

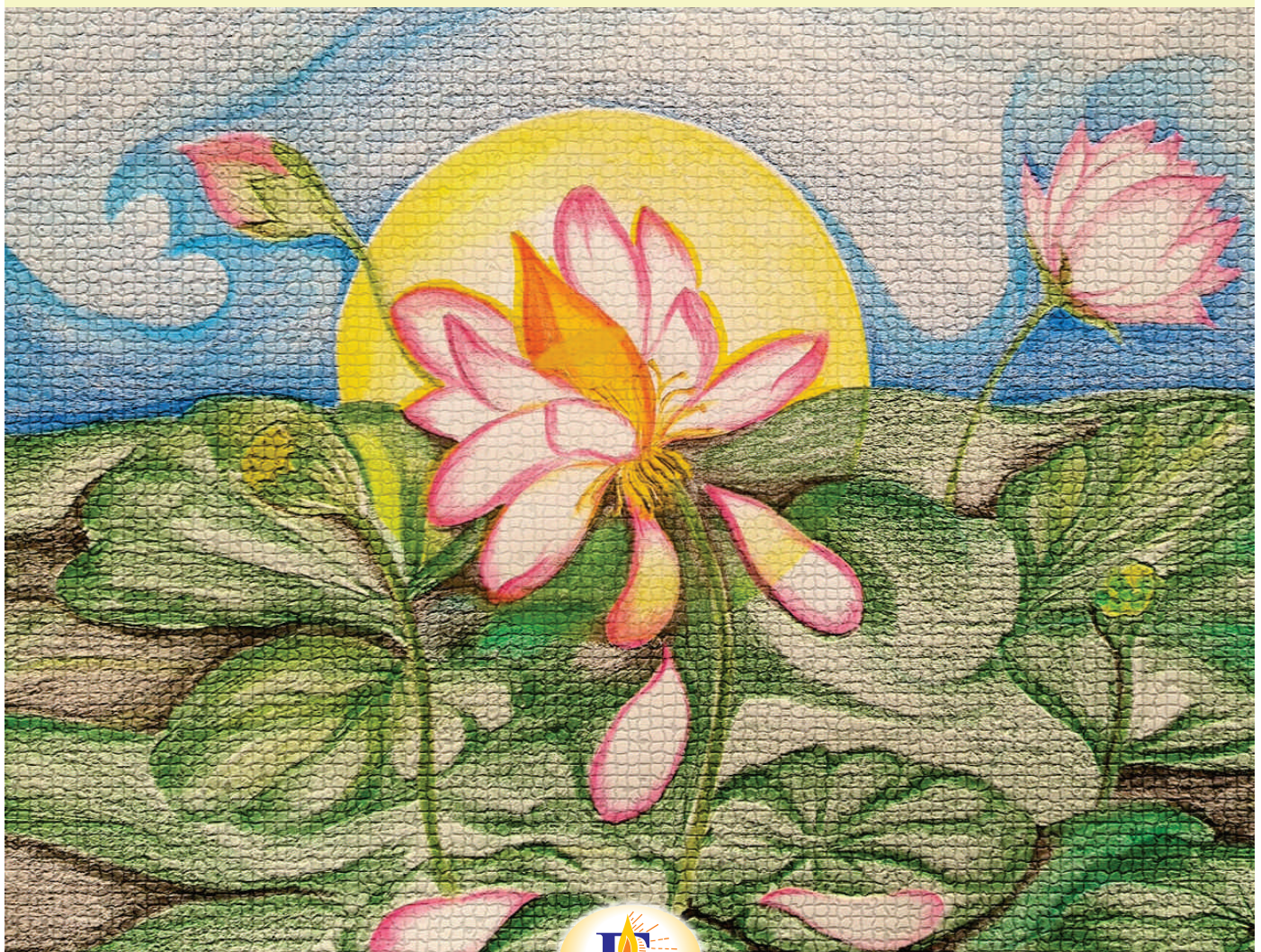
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Inner Flame

Volume XI

Issue 6

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Hari Om

India's mystics seem to have held the magic wand that attracted many a weary soul from the consumerist culture of the West, right from The Beatles to Steve Jobs. These 'Babas', with their utter disdain for worldly wealth, obviously possessed something that appeared far more valuable to those who had seen through the limits of material prosperity.

