feel a lot more grateful for what I have. I will never forget that visit and hope to go back some day." - Keshav Sabapathy

Packing shoeboxes (with pencils, teddy bears, crackers, etc.) for "Operation Christmas Child"

"This was a fun project, I really enjoyed doing it. It was a nice feeling. I got to connect with myself and my family as well as the children who would get the gifts. I also realized that just \$25 goes a long way in bringing a smile to a child's face." - Arjun Sood

"The ideal of service, and the urge to practice it, form the very heart of education."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba



Zone 1 Highlights - SSSE (Continued)

What are our SSSE children learning?

Loving God: “Swami says that sharing Love should be our first spiritual sadhana. It was hard for me, at first, to imagine even liking someone who is mean to me or disrespects me. But if we claim to love God, we must love all and serve all... My teachers used to say, “you don’t have to be friends with everyone, just be respectful to everyone”. But Swami’s teachings go deeper. He says we should love all unconditionally, as He resides in all. When we see everyone around us as Swami, there will be no place for anger, jealousy, and hate. Finally, I challenge all to take two minutes of time in your day to radiate love, that is, send love to yourself and to others. It will refresh you and make someone else’s day better!”

-- Shrey Patel, Group 3, Clearwater Sai Center

Being compassionate: “When I was growing up, I would be bossy and not show as much kindness as I should have. But as I grew and studied Swami’s teachings, I learned that compassion is extremely important. When you are compassionate to someone, you light up their day—and inspire them to be compassionate toward others. Being compassionate spreads happiness instead of negativity. When I first started SSSE, I used to think “Love all, Serve all” was something for Swami to do. But now I realize that I too can practice “Love all, Serve all” by being compassionate whenever I can. Bottom line: Always remember to be kind, it can make someone’s day great!”

-- Sravika Bolla, Group 3, Baltimore Sai Center

Finding ways to serve: “Seva is not only an act of devotion; it is also an act of love as well a way to appreciate the value of all human beings. Given the challenges to group interactions posed by present circumstances, my sister and I decided to teach younger children, online, how to make bead bracelets—each as unique and different as the person that made them. Planning for this activity, helped by our lovely instructor, was a learning experience by itself. We had so many questions along the way, but it ended beautifully. Seeing younger students excited to explore their creativity and show off their work was an incredible feeling. The bracelets had different twists and turns of style, color, and pattern. The same applies to

Service. Seva has no particular form. We can turn any situation into an opportunity to serve: nothing is too simple, no act too small.”

-- Saipriya Gande, Group 4, Clearwater Sai Center

Understanding the significance of Service: “When we see a kind act, we tend to disregard it. But is there more to a kind act than just being of help to someone? Yes! By helping others you are serving God, as all human beings are the creation of God. But the service should be selfless; one should not expect anything in return. Swami says, “*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.*” Service done selflessly builds up good Karma over time, gives you a sense of happiness, and leads, eventually, to self-realization. So, the next time we are given a chance to serve, let’s keep this in mind!”

-- Pranav Gadipathi, Group 3, Clearwater Sai Center

Living with Divinity:

Living with Divinity means that You are the source of Light shining through....that teaches me to love all human beings!

Living with Divinity is to let all my thoughts, words, and actions come through You....for that teaches me to control my desires and senses!

Living with Divinity is to know You are in us, and we are in You....and experience Supreme Happiness!

Living with Divinity means being so dear to GOD....keeping Him first, the world next, and myself last!

-- Jahnvi Babu, Group 2, Loudoun Sai Center

“Children’s minds are innocent and pure. Each child is like white marble for the teacher and the parents to sculpt into an image of God, a bud to be helped to blossom in all its Divine glory so that it becomes a worthy offering to God.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Zone 1 Highlights - SSSE



Sumana Murali

**National Education Coordinator
Sri Sathya Sai Global Council- USA**

“Knowledge without action is useless and action without knowledge is foolishness. There is a divorce between action and knowledge today. We need a fusion of action and knowledge.”

-Sri Sathya Sai, November 22nd 1994

Our most beloved Bhagawan has emphasized this multiple times to young students. Education must result in one having good character and not just worldly knowledge. The ability to get there, He says, lies within each one. Love is inherent and the opportunity to excavate that lies not only in one's own hands but also in the hands of a community that reminds children of the best potential that lies within. That community that raises children is first the family and then the wonderful program Swami has given us- Balvikas, which is called Sri Sathya Sai Educare in the United States of America.

A community of teachers He has crowned as the Guru, parents and members of a Sathya Sai Center join hands together in raising our children. This program, created and designed by God Himself, is flawless, with a mighty goal.

What is Educare and what is the need of it?

Swami has always emphasized on the inevitable relationship man has with nature. Swami says we are part of nature. Just as nature is made of the 5 elements which is sourced by Love itself, man is made of those same elements as well. Man, sadly, has disrupted the balance of the 5 resources within himself and thereby in nature. Educare is the answer! It is a fusion of knowledge and action: knowledge of the precarious imbalance within us and the will power to act on working to restore it and manifest it in our lives through the 5 Human values- Truth, Right Action, Peace, Love and Non Violence. Educare, Swami says, is the harmony of thought, word and deed. That knowledge and action is the answer to peace both within man and in the world outside. Realizing one's own innate divinity is the true purpose of Sri Sathya Sai Educare.

Since goodness, divinity and love are within, they cannot be taught from the outside like a school subject. Swami's program allows Gurus (teachers) to employ multiple teaching techniques and have a heart to heart

relationship to allow a child to manifest his/her inherent goodness. While doing that, the teacher is able to manifest the best that is within them! A teacher uses his/her knowledge and puts it into action in their own life first and then goes to teach children. Through all this, Swami's design and vision of the program is so all encompassing. It shatters all human constructs that divide us- race, culture, skin color, religion, country, so on and so forth. The focus is on things beyond the senses: things that lay within. The focus is on the inner blossoming of the goodness within a child, a blossoming that is silent, that can be nourished and a blossoming that has a positive impact in the family and in the world.

Swami has made spirituality so simple not just for children but also for teachers by synthesizing both knowledge and action in this program. Synthesizing knowledge and action is unity of thought words and deeds. Synthesizing knowledge and action is Educare and character. Swami says that that is exactly what the world needs today.

The Sri Sathya Sai Educare program adorns the term coined by Baba Himself and holds itself to that original true intent of focusing on a child's inner world, by focusing on the inner spirituality behind all material taught to them and by focusing on the 2 eternal truths He has set for the program— God exists and Man is Divine. With this blessing, the program is going strong with children in multiple Centers and in the online realm. Inspired by God Himself, every single teacher and coordinator in SSSE marches forward every single day to fulfil this very personal sadhana. With love in our hearts, broad mindedness, kind thoughts, words and actions and unwavering resolute will power the program aims to be a reflection of the very God that created it- ever expansive and full of LOVE.

Dearest Sai,

Grace us with the blessing to remember that we are made in your image and that we are on our way back to you. Allow us to remember that teaching YOUR children is a sadhana (spiritual practice) beyond comparison. Allow us to remember that this program is created by YOU and any flaw we see in it is a reflection of our own inadequacies within. Give us the strength to be role models in life so we may be true to what we say to our children. Bless us so we may serve you, love you and love you.

With gratitude and loving salutations, dearest Bhagawan!
JAI SAI RAM

Zone 1 Highlights

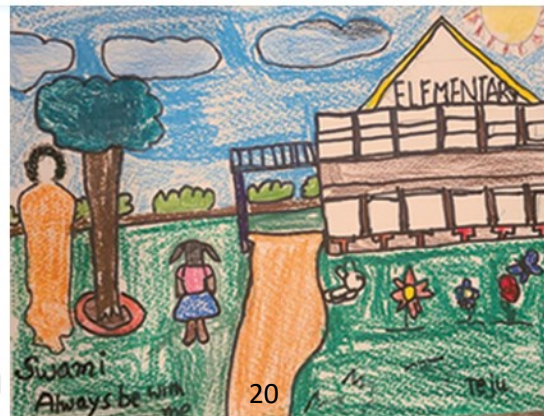


By Harshithsai

SSE G



Akshaya Sai Jandhyala, SSSE 2



Swami Always be with me



SSE Group 2

Zone 1 Highlights - Devotion

Zone 1 Highlights – Devotional Activities

Overview. Devotional activities—the mainstay of Sai Centers—continued with strength and vigor despite the COVID virus and its halting of in-person gatherings. Committed Center leadership steadfastly maintained regular bhajans as well as special bhajans on festival occasions, relying on Zoom technology and recognizing that in these times, more than ever, devotees have needed to connect with Swami and with each other. Study Circles too saw a lot of active participation, reflecting devotees’ growing desire to dive deeper into Swami’s teachings. Also noteworthy are Centers’ pointed efforts to put Swami’s teachings into practice in the run-up to both Swami’s 96th Birthday and the Centennial Birthday in 2025.

“Realize that there is nothing greater than bhajan. What bliss there is in bhajans! What a demonstration of oneness is it when a myriad throats join in uttering the name of God!”

-Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Singing Aloud the Glory of God

Center bhajans have continued without interruption since the start of the virus, albeit online, reflecting the fundamental and virtually indispensable nature of this weekly activity for Sai devotees. With many Center members becoming newly expert in audio-visual tools, Centers are having Zoom bhajan sessions with live and recorded variations. Loudoun and Baltimore, for example, have been having live Bhajan sessions, with the latter providing detailed audio guidelines to lead singers and their families (who would sing chorus). In Orlando’s Sai Center, on the other hand, member families produce Bhajan recordings which are shared during the Bhajan session each week. Centers have also held special bhajans for festivals and important days, including Sivarathri, Guru Purnima, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Avatar Declaration Day. In many Centers, YAs have been highly involved in the weekly bhajan offerings to Swami. At present, Centers are actively preparing for the forthcoming Global Akhanda Bhajan (see box on Canada).

Canada: Getting ready for Global Akhanda Bhajan

Intense preparations have been under way in Sai Centers in Canada to help ensure a Global Akhanda Bhajan that is charged with spiritual energy and sacred vibrations. Between 300 and 400 devotees are expected to attend the event.

- ◆ The Service wing is coordinating seva activities across all the Centres, organizing protocols for COVID-19 safety measures including sanitization of microphones; preparing meals and refreshments for devotees over the 24 hours; making altar and other arrangements, and so on
- ◆ The Educare wing is training SSSE children from various Centres in Veda chanting and Bhajans
- ◆ The YAs too are involved with Veda chanting and Bhajan practice, and will also participate in service activities supporting the Akhanda Bhajan.
- ◆ Center members recorded a one-hour Bhajan video to send to the Sri Sathya Sai Media Centre for the Global Akhanda Bhajan.

SSSGC - Canada

GLOBAL AKHANDA BHAJAN

NOVEMBER 13, 2021, 5:15 PM EST
NOVEMBER 14, 2021 6:00 PM EST

“Devotional singing (bhajan) must become an unbroken stream of bliss on your tongues and in your hearts; it must confer on you the uninterrupted awareness of soham, of the unity of I and He.”
- SRI SATHYA SAI BABA (SSS IX, 41-42)

Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre of Scarborough
5521 Finch Ave E, Scarborough, ON M1S 5W2

Listen in live at:
www.sssgc-canada.org

Subject to a maximum of 50% capacity. Devotees will be allowed inside on a first come, first served basis.

Please note: If you choose to visit the centre in person, you are required to wear a face mask/covering which covers your nose, mouth and chin at all times both inside and outside the Centre and you are required to maintain a physical distance of at least 2 metres from every other person, unless you are with someone who lives in your same household or you have a caregiver. You will also be required to sign in at the Centre upon your arrival.

Zone 1 Highlights - Devotion (Continued)

Participating in Study Circles

Weekly Study Circles are growing in importance; they have offered devotees a chance both to dive deeper into Swami's teachings and to connect with each other, at least hearing the voices if not seeing the faces of fellow devotees in this era of Covid. The South Bethesda Center has had 26 sessions so far on the mind and how to control it, exploring the topic through clips from Swami discourses, short videos and presentations made by Center members, role plays and scenarios, and panel discussion. Canada's Alberta Center has had a Study Circle program in which, once a month, devotees share their personal spiritual journey; also in Canada, weekly study circles have recently focused on the *Geetha Vahini*, a collection of Swami's teachings on the *Bhagavad Gita*. The Baltimore Center, meanwhile, has taken up the reading of *Sathya Sai Speaks*, with each participant reading a paragraph, followed by discussion and the drawing of simple practical lessons for daily life.

The 1008 Sadhana Program: Commitment is Key

"Just as you attend to the needs of the body, feeding it three times a day to keep it in good running trim, so too, spend some time regularly every day to keep your Inner Consciousness in good trim."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

In August 2021, the Sri Sathya Sai Global Council—USA launched a program to help Sai devotees step up their spiritual efforts in preparation for Swami's 100th Birthday. The 1008 *Sadhana* program, which will culminate in the Birthday Centennial celebrations, was conceived as a special, reverential offering to place at Swami's Lotus Feet on the holiest day of November 23, 2025.

How does the program work? In essence, a spiritual aspirant would formally commit to undertaking one or more specific spiritual practices a certain number of times a week, over the 1008 days. People of diverse age groups, religious backgrounds, and schedules can participate, and progress would be shared, to keep up motivation.

Please visit <https://www.sssgc-usa.org/1008sadhana/>

Stepping it up

Swami says, "*Knowledge that is not put into practice is like food that is not digested.*" And many Sai devotees are taking this to heart and stepping up their efforts to make concrete progress in their spiritual efforts. A recent initiative of the SSSGC, "1008 Days of Sadhana" (See Box), is expressly aimed at helping spiritual seekers celebrate Swami's Centennial Birthday by committing to follow His teachings. Many members of the Phoenix Sai Center, for example, are participating in this program, taking advantage of the program's structured initiatives. In Orlando, devotees have committed to two *sadhanas*, namely, chanting the *Gayatri* every Sunday and practicing *Jyoti* (Light) meditation daily. In Baltimore, as a follow-up to their Study Circle, devotees identify, for putting into practice, one lesson drawn from the reading and discuss experiences the following week. Lessons from seva are the focus of "My Service and I", a program in the Loudoun Center where members share their service experiences and discuss how to use them to connect to the Divine "I".



CONGRATULATIONS RADIO SAI!

Of great value to all devotional activities the world over has been the rich panoply of bhajans, other musical offerings, and thought-provoking programs aired by Radio Sai. Particularly in these COVID times, without access to Puttaparthi and our own Centers, Radio Sai has brought Prasanthi Nilayam right into our homes and kept us closely connected with Swami. Study circles have especially benefited from "satsang" discussions that break down Swami's teachings or the equally pithy "Snippets" that inform and inspire.

Thank You Radio Sai for 20 wonderful years!

Zone 1 Highlights - Devotion (Continued)

Other Devotional Activities

Sai Centers engaged in several other kinds of devotional activities. Raleigh celebrated Guru Purnima with an elaborate gratitude program featuring an in-person panel discussion on His Message and Mission, by Swami's Institute of Higher Learning alumni; a devotional music program; and a YA-led session focusing on SSSE Gurus. The Kansas Center has taken up Vedam chanting, meeting a half hour prior to weekly bhajans to chant Vedas. Canadian devotees have also been studying Vedas and Sanskrit, and recorded videos of Vedas as well as Bhajans (to send to Sri Sathya Sai Media Centre for Akhanda Bhajan). A monthly *Samarpan* program in New Jersey is aimed at learning from guest speakers who have experienced Swami's Grace directly; the Center also held a virtual interfaith dialog on Service, with SSSE students chanting multi-faith prayers. Most recently, South Bethesda marked Avatar Declaration Day with "Sai Smaranam", a delightful live exchange between Mrs. Geetha Mohanram and her senior aunts joyfully sharing recollections of Swami in the earliest years of His Avatar. In some Centers, devotional activities extended beyond the Center. For example, the Sathya Sai Center of Indianapolis offered a devotional music program at the local Hindu temple, on their invitation.

In Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), a weekly web series—Awake, Unite, and Inspire—provides a platform for Sai devotees locally, regionally, and internationally to stay connected, enabling a form of *satsang* that works around the challenging restrictions imposed by Covid. In addition, a weekly radio program, conducted Wednesdays, broadcasts Swami's messages to a large listening audience. Guests on the program have included senior members of the Sai family who have visited the island. A TV program is also aired every Saturday and rerun on Tuesdays. Viewers are regularly inspired and blessed by watching these Sai programs.

From the President of the T&T Sai Center:

"Swami has stated that if the intention is pure, men, money, and materials will follow. As we continue on the spiritual path, we may be faced with challenges that at times seem impossible to overcome. However, as long as we remain focused on Swami and practice His teachings, we will reach His Divine Lotus Feet."



Celebrating Swami's 96th Birthday

Sai Centers are undertaking a variety of activities to commemorate Swami's 96th Birthday. California's Tri-Valley Center, for example, in August initiated a weekly, online Sadhana of reading the *Bhagavata Vahini*, Swami's retelling of The *Srimad Bhagavatam*, a Hindu scripture about the divine incarnations of Vishnu and the Krishna Avatar in particular. In Phoenix, devotees are marking the Birthday by planting 96 trees and plants in the community. The activity is also part of a go-green initiative, responding to Swami's call for environmental concern. Devotees in Raleigh, meanwhile, are focusing on self-transformation to honor Swami's Birthday and express their gratitude to Him. Under this initiative, Center members submit ideas (values) for individual transformation; devotees then choose one or more values from this repository and share their experiences in study circles as they advance in their spiritual efforts.



Zone 1 Highlights - Young Adults

Overview

Young Adults (YAs) are playing an increasingly important role in Zone 1, at the Zonal and Center levels. Participation in all Center activities is an essential part of preparing for their role as future leaders in the Sai organization. YA participation in a variety of activities is described throughout this newsletter; a few such efforts are highlighted in this section.

At the Zonal Level

A renewed focus on personal transformation and connection to Bhagawan's teachings is at the core of the Sai YA movement. As a part of this focus, Sai YAs recently organized and presented two innovative programs elaborating these important themes. The programs were aimed at sharing, bonding, and strengthening the connection to Swami.

Finding Purpose In Real Life

The SSSGC-USA Labor Day retreat in September 2021 featured an inspiring YA Panel on "Finding Purpose In Real Life", with panelists offering practical tips in navigating the challenges of being a Sai devotee across work, school, and social environments. The four panelists, each with their unique backgrounds and perspectives, also discussed how each of them found their own connection to Swami over time, a personal connection that went deeper than merely being a child of Sai parents or a member of a Sai family. The energy and enthusiasm of the panelists received much acclaim, reflecting, as they did, the YAs' sincerity and commitment to putting Bhagawan's teachings into practice in their daily lives.

Special thanks go to the Sai YA panelists:

- Ananda Gonzalez, a writer (and professional dancer, choreographer, and filmmaker) from Manhattan, NY
- India Gonzalez, a poetry magazine editor from Manhattan, NY
- Meghana Iragavarapu, a clinical research coordinator currently living in Boston, MA
- Sumant Sahai a certified flight instructor and check pilot from Miami, FL

PB&J: People Belonging and Jamming

Sai YAs from USA, Canada, and the West Indies gathered in October 2021 for "PB&J: People Belonging and Jamming" a special evening of sharing and fun among Sai YAs in the virtual space. Similar to an "open mic" program, the goal of PB&J was to foster unity among YAs, many of whom were meeting each other (virtually) for the first time, and to allow an open forum for YAs to



express their connection to Swami through a variety of creative outlets. YAs shared their talents in the visual arts, spoken word poetry, and a wide variety of musical genres, ranging from original rap compositions to arrangements inspired by poets and saints of various traditions. Judging from the talents on display and the sense of connection, both to Swami and across the YA community, it appears all but certain that this first-of-its-kind "PB&J" will certainly not be the last.

At the Center Level

Young Adults are active, committed participants in Center activities across all wings—Bhajans, Study Circles, Veda chanting, Seva, and Sai Education. Such participation is noted in the respective sections of this newsletter, but a few examples of YA efforts are featured here.

Zone 1 Highlights - Young Adults (Continued)

YAs in the New Jersey Center organized “Meals with Love” in March 2021, procuring material and packing 10,500 ready-to-cook Pasta and Tomato Sauce meals for distribution to local food banks and the local community. New Jersey YAs also regularly purchase and deliver groceries every weekend to destitute families. Another activity in recent months involved assembling hygiene kits and clothes to deliver to a community shelter for battered women.

Tri-Valley Center YAs have been conducting “Burrito Service” for a center for homeless women and children in California. Before the pandemic, YAs would meet in each other’s homes at 5 a.m. to prepare and deliver freshly cooked beans-rice burritos and pasta. During the pandemic, monthly arrangements were made to order healthy food and have it delivered directly to the homeless center. Apart from food, YA support has extended to toiletries, women’s hygiene products, and baby products, in response to such needs.

YAs in the South Bethesda Center contribute in multiple areas. Recent activities included a Gratitude program entitled “*Sunle Sai Meri Pukar*” (“Sai, Hear my prayer”) on the occasion of Guru Purnima, and a Study Circle on “The Monkey Mind”, discussing practical ways to stay focused on Swami and adhere to His teachings amid academic and work pressures and present-day distractions of social media.





A Birthday Offering



Swami's Birthday

(drawn from *Seventy Five Blossoms, 2001*)

Kanaga Ranganathan

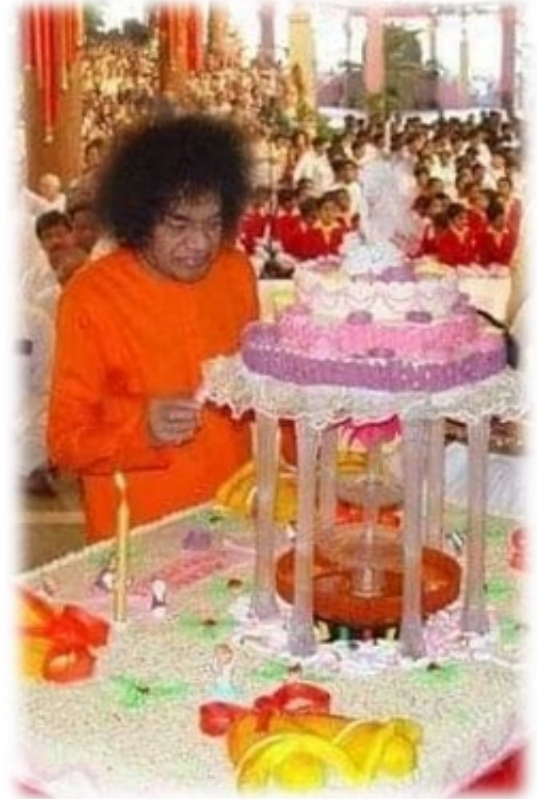
With the dawn of morrow, a glorious day, a day we revere,
The day to remind us of the advent of our Lord, here on earth,
We, His devotees, need to ponder ever so deeply of His mission,
How He has come to pull us out of the morass we are all deep in.

We see these birthdays come and go, year after year, unmoved,
The external grandeur we observe, but is our deeper self moved?
His Birthday, Baba says, should be the birth of divinity in us all,
A day when we attempt to cleanse within to let His Grace flow free.

All the acts we do, the garlands we make, the bhajans we sing,
The drama we enact, the homeless we feed, the cheerful chatter
All these suffice not if deep in our hearts we fail to see any change,
A change that heralds the advent of Love, a love that embraces all.