One such 'Baba' was Neem Karoli Baba and the student who was pulled out of the material 'orbit' was a Westerner, who himself became known as 'Baba Ram Dass' in his spiritual '*avatāra*'. In this issue, we carry the story behind this fascinating transformation.

From the 'Ādi Yogi Dakshināmurthi' to Ramana Maharshi who answered seekers' doubts without speaking, 'silence' has always been the secret power wielded by the Yogis. In his featured article, Swāmi Chidānanda dwells on this little-known power which is considered as the highest form of teaching, by those who are in the know of things spiritual.

In 'Places that Beckon', read about Puttaparthi, the seat of Shri Sathya Sai Baba who has truly been an enduring legend of our times. It was remarkable for the miraculous transformation Baba brought about in the people who thronged to his abode 'Prashanti Nilayam'. The huge wave of development that Baba brought to bear during the four decades of his earthly sojourn in the small hamlet is nothing short of a miracle. A little village that was Puttaparthi in the 70s, became a thriving township that boasted of a super-specialty hospital, many temples - small and big, a full-fledged international sporting arena, a university offering many courses, etc.

Swāmi Chidānanda recounts his visit, undertaken almost four decades ago, to meet another great master 'Shri Rāghavendra Swāmiji of Mallādihalli' who lived till 106 years of age and taught Yoga to millions of people.

There is an inspiring little piece about the wonderful work being carried out by the foundation run by Bill and Melinda Gates and the values that sustain it.

Our regular feature 'Eternal Vibrations' carries an inspiring message from the master of Arunāchala.

May the Almighty give us the strength to escape unscathed from these times of the pandemic and the wisdom to engage in service-oriented activities that help elevate the quality of lives.

For Swāmi Chidānanda
Cdr HC Guruprasad (IN, Retd)



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Petals fall and the flame reveals itself in the flower.
Layers of conditioning fall and one gets to the Inner Flame.

The Beacons

From Drugs to Dhyāna -
The Transformation of Richard Alpert to
Baba Ram Dass

- *Compiled by Dakshu Mansukhani.....1*

Perceiving Phoenix

Silence, The Supreme Secret

- *Swāmi Chidānanda.....9*

Stories Teach

See Advaita Everywhere or See it Nowhere
A story narrated by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

- *Osho.....12*

Places that Beckon

Puttaparthi-The Abode of Shri Sathya Sai Baba and The
Peace that Passeth Understanding

- *Compiled by Vatsala Ravikrishnan.....13*

Fleeting Moments, Enduring Impressions

The Amazing Yoga Master of Mallādhalli
Sevā (service) was his highest mantra

- *Swāmi Chidānanda.....22*

Gen Next

Tips on Happiness
At Work and at Home

.....26

What do we learn from the Upanishads?

What is here, you will find there too!

- *Swāmi Chidānanda.....28*

Insights 'N' Revelations

Exposure

- *By Anthony de Mello, S.J.29*

Subhāshita

.....30

Rhythms for the Soul

My Prayer

D.A. Marcum.....31

Eternal Vibrations

Do Not be Charmed by Special Powers

- Compiled by Dakshu Mansukhani

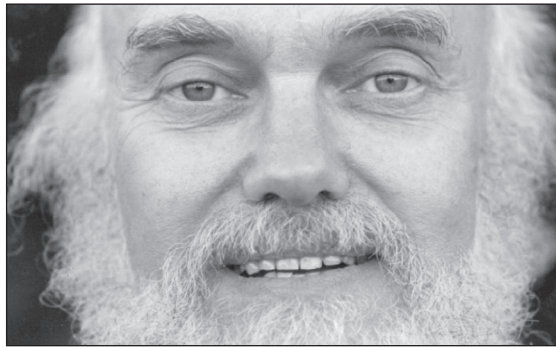
Man and the mountain

At 80+, looking back on his life, dividing it into three distinct segments, the grey-haired man said: *“First part, till Harvard: power, power, power, power. Up until drugs, I thought power was the end all and be all, because I was a little individual. Then drugs: love, love, love, love. My first mushroom trip was so profound that I saw radiance was inside, and I said, ‘I’m home, I’m home, I’m home.’”* Referring to when he reached his final understanding of life and living, he concluded *“Cosmic humour, especially about your own predicament, is an important part of your journey. The cosmic humour is that if you desire to move mountains and you continue to purify yourself, ultimately you will arrive at the place where you are able to move mountains. But in order to arrive at this position of power you will have to give up being he-who-wanted-to-move-mountains so that you can be he-who-put-the-mountain-there-in-the-first-place. The humour is that finally when you have the power to move the mountain, you are the person who placed it there - so there the mountain stays.”*

How long did it take to go from a power-

seeking university professor, to a love-hungry experimenter of LSD, the counterculture drug of the 60's, to a laughing, wheel-chair-bound guide and teacher to thousands, mostly in America? Let him answer the question:

“Early in the journey you wonder how long the journey will take and whether you will make it in this lifetime. Later you will see that where you are going is HERE and you will arrive NOW...so you stop asking.”