To call ourselves His dear devotees, what a great and grand glory!
But an honest search within, a relentless query of what we are now,
All these are needed to know us as we are and then to move on,
Then divinity fills our hearts; we can truly be His dear devotees.

When and when only this change happens, this divinity dawns on us,
We see the glory of this day; our hearts fill with wonder and joy,
The birds on the branches sing, the sun and the moon shine so bright,
All creation sings in chorus, glory be to Him whose advent we enjoy.



Living with Divinity

Experiences and Reflections

About This Quarter's Theme: Living with Divinity



"To elevate man to the level of Supreme Consciousness, God has to incarnate as man. God has to speak to man in his own style and language. He has to teach mankind the methods that it can adopt and practice...The essential quality of an Avatar is to teach you to make good and proper use of your thought, word and deed. Depending on the conditions and the environment in the country, the Avatar will teach and show the right use of the Divine faculties gifted to man."

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

In celebration of Swami's 96th Birthday, "Living with Divinity" is the featured theme of this first issue of *SaiLights*. What has it meant to live with the Sai Avatar? What has it meant to know Him, know of Him, see Him, speak to Him, step on the ground He walked on, hear Him, be around Him? There can be no single answer to these questions; but what is unequivocally true is this: that *living* with Swami was *learning* from Swami.

Swami's entire life of 85 years was one glorious Message to humanity on how we should live our lives, and let blossom our own inner divinity. He taught not only through His words but also by His personal example. Some aspects of His Avataric life that were particularly striking were Excellence, Discipline, Humility, Compassion, and Ceiling on Desires. Sai students' stories about annual sports meets or drama preparations, for example, are replete with instances of His insistence on these values. Prasanthi Nilayam itself—a place fully suffused with the Divine Presence and a surreal experience for any first-time visitor—gives us an extraordinary window into the meaning of Living with Divinity.

In the pages that follow, Sai devotees who have had the great good fortune of close interactions with Swami share their reflections on the theme of Living with Divinity, including ways in which humility, compassion and other values noted above shone through in His Divine persona. We are grateful to Mr. Viswanathan, Mr. Shankar, Mr. Mariwalla, Ms. Mead, and Ms. Sanka for their valuable contributions.

Living with Divinity: Fond Memories of a Servant of our Lord

Krishnier Viswanathan

The following are a few unforgettable experiences of mine as a former staff member of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (Puttaparthi) who had enjoyed the supreme blessing of working under the direct supervision of my Beloved Lord and Master, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. (1994-2011)

Episode 1: Swami teaches me how to work for Him

It was probably my fourth day of work in the Hospital. The Director got a phone call from the Ashram that Swami

would be visiting the Hospital. The Director called me and said, "come with me to the front steps of the Hospital. We both will have to receive Swami as He alights from His car near the steps." In a few moments Swami's car swung through the front gates and came up the driveway. When Swami's car stopped, He didn't wait for any of us to open the door of the car, and with characteristic Grace, alighted with a beautiful smile. His first words were, "Hey Viswanath, come here!"

Swami then pointed to the front gates of the Hospital and

Living with Divinity

Experiences and Reflections

said, “What do you see there?” I stood nonplussed as there was nothing remarkable in sight. After a couple of seconds, Swami asked, “Don’t you have wheelchairs in the Hospital?” I said “Swami, we have plenty of wheelchairs. In fact, there are 32 of them.” Then Swami continued, “Don’t you see an old man and an old woman tottering up the driveway, supporting each other. Why don’t they have wheelchairs?”



Then Swami, still sweetly, said, “Don’t ever think that in this hospital you should feel satisfied that facilities are available. Our patients are all poor villagers. They are too modest to demand anything from us. It is for *us* to be observant and to offer our services, sweetly and respectfully. From now on, just remember that every patient entering the front gates is Swami’s Guest and should be treated as such. Courtesy should start right from their entry. From today I want you to be in charge of the Sevalal Service in the Hospital. You know they come from different States; I want you to meet them on the first day of their taking up duty and explain the principles of mutual respect, politeness, punctuality, and alertness in everything they say or do. They should look upon and treat every patient as Swami’s Guest. Secondly, every one who enters this Hospital should receive prompt and medically excellent attention.” This was obviously for the Director.

After this lesson, right at the entrance of the Hospital, Swami stepped into the Central Dome of the Hospital. Once inside, He said that the Sevalal in the area should gently instruct patients to enter always through

Mr. Viswanathan has had a very close association with Swami and the Sri Sathya Sai Organization for many years. He and his family started attending the South Bethesda Center, MD in 1979, and became its President in 1984. Uncle introduced the first Seva programs in the area, including Narayana Seva and Sandwich programs. In 1994, Uncle moved to Puttaparthi and almost immediately thereafter, Swami made him Chief Engineer of the still fledgling Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospital. In this capacity, Uncle was privileged to work very closely with Swami as the Hospital grew by leaps and bounds. With daily guidance from Swami Himself and the senior medical team, he managed the day-to-day activities of the Hospital and helped guide the establishment of the new hospital in Whitefield. After an extremely busy, productive, and highly blessed 17 years with Swami, Uncle retired and returned to the South Bethesda Center upon Swami’s Maha Samadhi in 2011.

the Central Dome, pray to their favorite Deity, and only then proceed to their respective departments of medical interest. “For this purpose,” He said, “you must ensure that pictures of Gods and Saints of all major religions are displayed all around the Dome. The Dome area should be a place of worship right at the entrance and not merely a show piece.” Those instructions given, Swami proceeded on His tour of the hospital.

Episode 2: “Stop Further Negotiations!”

After many years of such learning experiences, there



Living with Divinity

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arose an occasion for a different type of lesson. One of my duties was to procure equipment for the Hospital. This task included price negotiations before Finance Department scrutiny and placement of the purchase order by the Director.

A major item of medical equipment had served the Hospital well for nearly nine or ten years, and the doctors wanted it replaced with a higher-capability, more modern machine. With Swami's approval, we called for international competitive bids and zeroed in on preferred choice with all desired features. Next, I had to negotiate the price. I had by then learnt from experience that success in negotiations depended on patience, as suppliers would not yield a significant reduction in price in one go. In this case, we had already gradually brought the price down by about 25 percent, and I was eagerly working towards 30 percent. I was somewhere around 28 percent when our Finance controller had gone to see Swami about some other matter. As he was about to leave, Swami said, "By the way, tell Viswanathan to stop negotiations at 28 percent and not press for more." I was struck by how closely Swami had been following our negotiations, step by step, without our formally informing Him in any way!

Swami told me later, *"There is a Dharmic limit for everything in life. Negotiating for a lower price is right, as we are a philanthropic institution; but not going beyond a Dharmic limit is also a discipline we should not lose sight of. We should, under no circumstances, forget Fair Play, and we should never hurt the seller's interests."* Which other Managing Director would have exercised such self-restraint when additional gains were distinctly possible, all for not hurting the interests of the seller?

Episode 3: Realigning the Hospital's Boundary

In the beginning, the compound wall all around the periphery of the Hospital had been completed on two sides only, with barbed wire fencing on the other two sides. The project for completing the wall on the other two sides had been approved, and we obtained the original land documents, to confirm our boundary limits before constructing the wall. It was observed that the fence had not included a parcel of land of about 300 or 400 square feet. That piece of land had, over the years, been encroached upon by the neighboring smallholder farmer,

who was growing ragi in that area. Building the wall would require the farmer to withdraw from that land.

We alerted the smallholder farmer of this matter. As he was understandably unwilling to lose this piece of land, we brought this problem to Swami's notice before taking any action. Swami was very concerned that we were about to dispossess the poor farmer of this plot of land. He said, "you don't know how readily these neighboring smallholder farmers sold their lands to Swami for building the hospital, even though this land was their sole source of livelihood." Here, Swami recalled that He had compensated the farmers handsomely when He first purchased the land for the Hospital, while also taking care to leave them with at least some land for their use. Then, Swami said, "If they had held out and gone to litigation, how could Swami have built the hospital? Just think how valuable each square foot of land is for these small farmers, whereas the Hospital can well forego this small piece of land."

Swami continued, "In all such matters, you must see the human angle and not stick to legal rights. So go and tell that farmer that Swami has not forgotten how gladly he had sold the major portion of his property for building the Hospital; now, Swami will not deprive him of this last piece of his property. So you go and realign the compound wall suitably and let the farmer have the land." This was the message from the Embodiment of Consideration and Compassion that Swami is. The farmer was happy, enjoying not only his land but also the comforting words with which Swami remembered him!



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Living with Divinity is Learning from Divinity

P. V. Shankar

It is indeed our greatest good fortune to be born during the advent of the Avatar of this age, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I consider it my sacred privilege to recount the glorious lessons learnt at His Divine Lotus Feet. Swami always said "I am God, so are you. I know it, but you do not." Not only did He make this declaration, He demonstrated it by setting His life as an ideal example for all of us to emulate.

An **Avatar** is the most magnificent manifestation of the Supreme Consciousness in human form. An Avatar is at the cusp of the *Nirguna Nirakara Brahman* (formless, attribute-less pure consciousness) and the *Saguna Sakara Brahman* (the manifested Divinity). This manifested Divinity is armed with five eternal attributes: **Advaitham** (Nondual oneness), **Jnanam** (Eternal Wisdom), **Anantham** (Limitlessness), **Premam** (Divine Love) and **Anandam** (Supreme Bliss). These attributes are associated, respectively, with the ideals of excellence, discipline, humility, compassion, and desirelessness—ideals that Swami lived by and that man should aspire to in order to realize the divinity within him.



Advaitham is the highest human excellence. Also referred to as Mukthi or enlightenment, it is the full awareness of the oneness of all of creation, achievable only through His grace. We normally think excellence means being better than someone else, or being the best that we can be; true excellence, however, is living in the awareness that there is no other.

Dr. P. V. Shankar came into Swami's fold five decades ago and has been experiencing His immense compassion and love ever since. He is the author of the book "Sai Antarvani" which was published and released on Swami's 95th birthday.

Swami always said, "*I am around you, behind you, beside you, above you, and inside you,*" reminding us that He was ever aware of His oneness with all of creation. He exhorted us to try to reach this exalted state through Bhakthi (devotion) and Jnana (wisdom.) He would not tolerate any differentiation based on caste, creed, gender, nationality, belief system, religion, and social status. He wanted us to achieve excellence through moderate eating, steady breath, observing the mind, purifying the intellect through Vichara (enquiry), chanting the name of God, singing His glory, serving humanity at all times, and being immersed in pure consciousness as often as possible.

Swami used to bring me into close contact with so many people, some devotees, and some even total strangers across the world. Once I complained, "Swami, you have brought so many people into my life. I am unable to cope with this challenge. I am struggling with my own multiple personality syndrome. How am I to handle so many other personalities as well?" Swami replied sweetly, "It is your own fault. You prayed to Me to give you the experience of Advaita. What is Advaita? Do you think sitting in a room alone meditating undisturbed for long hours in a pretended state of Samadhi is Advaita? Remember all these are My own manifestations. I am bringing them into your life, so that You can experience Me, and only Me in them, and that is true Advaita. From now onwards, remember this: whatever you experience, be it praise, blame, love, criticism, censure, success, or disappointment, it is I who is causing that for your own evolution. Accept them as Prasadam, My Divine gift, and live in eternal gratitude."

Jnanam or wisdom is the ultimate result of the churning that comes out of life-long discipline. Without discipline one cannot accomplish anything in this world. Thapas, or austerity, is self-imposed discipline. Yama and Niyama are the first two steps of the eight-fold path of Yoga, insisting

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on inner and outer discipline. The ultimate discipline is the wisdom to know beyond any shadow of doubt about the golden rule that when one harms others, one is harming oneself. True discipline will erase the slightest trace of selfishness in us.

Swami was very compassionate and gave us the long rope (to roam freely about) for quite some time, but He would then tighten it as He began to discipline us. His greatest punishment was to starve devotees of His love, if their thoughts, words, and deeds were not in line with His commands. Revealing His omnipresence, He corrected me so many times, especially when I developed critical thoughts of others. He had conferred on me numerous times the wonderful title of “Dhunna Podda” (He buffalo, the laziest animal on the planet.)



Once Swami walked back and forth talking to me for over twenty minutes. Suddenly a stray thought occurred to me, as to how fortunate I was. Instantly He talked to the gentleman next to me for twenty seconds; and immediately I felt a wave of jealousy within me. At that very instant, Swami gave me an intense glare of disgust and disappointment, leaving me ashamed. Here lies the problem with greed and lack of discipline! Often, those who receive in abundance from God (time, attention, wealth, health, power, popularity, and fame) are the ones who become jealous of those less fortunate. Swami may initially ignore faults in His devotees, but as devotees get closer and closer to Him, He can become the Vedic fire that could scorch them. Wisdom should be

reflected in the unity of our thoughts, words, and deeds in following Swami’s instructions implicitly.

Anantham or limitlessness arises from ultimate humility. It is the ego that tells us that we are this limited body, and consequently we suffer the duality of pain and pleasure, success and failure. There is an insatiable thirst in us to create our own, superior identity (the seed of ignorance) and use that identity to overpower others. But such an attitude of arrogance limits us. On the other hand, an attitude of humility expands our awareness and makes us accept diverse cultures and opinions with an open mind.

One day Swami told me, *“I know everything, but I act as if I know nothing. But you know nothing, yet you act as if you know everything. How do you do that?”* Swami continued, *“Partial knowledge and a scholarly attitude are dangerous. If you are not careful you will end up like [a famous contemporary philosopher], who talked so much about awareness, but he died a few days ago and now he is wandering as a disembodied being in total confusion in the astral space. Love of god and love for god are more important than the achievements of the intellect. Uddhava was a Jnani, but he was humbled by the devotion of Radha, who spurned his philosophy, saying “I have already surrendered my mind and heart to Krishna and I have nothing left to give to you.”*

Premam or Divine Love is the ultimate compassion. God is the inner resident of every heart. When we love God, we love everyone, and loving everyone is the only way to demonstrate our love of God. Love of the body is called Kama or lust. Love of the mind is called Sneham or friendship. Love of the Atma is Premam—pure, unsullied Divine love. Swami’s love is indescribable. Once when I was serving His devotee, Sri Thriumalachar at Dharmakshetra, I had to get up many times during the night to attend to him. On the last day I was running a very high temperature. I thought I might take a hot shower in the guest house, but then reminded myself that I had come as a servant of the Lord and had better behave like one. Next day early morning, I went to take a bath near the garden pipe. When I put my hand out, the water was so cold, I felt a strong, stinging pain on the back of my hand. I immediately pulled my hand out. The next time I put my hand out, I once again pulled it out, this time because it was steaming hot. Bhagavan in His

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infinite love had transformed the ice-cold water into steaming hot water. Later that morning before leaving, Swami came into the room straight to me, held my hand and ran His fingers over the back of my hand, and asked, "Did it pain too much?" Such is the compassion and love of our Lord. Just as Jesus said to his disciples during the last supper, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you," Swami expects us to love and serve each other with compassion and understanding.

Anandam or Bliss, is the ultimate consequence of desirelessness. Because of past Karma, we are born with desires and innate tendencies and it is very difficult to overcome them. That is why Swami guided us to practice Ceiling on Desires, to conserve our time, food, money, and energy and slowly and systematically reduce our cravings and desires. We have to develop gratitude, acknowledging that everything is a gift from God and we are only temporary custodians. We cannot take anything with us after death except the Karma accumulated during this life time.