Academic education

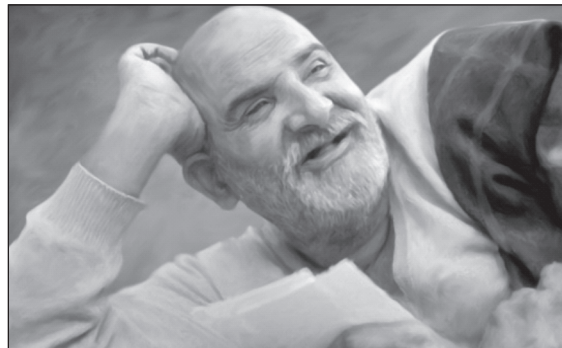
Richard Alpert who, as Ram Dass, discovered the best drug in life... serving God by serving His creation, was born on April 6, 1931 in Boston, the youngest of three brothers. His father, George Alpert, a prominent lawyer, was president of a railway company and the first board president of the famous Brandeis University. The family was Jewish and though Richard had his bar mitzvah, he claimed to have had no interest in religion until he took psychedelics. After graduating *cum laude* from a private school in Massachusetts, he earned a bachelor’s degree from Tufts University, a master’s from Wesleyan University, and a PhD from Stanford University – all

in psychology. In California, he met psychologist David McClelland, who became his mentor and brought Richard with him to Harvard. At Harvard, Richard was a star, with appointments in the Psychology and Social Relations Departments, the Graduate School of Education, and the Health Service, serving there as a therapist. He also had research grants from Yale and Stanford, and was publishing academic books. *"In 1961, at the beginning of March, I was at the high point of my academic career,"* he wrote in *Be Here Now*. *"I was making a great income, and I was a collector of possessions,"* among them an antiques-filled Cambridge apartment, a Mercedes-Benz, an MG sports car, a Triumph 500cc motorcycle, and a Cessna 172 airplane. *"But what it all boils down to is that I was really a very good game player."*

So what happened between the first two segments of his life and the final one that has made a huge impact on a very large number of young and old 'seekers' of fulfilment that lies beyond the material pleasures and possessions?

Passage to India

A friend invited him to travel across India. He watched the scenery roll by, but his depression, on the recent loss of his mother, never lifted. Then a chance encounter with another American led Alpert to a temple in the Himalayas, where he met his Guru, Neem Karoli Baba. That encounter was to alter the course of his life. At first sight, though, Alpert held back and refused to touch the feet of the Guru as others were doing. The guru was a twinkly old man wrapped

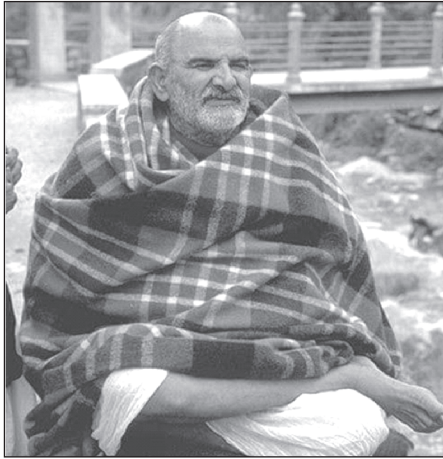


Neem Karoli Baba

in a blanket. He beckoned to Alpert and told him he knew he'd been grieving for his mother, who'd died of spleen failure. Not having told anyone in India that his mother had died of a spleen disease, his mind raced to find an explanation and then *"my mind just gave up. It burned out its circuitry."* He felt a violent wrenching, as if he'd been cracked open, and love - welcoming love - was pouring in. *"It felt like I was home. The journey was over."*