During Swami's 70th birthday, we asked Swami what special gift we could give Him for His Birthday. Swami kept ignoring our request; one day He took us inside the interview room and asked, "Will you give Me anything I want?" We promised Him that we would. He kept repeating "I want.. I want.." The suspense was building up and almost unbearable. We were literally on our knees and as Swami leaned forward, our faces were so close to His face, and we could feel the curls of Swami's hair brushing against our cheeks. Swami finally said, "*I want you to be always happy. That is the best Birthday gift you can give me.*" Our lives should become His Message and that is the only way we can truly express our gratitude to Bhagavan.



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Living with Divinity - Power of Love

Ravi Mariwalla

Love and power are often considered paradoxical, if not opposites. Yet the almighty Sathya Sai Avatar was characterized by great humility and pure, unconditional love. Indeed, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, God to millions and source of inspiration to Sai Students, was and is the Epitome of simplicity and selflessness. Of the many who came into His presence over the 86 years of His Life, we, His students of the colleges in Puttaparthi, Brindavan, and Anantapur had the much coveted opportunity to see Him up close, and enshrine Him in our hearts as the Worshipped One. The most precious years of my life were those spent in His presence. Let me describe some part of this Avatar's "Stream of Love in Action", as I observed it.

He Rushes to our Rescue in Times of Trouble

Swami's timing is always impeccable, but more often than not, it is not clear to us.

We had many wonderful experiences at Kodaikanal in 1991. I think we spent about eight hours in the presence of God, each day.

One day, when we were sitting around Swami after dinner, He suddenly became silent and still, and seemed to have gone into a trance-like stupor. We were not sure what exactly was happening, because until then, we had only heard about these "trances", as they were called, of the early days. So, even though the atmosphere was very informal that evening, we did not seek any clarification from Swami.

The next morning, Swami came downstairs and said, half-pretending to be disappointed and upset, "*Dhunnapotula* (He-buffaloes), none of you wanted to know where I went last night?" We all had goose bumps and said in one voice that we would love to know.

Then Swami said, Ms. Selvidas, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Mysore, was about to have a horrific accident when her car was descending the hairpin bends from Kodaikanal. A truck, ascending the mountain road in the wrong lane, nearly ran over her car as they were driving down the steep slopes (*ghat* section).

By way of background, we had all witnessed Swami sculpt a beautiful pendant for Ms. Selvidas only a day before she

Ravi Mariwalla was blessed in his youth to be a part of Mumbai's Bal Vikas and Pre Seva Dal programs. After speaking in Baba's presence in Mumbai and Parthi in 1979, he had a strong desire to study at Baba's college, a wish fulfilled by Bhagawan in 1982. Over nine years Ravi had many opportunities to interact with Bhagawan, including in Kodaikanal, and was blessed to receive three Gold Medals from Bhagawan's own Hands. Bhagawan recruited him as one of the first employees of the Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospital in Puttaparthi, where he served for 14 years in Cardiac Surgery in multiple roles.

had left. Swami explained that, at that moment when the accident was about to happen, the pendant flashed in His consciousness, informing Him of the event, and He instantaneously rushed out of His body, to save her! He had miraculously maneuvered the car out of harm's way, averting a certain disaster!

A few hours later a telegram came from Ms. Selvidas, corroborating the incident, expressing gratitude for Bhagawan's timely intervention and grace!

He Re-designs the Impacts of our Past Actions

Swami then allowed us a question and answer session, which I carefully noted in my Kodai diary. I got a chance to ask Swami about this incident: what if we do not have an object given by Swami? Swami said that it did not matter and that, at those times, our whole life, karma, and good deeds flash in front of Him. At that moment, He reviews the deeds we have performed throughout our life and identifies the good deeds we have performed, in order that He may re-arrange our destiny and save us from calamity.

Swami went on to explain that this is the reason why he always asks us **to do something for him**, be it *vibhuti* distribution or cutting of shirt and pant cloth pieces for distribution at village service activities (*Gram Seva*).

He narrated the famous incident in which Draupadi tore her sari to bandage Sri Krishna's bleeding little finger—but His version of the story had a twist. Swami said that Sri

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Krishna, knowing that Draupadi would need His protection, created and enacted the whole situation. Differently explained, Swami said, Sri Krishna created this whole situation in order to obtain her sacrifice—which He could then count as a basis, or justification, for saving her later.

Sri Krishna had enacted, nay engineered, the entire incident. He even chose to hurt his finger on purpose, making it seem, all through, like an accident. All along, He knew fully well that Draupadi would without a moment's hesitation tear her sari to bandage his finger. Later, at the time the Kauravas would try to dishonor her in open court, try as they may, reams of cloth continued to flow and protect her, multiplying a thousand-fold the sari that she had torn for Krishna's bandage! Because of Draupadi's spontaneous sacrifice, Krishna offered her His timely protection!

Swami thus explained that by doing small tasks and participating in His work, He provides us an opportunity to serve in His Mission. A benefit that accrues to us is that, when we are in a difficult situation or impending catastrophe, He can apply this principle to rearrange the consequences of our actions.

To me this conversation was an eye opener. Remembering this lesson always could go far in enlightening and purifying our lives.

Value every opportunity to serve in the Divine Mission

I have learned that the power of His Good intention and Grace are the source of His guidance and commands - however casual they may appear. The biggest proof of my accepting the Lord Swami as my master would then be implicit obedience - not placing myself in opposition to His command, or even applying my own interpretations to His guidance.

With our limited insight, we cannot see the way our lives will unfold. But God is constantly preparing us.

From the time I joined the Parthi college, I always wanted to be near Swami and serve Him. Yet strangely, around the time I was finishing my MBA, I was starting to feel the lure of the external world. This **Vishaya Vasana** (craving for worldly desires) made me want to go out into the

world and be an important manager, earn a lot of money, build a career etc.

At this point, out of the blue, one day Swami told me that He was starting a new hospital, and asked if I was interested in joining. I, who had always wanted to live in Puttaparthi and dedicate myself to Swami, suddenly felt hesitant. Yet on the other hand, I clearly saw that this was a great opportunity along the lines of something I had



also wished for!

Swami noticed my hesitation. He often used to say that there is a dark zone around the candle. The candle lights up the area around it but immediately under the candle there is darkness. Moreover, many times he said, "You are all frogs in the well. Look at the devotees; they are like bees coming to the flower because they realize the value of the nectar in this flower" (He would point to Himself.)

One day He sent word for me to come to the interview room. And I was alone with God! And I stood, trembling, as I was unsure of what Swami would say or what He was going to ask.

But Swami simply said, "Work in my hospital, that is my *aagya* (command) and it is good for you, good for your family, good for your country, and your brothers and sisters. What? Do you accept my *aagya*?"

I could not hold back my tears as I realized my mistake in hesitating to accept the offer. I fell at the Lotus Feet of the Lord and said, "Swami, there is nothing greater for me than to accept Your Command".

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Little did I know it, at that time, but that guidance enabled me to remain in Swami's Divine presence for another 14 years and to contribute to the silent but incredible service the Temples of Healing are rendering to the poor and the needy.

Brothers and sisters, let us re-examine our lives. Due to some unknown good fortune, we have come into direct contact with Bhagawan. He invested 86 years trying to cultivate, build, and nourish our Faith. This Faith needs to be strong for Him to shower His Grace and allow us to serve as instruments in His Mission.

Indeed it takes courage to have that unflinching Faith. However, it is the culmination and completion of our life's goal, to honor the Great Sadguru and fulfill our inner quest!

"In this world, there may be at least one good person out of every ten persons. Out of every ten good persons, there may be at least one who has love for God. Out of every ten persons who have love for God, there may be at least one who wants to attain Divinity. Out of every ten persons who want to attain Divinity, there may be at least one who is ever ready to obey God's commands. Only he who obeys God's commands is redeemed. There is no point in undertaking spiritual practices without obeying God's commands."

– Sri Sathya Sai Baba



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A Life-Changing Experience

Berniece Mead,
former National Education Coordinator,
Sathya Sai Education in Human Values

In March 1993, I was selected as the National Education Coordinator for Sathya Sai Education (SSE). A high priority was to put together an SSE Teachers' Manual, to begin training for teachers who would conduct the SSE classes. I got to work, collaborating with the SSE teachers



Dear Berniece, in appreciation for your many loving years.

in Southern California to conceive of the various elements and prepare the entire manual. Once it was completed, I made airline reservations for travel to Puttaparthi, India, to seek Swami's approval for the Teachers' Manual.

Around that time, my son, Jay, who was an actor and stunt man for Universal Studios and Knott's Berry, had become injured during a performance and was in a coma. I went to see Swami, and told him I could not do the Teacher Trainings, as I had a son in a coma. He listened to my story and then told me in a stern voice that this was the role that He had given me to play! He then put His finger in the middle of my forehead, and said, "I am Blessing You; I am directing you, have confidence!"

For the next 23 years, I did indeed have a wonderful role to play, training teachers in the United States as well as Russia and El Salvador! I was truly blessed by the Lord of the Universe!

A Compassionate Lord

Sharmila Sanka
Alumnus, Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur;
President, Sri Sathya Sai Center of Indianapolis

On one Guru Purnima festival, Swami had given accommodation to Anantapur students right by His residence in Brindavan. Hence, we received strict orders from our teachers not to disturb Swami: we were not to utter even a single word out loud. As our hearts were all craving to please Swami, we spoke in whispers for all the ten days. Swami was so pleased that He visited our residence hall after *Darshan*.

Swami seated himself on the beautiful chair and looked at us with a smile. "Every time you come here to Brindavan, you can stay in this Kalyana Mandapam. This is for you. I know that all of you were so silent and disciplined in order not to disturb Swami, residing next to this wall. It is inconvenient for you to stay here." We all protested, "No Swami!". Swami continued, "It is for all of you that I had five bathrooms built overnight. I know how difficult it is, but you have adjusted so well."

Then Swami said, "I don't expect anything from you; live like Swami's students." And as He was leaving, He said, "Good girls!" That very moment our hearts were filled with bliss, love, and gratitude towards our Sai Maa. Living with Divinity, that Guru Purnima, had been a test for us, but much more than that, an unforgettable blessing.



Sai Pearls - Poems from Devotees

The Pandemic Brings Forth Faith, Not Fear

Sridevi Devaraj, Sugar Land, TX

Our World that we thought was so large, is so small
The SARS CoV2 virus, we thought so small, stood tall
There was panic, our friends and relatives, being taken away so harshly by the COVID storm
Then we learned, wore masks, used hand sanitizers, distanced ourselves from the norm!

COVID taught us to rethink the way we live,
It taught us to forget differences and forgive,
It taught us to look deep inside, introspect and surrender,
It taught us resolve, it taught us to never fear, to hold on to our faith stronger

Many learned to connect to others through the internet,
Many others reached for the security of their inner net,
Meditation, Bhajans, Educare, Service, all went on with full fervor,
Swami said Love all and Serve All and we continued on with prayer

Now that we have a vaccine to protect against the deadly virus,
We learned that our bad habits, our ego, were deadlier than the virus,
We looked within, our Faith stood us in good stead, for real
All we needed to do was let go, so that His will would prevail.

And now we combat the pandemic with renewed faith and renewed resolution,
Let's love all, serve all, help ever, hurt never, the perfect solution!
Let's resolve to never fear but hold on to our Faith, O' Lord
May all the beings in all the worlds be happy, the perfect reward.



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Kanakadara Lakshminarayanan,
SSSE Guru, Baltimore Center

Swami You fill my every cell, my every breath,
my every thought, word and action
Help me recognize the truth that...
You also fill every atom around me
You are everything that I...
Hear, touch, see, eat and smell
You are everything that is...

Beyond

If I can fill my every moment with the
awareness of this unity, then
I will surely be

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Sai Humor

Swami has said that His discourses are not lectures, but mixtures. *Mixtures?* Yes! When He spoke, He often added Humor to the mix – be it a Chinna Katha, a play on words, or some amusing, even hilarious, story that He would narrate with all the flourish and charm of a veteran story teller. As His students have attested time and again, Swami was fun!

But there is a purpose to everything the Lord does, even banter. Over years of close, daily, and unique interaction, Swami’s students learned that laughter and learning went hand in hand. They learned that if Swami made a joke, they had better pay even more attention, for therein lay a loaded lesson or even a gentle reprimand. Indeed, Swami excelled in using wit, mischief, and humor to drive home the sharpest and most serious of messages about life and spirituality.

Swami, Divine Teaser

Swami liked to tease, especially those within His inner circle. Such teasing was mainly a sign of love and affection, a morsel of mischief reminiscent of Lord Krishna, targeting a dear—and most fortunate—devotee!! Professor Anil Kumar, who was Swami’s translator and worked closely with Him for many years, recounts several such light-hearted moments with Swami.



Hailing from hot Andhra Pradesh, Professor Anil Kumar found cool mornings uncomfortable. Confronted with a power cut and lack of hot water one early morning, he decided to attend Swami’s Darshan without a bath. The all-knowing Swami soon made His way straight to the Professor. In front of everyone, and within earshot of the

students, Swami lifted up both hands and pointedly announced, “some come for Darshan without a bath”. Understandably, Professor Anil Kumar was mortified and had visions of his students quizzing him the next morning as to whether he had bathed. When Darshan was over, he hurried back to his room; then with the power back, and two buckets of “hot, hot water” thus available, he had a long, refreshing bath and spruced himself up for the next Darshan. Darshan passed uneventfully; as Swami sat down for Bhajans, the Professor sat back at what he thought “a comfortable spiritual distance, away from the Divine lens”. But Swami was apparently not going to let the matter rest. No sooner had the Bhajans begun, Swami again approached the Professor, this time opining loudly that “an ordinary bath is enough, sir, not extraordinary”! Swami then gently chided him for his reluctance to bathe in cold water even in hot Puttaparthi and walked away, having had some fun at the expense of a fond devotee.

Lord of the One-Liners

On another occasion, a young man in the interview room had shoulder-length hair, which was fashionable at the time. After teasing him that he looked like a woman, Swami advised him to get his hair cut. “Will you cut the first lock, Swami?”, asked the young man adoringly. Swami shook his head in mock horror, and quickly said “I am Baba, not Barber”!

Swami’s use of humor comes as no surprise given His emphasis on our leading joyful and happy lives. He urges us to be full of smiles and always spread joy.

The above draws on: i) a delightful video, “Living Joyfully—Lessons from Sai Humor”, Live Satsang from Prasanthi Nilayam, July 25, 2020; ii) an excellent Talk by Sri. K. Anil Kumar, “Samarpan # 4”, July 25, 2015, Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations, Maharashtra Goa; and iii) Sai Humor, by Peggy Mason, Sandra Levy, and Dr. M. Veeravahu, 2005.



Life is a Game: Play it!

PHOTO CAPTION CONTEST!

Contemplate, Connect, and Caption!

Dear brothers and sisters,

Put on your creative hat, connect to Swami and let your heart write ...

- * Please write a caption to the picture below.
- * The caption should not exceed 100 characters. A one line caption is recommended.
- * Please send your entries by December 23, 2021 to sssgc.newsletter@gmail.com
- * The top three winners will be announced in the next edition of SaiLights.



Asked and.....Answered by Swami

The following is an exchange between Swami and Professor Anil Kumar Kamaraju, drawn from *Satyopanishad*, Sri Kamaraju's book of 270 questions and answers published in two volumes. Professor Anil Kumar is best known for translating Swami's Telugu discourses into English.

Anil Kumar: Bhagawan! Should we follow any discipline or regulation in our food habits? Is that necessary for our spiritual pursuit?

Swami:

As is the food, so is the Mind.

As is the mind, so are our Thoughts.

As is the thought, so is the Action.

As is the action, so is the Result.

Therefore, the result depends on the food you eat. Meticulously and unerringly, you should follow discipline in your food habits.