Following the disciplines required in *Āshrams*, e.g. 4 am wake-up call followed by a cold bath, study, meditation and session with the Guru, lovingly called Mahārāj-ji, the young American stayed for eight months. It was clear to Alpert that Mahārāj-ji knew everything that was in his mind - good thoughts and bad - and loved him nonetheless, just as he was. *"That had never happened to me,"* he says. *"Never,"* he emphasized. What clinched the total transformation of the young American is best told in his own words:

"In 1967 when I first came to India, I brought with me a supply of LSD, hoping to find someone who might understand more about these substances than we



did in the West. When I had met Mahārāj-jī (Neem Karoli Baba), after some days, the thought had crossed my mind that he would be a perfect person to ask. The next day after having that thought, I was called to him and he asked me immediately, 'Do you have a question?' Of course, being before him was such a powerful experience that I had completely forgotten the question I had had in my mind the night before. So, I looked stupid and said, 'No, Mahārāj-jī, I have no question.' He appeared irritated and said, 'Where is the medicine?'

"I was confused but someone suggested, 'Maybe he means the LSD.' Mahārāj-jī nodded. The bottle of LSD was in the car and I was sent to fetch it. When I returned, I emptied the vial of pills into my hand. In addition to the LSD, there were a number of other pills for this and that – diarrhoea, fever, a sleeping pill, and so forth. He asked if they gave powers. I didn't understand at the time and thought that by 'powers', perhaps he meant physical strength. I said, 'No.' Later, of course, I came to understand that the

word he had used, *siddhis*, meant psychic powers. Then he held out his hand for the LSD. I put one pill on his palm. Each of these pills was about three hundred micrograms of very pure LSD – a solid dose for an adult. He beckoned for more, so I put a second pill in his hand – six hundred micrograms. Again, he beckoned and I added yet another, making the total dosage nine hundred micrograms – certainly not a dose for beginners. Then he threw all the pills into his mouth. My reaction was one of shock mixed with the fascination of a social scientist eager to see what would happen. He allowed me to stay for an hour – and nothing happened; nothing whatsoever. He just laughed at me.

The whole thing had happened very fast and unexpectedly. When I returned to the United States in 1968, I told many people about this acid feat. But there had remained in me a gnawing



doubt that perhaps he had been putting me on and had thrown the pills over his shoulder or palmed them, because I hadn't actually seen them go into his mouth.

"Three years later, when I was back in India, he asked me one day, 'Did

you give me medicine when you were in India last time?' 'Yes.' 'Did I take it?' he asked. (Ah, there was my doubt made manifest!) 'I think you did.' 'What happened?' 'Nothing.' 'Oh! Jao!' and he sent me off for the evening.

"The next morning, I was called to the veranda where Mahārāj-ji sat. He asked, 'Have you got any more of that medicine?' It just so happened that I was carrying a small supply of LSD for "just in case," and this was obviously it. 'Yes.' 'Get it,' he said. So, I did. In the bottle were five pills of three hundred micrograms each. One of the pills was broken. I placed them on my palm and held them out to him. He took the four unbroken pills. Then, one by one, very obviously and very deliberately, he placed each one in his mouth and swallowed it - another unspoken thought of mine now answered. 'How long will it take to act?' 'Anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour.' He called for an older man, a long-time devotee who had a watch, and Mahārāj-ji held the man's wrist, often pulling it up to him to peer at the watch. Then he asked, 'Will it make me crazy?' That seemed so bizarre to me that I could only go along with what seemed to be a gag. So, I said, 'Probably.'

"And then we waited. After some time, he pulled the blanket over his face, and when he came out after a moment his eyes were rolling and his mouth was ajar and he looked totally mad. I got upset. What was happening? Had I misjudged his powers? After all, he was an old man (though how old I had no

idea), and I had let him take twelve hundred micrograms. Maybe last time he had thrown them away and then he read my mind and was trying to prove to me he could do it, not realizing how strong the "medicine" really was. Guilt and anxiety poured through me. But when I looked at him again, he was perfectly normal and looking at the watch.

"At the end of an hour, it was obvious nothing had happened. His reactions had been a total put-on. And then he asked, 'Have you got anything stronger?' I didn't. Then he said, 'These medicines were used in Kullu Valley long ago. But yogis have lost that knowledge. They were used with fasting. Nobody knows now. To take them with no effect, your mind must be firmly fixed on God. Others would be afraid to take. Many saints would not take this.' And he left it at that."

Path of love and service

Given the name Baba Ram Das, it was during this time that his Guru told him his path was to "*love everyone and tell the truth.*", encompassing both the *bhakti* and *karma yoga* paths. On his return to the US in 1968, confident of the grace promised by his Guru, Ram Dass came off the plane in Boston, barefoot, all in white, wearing prayer beads and sporting a beard. His father hurriedly hustled him into the car, "before anyone sees you." Ram Dass moved into a cabin on his father's estate in New Hampshire, where he read and meditated. The first time he drove into town, he met kids who thought he was the new drug connection. He told them, "I am not that kind of

connection.” The young people came to visit him and started bringing friends until there were regularly more than 200 sitting on the lawn at his father’s house. Ram Dass said he was a beginner on the path, but he taught them how to chant, meditate, and develop a “witness” (*sākshi*) attitude through which the inner observer watches thoughts and feelings go by without judging them. Humbly, Ram Dass summed up the support he gave young people with the words: “*We’re all just walking each other home*”.

Secure in the now clear understanding of the purpose of his life, blessed with the grace of his Guru, Ram Dass accepted an invitation to give a talk on “The Transformation of a Man” at a seminar house. This talk was then broadcast on the Radio, and Ram Dass hit the lecture circuit, speaking at churches, personal growth centers, colleges, meetings on psychology, and medical schools around the country. At the time, meditation was not well-known, and *yoga* was considered weird. A Social Historian and author Sara Davidson, who had met and interviewed Ram Dass several times said “I was not attracted to this strange stuff, but in 1971, when *Be Here Now* was published and a friend gave me a copy, I related to everything Ram Dass said. He was the first person I read who articulated what I - and countless others - were feeling: that you could achieve, earn money, and attain prestige and still not be fulfilled or content”.

What Ram Dass offered, based on spiritual truths he had learned while in India and on his own experiences, was a set of practices to cultivate inner peace and love. He taught that the divine consciousness could be accessed by looking within. Western psychology is powered by and studies the mind; in Vedānta, consciousness is larger and more expansive than the personality and mind. Thoughts are seen, not as serious or solid, but as clouds that pass across the sky.

Ram Dass communicated *sanātana dharma* precepts in a language Westerners could understand. He would run down Buddha’s four Noble Truths and keep the audience with him all the way. The first truth, he said, is that all life is suffering, because it’s in time. “*Birth, death, not getting what you want, even getting what you want means suffering because you’ll lose it, in time.*” The second truth is that the cause of suffering is desire or attachment. “*If you don’t try to hold on, you don’t suffer over the loss.*” So the third noble truth is: “*Give up attachment; give up desire and you end the suffering, the whole thing that keeps you stuck.*” The fourth truth is the eightfold path for giving up attachment, which Ram Dass summarized in a phrase that clicked instantly with Western minds: “*I can do nothing for you but work on myself...you can do nothing for me but work on yourself*”.

Through his teaching and writing in the seventies, Ram Dass helped launch what’s often called the ‘fourth

great awakening' in America, when masses of young people set off on 'the path', seeking a direct experience of truth and oneness or connectedness with all living beings. In Manhattan, many people were carrying dog-eared copies of the now-famous *'Be Here Now'*, reading other spiritual books, becoming vegetarians, and going off on silent retreats.

But by the eighties, when the United States of America was caught up in a fever of accumulating wealth, many seekers turned their attention to careers and raising families. Ram Dass was one of the small numbers who stayed the course, but he fell off the cultural radar screen. He began to concentrate on service, working with the homeless, prison inmates, and people facing tragedy or death. He never accepted money for this work and made sure his books and tapes were affordably priced. He would sit across from people, looking into their eyes as they spoke about their anger, terror, or grief, and he would help them reach a different perspective. He taught a young man, who had become a paraplegic after a surfing accident, to see that he was not merely his body. When a couple sought his counsel after their young daughter was raped and murdered, Ram Dass wrote them a letter that was so empathic and uplifting that the mother later said it was the first communication that had penetrated the blackness and helped her see a glint of light.