You should not eat too much. You should eat to live and never live to eat. Eating in excess is a *tamasika* quality. If you eat once a day, you are a *yogi*, if you eat twice a day you are a *rogi*, sick. If you take *sattvika*, soft, and balanced food, in moderate quantity, you develop *sattvika* or pious mind. If you eat *rajasika*, spicy, hot, food, you will have *rajasika* or emotional, agitated mind, and if you have *tamasika* food, meat, alcohol, etc., you will have *tamasika* or bestial, dull, passive mind. So, it is food that shapes the mind and on this your actions depend, leading to their corresponding consequences.

You should also think of:

patras'uddhi - cleanness of the vessels and utensils used

padarthas'uddhi - purity of the materials

pakas'uddhi - clean method of preparation or cooking

bhavas'uddhi - purity of the thought of the person who cooks the food

Further, you should feel your body as light after eating as before eating. The best thing is to keep half of your stomach empty. The remaining half should be filled in with water and other foodstuffs. Tubers are not good for the body. You should not drink whole milk. You should mix some water in your milk and then drink it. You should have a minimum interval of four hours between two meals. You should take food, which gives you enough calories needed for the body. You shouldn't have too much of oily and fried curries. Sleep a while after lunch, and walk a mile after dinner. You should work hard and eat well.



Spiritual Good Practices for Sadhana



Spiritual GPS #1: Controlling Anger

Swami says, *"You should not become a victim of the feelings of anger, hatred, ego, or pride that may arise in you"*.

When such negative feelings arise, He says, do this:

- * sit silently for a few minutes; do not give vent to your anger and scold others.
- * immediately leave the room, go out into the open, and quietly walk.
- * stand before a mirror and look at your own angry face; you will dislike what you see.
- * laugh heartily, and let your anger slowly leave you.
- * go into your bathroom, turn the tap on, and sing.
- * drink a glass of cold water.
- * find other ways to regain a calm and peaceful mood.

*Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume XXV,
Chapter 15: Rise from Animality to Divinity.*

Spiritual GPS #2: Testing for Dharma

How do we know whether an action is Dharmic or not?

Swami says, *"Dharma is universal. There is a test that may be applied to any action to determine if it is [aligned with] Dharma. Let not your deeds harm or injure another. This flows from the recognition that the divine spark is the same in every form, and if you injure another you are injuring the same divinity that is in yourself. Dharma enables you to realise that anything that is bad for another is also bad for you. The test of Dharmic action is stated very clearly in the saying: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"*.

*Conversations with Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.
Author: John Hislop, Year:1978*



Zone 1 Upcoming Projects

Sai Tunes

“Tune with Sai Tunes”

On this auspicious occasion of Bhagavan’s 96th Birthday, with *Pranams* at His Lotus Feet, the SSSGC Zone 1 Media team is pleased to introduce Sai Tunes, a one-stop site for all Devotional activities and needs of the centers and devotees of the zone.

Devotees can choose and learn Bhajans, be it to sing at their center or home or simply listen and enjoy. Learning tools include a Karaoke track and lyrics. Each Bhajan page also includes a video of Swami’s Darshan (wherever possible) as the Bhajan is being sung. The site also features all the resources needed by center Devotional Coordinators to conduct a Bhajan session with pre-recorded Sanskrit and multi-faith prayers such as Aarathi, Gayathri, and others. Devotional Coordinators will be able to use this site to easily prepare weekly Bhajan presentations for their centers.

Devotees and coordinators will also find an indexed and searchable page containing Swami’s discourses that have been consolidated in Sathya Sai Speaks (volumes 1 – 43) which can serve as excellent reference material for Study Circles or Sri Sathya Sai Educare (SSSE), or for simply



obtaining Swami’s guidance on matters most important to us.

Current functionality of the site includes a searchable Bhajan and Discourse database. Remaining functions will be rolled out in future phases.

Please visit the site and provide feedback through the comments section at the bottom of the page.

Call Sai

“Life is best spent in alleviating pain, assuaging distress, and promoting peace and joy. The service of man is more valuable than what you call “service to God.” God has no need of your service. Please man, you please God”.

– Sri Sathya Sai Baba

With the infinite Grace of our Beloved Lord, SSSGC USA is honored to introduce Call Sai, a volunteer-led and volunteer-run community support initiative – a free service to our brothers and sisters of all ages in the USA who are faced with unsolved challenges or any needs that require additional hands.

All submissions and requests to Call Sai are treated with the utmost and strictest confidence and information is shared only with the volunteer able to help with the particular issue. A group of first-line volunteers triage the request submitted through the website or phone and connect the devotee with the right volunteer who can assist.

Please visit our site and participate, whether to offer or to seek assistance.

Support System

SSSGC Zone 1 is pleased to announce the first Support channel for all things SSSGC.

With abundant blessing from Swami and prayers at his Lotus feet, the SSSGC Zone 1 Team and the committees of USA, Canada, and West Indies offer another option for devotees to reach out to committees directly with any suggestions, questions or comments on any SSSGC Zone 1-related activities or events. Whether you have feedback on a recently announced event or noticed any issue or simply want to send us a note, you will be able to use this

Zone 1 Upcoming Projects (Continued)

forum. The SSSGC support team will triage the messages and connect you with the right resource able to answer your question.

As at present, you may submit queries as a guest and receive responses via the email address used to submit the form, or alternatively, you may please register and create an account, in which case you will be able to track your ticket history in one single dashboard.

Please provide any valuable suggestions on how we can further improve the support system itself.

Parthi Pilgrimage

Swami has said *"No one enters Puttaparthi without My permission"*.

The officers of SSSGC Zone 1, along with the committees from USA, Canada, and the West Indies, pray at His Lotus feet to permit His Devotees of Zone 1 to undertake a pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam between the days of July 10 – 17, 2022. Planning is under way for various activities including a potential performance, bhajan session, and accommodation for the devotees.

We request that you visit the dedicated Parthi Pilgrimage webpage and register. Please continue to visit the page for frequent updates. If you have any questions, please submit them at the dedicated Parthi Pilgrimage support desk, and someone from the planning committee will get back to you.

Let us collectively pray to Swami to make the pilgrimage worthy of His Grace.

"Sathya Sai Baba can be said to be the architect and engineer who directed the entire work for construction [of Prasanthi Nilayam]...The mandir was painted blue, yellow, and pink, communicating the message of the harmony of spirit, intellect, and heart respectively; for blue stands for spirit, yellow for intellect, and pink for heart (love). The rich harmony of the three does result in Shanti (peace) and Prasanthi (supreme peace); and that really is the message of the Prasanthi mandir."

- Professor N. Kasturi

The image is a composite graphic. At the top left, a woman in an orange sari stands in front of a cityscape. To her right is a circular logo with a flower and the text 'SSSGC ZONE 1'. Below this is a banner with the text 'SSSGC ZONE 1' and 'USA, CANADA AND WEST INDIES'. The main text on the banner reads: 'Utilise this rare chance, this unique opportunity secured by the merit of many births, for self-improvement. ~ Sri Sathya Sai Baba, 01 March 1965'. Below this is the title 'PATHWAY TO PRASANTHI (PARTHI PILGRIMAGE)' and the dates 'July 10 - 17, 2022'. Further down, it says: 'This Nilayam (abode) is Prasanthi Nilayam (Abode of Tranquility). It is the abode of the highest form of peace (santhi), absolute peace (prasanthi). In fact, you are each one of you, the Abode of Tranquility. ~ Sri Sathya Sai Baba, 29 September 1962'. At the bottom, there is a photograph of the Prashanti Nilayam temple, showing its colorful facade and a large archway.

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:

Zone 1



USA



Canada



West Indies

Subscribe



Telegram



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Mailing List



YouTube



Ninety-Six Years of Supreme Love



"Of what use is it to honor the Avatar and hold the day when the Avatar took human form as sacred? The Message of the Avatar must be born, must become alive, must grow in you, your heart - that is the Birthday you have to celebrate. Plant the seeds of Love in your hearts. Let them grow into trees of Service and shower the sweet fruit of Ananda. Share the Ananda with all. That is the proper way to celebrate the Birthday."