Ram Dass and a fellow-disciple had both received guidance from Neem Karoli Baba that led them to co-found SEVA, Society for Epidemiological Voluntary Assistance in 1978 to alleviate blindness, initially in Nepal. When he gave talks, he urged people to serve others - to give their time and resources - as a path to God through selfless service. *"Think of the poorest person you have ever seen and ask whether your next act will be of better use to that person."* *"To me life is joy and the joy should include the service, instead of the joy or service; the joy through service..."*

Inspired by the humane approach to death and dying that he had seen in India, Ram Dass was instrumental in co-creating the Living-Dying Project to support caregivers, healthcare professionals, and individuals dealing with terminal illness, and in establishing a hospice and training center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. *"Sitting by the bed of the dying is sādhanā [spiritual practice],"* he said. For his unwavering commitment to helping others, Ram Dass has been called 'a model of selfless service.' Shortly before his stroke, Ram Dass told an audience: *"Something has happened to me as a result of my meanderings through consciousness over the past 30 years that has changed my attitude towards death. A lot of the fear that denial of death generated has gone from me. Death does not have to be treated as an enemy for you to delight in life. Keeping death in your consciousness as one of*

the greatest mysteries and as the moment of incredible transformation imbues this moment with added richness and energy that otherwise is used up in denial."

Understanding suffering

After the stroke, which he suffered in 1997, those observations seemed hopelessly naive, he said. The stroke had given him a far deeper understanding of what the suffering of aging, infirmity, and dying really means. Characteristically, he viewed it in spiritual terms: *"I don't wish you the stroke, but I wish you the grace from the stroke,"* he said in *'Ram Dass, Going Home'*, a documentary film made in 2017 by Derek Peck. *"The stroke pushed me inside even more"*. During his long rehab, he needed assistance to get out of bed, bathe, dress, and eat. It was agonizing. Temporarily, he also lost his faith in Mahārāj-ji, who had passed away in 1973. Maharaj-ji had promised to shower Ram Dass with grace, and then Ram Dass was incapacitated by a stroke. *"I couldn't put the two together -grace and the stroke,"* he said. But in time, he came to understand that the stroke had deepened his compassion, openness, and humility. *"The stroke was giving me lessons, and I realized that was grace - fierce grace"*. [A film with that title, based on Ram Dass's life was named by Newsweek as one of the 5 best non-fiction films of 2002].

Ever true to his vow of being truthful, in thought, word and deed, in 2004, running a fever when he was scheduled to fly to Maui to lead a retreat,

he got on the plane anyway, "because I wouldn't welsch on my deal." The infection grew acute as the retreat progressed, and he wound up in the hospital. Once again, doctors weren't certain he would recover. When he did, he rented a house and announced he would spend his remaining years in Hawaii. His exuberance and love of life did not diminish despite his handicap; he continued his daily swim. Once, standing in the shallow end of a pool, Ram Dass looked transported with joy. He made a sweeping gesture with his left arm, taking in the vistas. "The trees! The flowers! The ocean . . . and friends! It's paradise." *"You've got to enjoy the good fortune you have in life... to be affluent, to be in this society, to have the freedom that you have and at the same moment you've got to keep the heart open to compassion, that's the balancing that we are playing with."*

At this point in his life, he saw himself demonstrating a way to grow old and prepare for dying. The most important task is to *"practice change - be happy with change,"* he said. After the stroke, he had to give up playing the cello, driving his car, hitting a golf ball, all the pastimes which he enjoyed. He had to let go of his old life and not compare it to the present one. *"I've been changed with a stroke . . . and I'm happy,"* he said. *"Death is the biggest change we'll face, so we need to practice change."*

In a quieter moment, he expressed what his life has been about. *"Learning about suffering and*

compassion. I had to learn to be compassionate,” he says. “And bringing people to God.” Initially he saw his role as the “kindergarten teacher” who took people on their first steps but later in life he elevated himself to teaching ‘fourth grade’. When people would tell him he is their guru, he used to respond, “You’ve never met a real guru, like Mahārāj-ji, or you wouldn’t say that. I’m not a realized being at this moment...” “Besides being lovable, the guru is God-realized and clear. He has no attachments, and nothing in his personality gets in the way.” Asked if he would like to become realized in this life, he shut his eyes, letting the question sink in. “Yes. Then I would help people so much. So much.” His humility had touched many hearts. When word spread over the internet that Ram Dass had always given away money, never saved for himself, and was now about to lose his house, more than 3,000 people sent him loving letters with checks enclosed, for varying amounts, ranging from one dollar on and up. The money that arrived supported him in his rented house which was set up like a temple, not solemn but airy and tropical, with flowers strewn on altars, candles burning, Hindu chants playing, and on the walls, large paintings of Hindu gods and Ram Dass’s guru, Neem Karoli Baba.

People have been seeking out Ram Dass for four decades. He’s responsible, more than any person in the present times, for making Eastern religious thought accessible to the West. Almost every yoga and meditation

teacher today has been influenced by him. An electrifying speaker with a gift for making people laugh, he has recorded hundreds of hours of tapes and CDs and written 13 books, including *Be Here Now*, the story of his journey and a “*Cookbook for a sacred life*,” which sold two million copies. He has set an example of how to serve others as a spiritual practice. Especially for boomers, Ram Dass has been the figure holding the lantern, pointing the way, and then he demonstrated how to grow old with grace and prepare for dying without fear.

A true *karma yogi*, Ram Dass continued his service right till the very end of his life. Despite being crippled by a stroke and using a wheelchair, at 75, living in Maui, Hawaii, he decided that while he would not be flying around the country to give talks and workshops, “if people want to come to me, that’s fine.” Mirabai Bush, a ‘guru sister’ from their days with Mahārāj-ji in India and his collaborator on his last book, *Walking Each Other Home: Conversations on Loving and Dying* summed up his life’s work in her introduction. “Ram Dass’s journey has been a search for love and for finding a way to stay in the space of love once he experienced it,” she wrote, adding, “Ram Dass was always loving, but now he is love.”

Ram Dass breathed his last at his home in Hawaii in December 2019.

Sources:

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<https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/ram-dass-dies/>
Quotes from ‘Be Here Now’, his 1st best seller

- Swāmi Chidānanda



“I am silence among things secret,” declares¹ Lord Shri Krishna, making us wonder what the divine aspect of ‘silence’ could be. We are more used to seeing divinity in names, forms, chants, words of scriptures or acts of holy men. It seems to us that silence is absence of sound, and we are at a loss to know how absence could support certain (divine) presence.

There is nothing above God

Ammachi² once narrated a story in one of her *satsangas*. A king was to hold court and all high officials had gathered, waiting for the king to arrive. A fakir³ came there, out of the blue, and even before the distinguished role-holders could find out how he had entered, this man went straight to the throne of the king and occupied it! Everybody was

horrified but a certain quiet glow on the face of this intruder made them hold back from any aggressive or punitive action.

The prime minister took it upon himself to ask the stranger, “Who are you?” There was no answer but a benign smile on the face of the fakir. “What are you?” Again, there was no reply. “Are you a king of another country, to think of sitting on the throne of our king?” Now came the soft but firm reply, “No, I am above any king in the world”. Puzzled, and a bit amused, the prime minister persisted, “Are you a scholar of international repute, who has come here today in disguise?” The fakir said, “I am above any scholar under the sun.”

“Are you a very wealthy man in some foreign country, pretending to be a beggar today?” The visitor said, “I am above any rich man.”

“Are you somebody with magical powers? You seem to have entered here by magic, hoodwinking all our guards!” The fakir responded, “I am above all those who have magical powers.”

This went on and the fakir repeatedly said, “I am above this; I am above that,” etc.

At his wits’ end now, the prime minister angrily asked, “Are you God?”

“I am above God!”

Managing to laugh somehow, the

prime minister retorted, “Oh come on, there is nothing above God!”

It was then that the fakir made a startling statement, “Yes, I am that ‘nothing’, which is above God!”

Finding zero was a milestone in mathematics

We know that they credit India with coming out with the concept of zero in mathematics, which led to a lot of further development of the subject. Having positive numbers on one side and negative numbers on the other, zero shines in unique glory in all number systems. It is itself neither positive nor negative. Likewise, we have Pure Awareness, devoid of ego, which transcends good and bad. The ‘nothing’ that the fakir in the story above referred to, is the limitless, infinite truth, which acts as the basis for all the play of virtue and evil on the earth. We generally see the world as made of pairs of opposites – heat and cold, right and wrong, long and short, fair and foul, etc. – because we, in the first place, identify with a personality that has particular desires and expectations. No wonder what is pleasing to one is often disgusting to another.

Rising above likes and dislikes, walking free from the pairs of opposites⁴, a wise man (or a wise lady) is like a ‘flame⁵ without smoke’. (Shri Krishna adapts this illustration a bit and calls the elevated consciousness of an advanced meditator, a ‘flame⁶ without flicker’). Vedānta regards the ego as born of spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*). The ego,

which has a large number of ideas of one’s identity, necessarily has preferences and prejudices. It is impossible for broad-mindedness to coexist with an egoistic outlook. Erasure of ego is thus the silence that Shri Krishna seems to hint at.



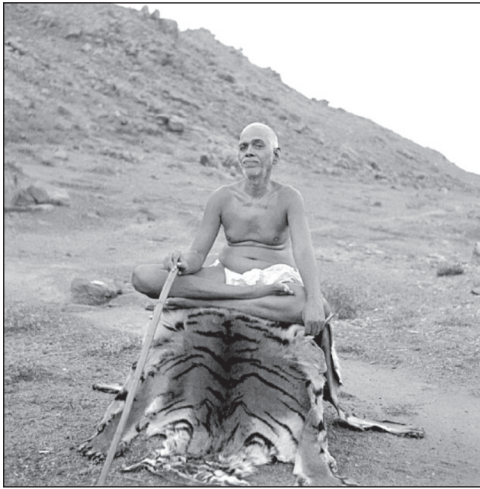
Silence is the means, and the end too

On higher levels of *sādhana* (spiritual practices), the dividing line between the means and the end gets blurred. In order to watch our thoughts, which carry attachments and aversions, we need to have a silent mind. The result of such watching, without bias, is that we anchor in inner silence. This silent observation requires letting go of concepts, ideologies and preconceived notions. Total openness is the demand of this advanced exercise.

Informed by scriptures (*shāstra-pramāna*), where we are asked to 'negate' all our notions of being this personality, we remain the witnessing consciousness. Structures of thought then die a natural death. They collapse like a house of cards. The Upanishads awaken in us a certain intelligence, which is eminently capable of seeing the false as false. The false (*asat*) then has to leave, making room for the truth (*sat*). The famous prayer⁷, "Lord, please lead me from the false to the true," is not answered when we exercise willpower. It is fulfilled when 'right seeing' takes place, following the study of scriptures with competent guidance.

Be still, and know I am God

When devotees asked Shri Ramana



Maharshi to summarize the essential spiritual practice, he said⁸, "Be still". This teaching, they say, is found in the Old Testament too. In the Indian tradition, the saint in Tamilnadu, Aruna-Giri-

Nāthar, said it in one of his poems. This is not to be misunderstood as a silence that we could force upon ourselves by our willpower. Will cannot lead us to freedom. As said before, guidance from a guru in the light of the Upanishadic teachings helps us see the falsity of our ego. Our regrets at our failures and our pride at our achievements both fail to build an ego in us when we do not own the memories anymore. The understanding arising from proper Vedānta study erases all the self-descriptions of the kind, "I am successful, virtuous and accomplished," as well as, "I am a failure, at fault and suffering from defects." What remains is not dullness of the mind but a bright state of being, marked by alert silence. Such silence is '*mauna*' and a person who abides by it is a true '*muni*'.

Notes:

1. '*mounam chaivāsmi guhyānām*' – Geetā 10.38
2. Mātā Amritānandamayee; see amma.org to know about her and her work.
3. *fakir* means a religious ascetic who roams around and lives on alms.
4. *dvandvāteeta*, Geetā 4.22
5. *vyotir-iva-adhoomakah*, Kathopanishad 2.1.13
6. *deepo nivāstah*, Geetā 6.19
7. *asato mā sad-gamaya*, Brihadāranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28
8. "*summā iru*" in Tamil, meaning, "Keep quiet" or "Stay silent".

- Osho

A Rāja was once taught by his Guru the sacred doctrine of advaita, which declares that the whole universe is Brahman. The king was very much pleased with this doctrine. Going in, he said to his queen, "There is no distinction between the queen and the queen's maid-servant. So the maid-servant be my queen henceforth."



At dinner time, the Guru and the king sat down together to eat.

Who could imagine the rage of the king when he saw a dish of cow-dung served for his meal.

The Guru, seeing this, calmly interrogated: "Your Highness, you are well-versed in the knowledge of advaita. Why do you then see any distinction between the dung and the rice?"

The king became exasperated and exclaimed, "You who pride yourself to be such a great advaitin, eat this dung if you can."

The Guru said, "Very well," and at once, changed himself to a swine and devoured the cow-dung with great gusto and afterwards again assumed his human shape.

The king became so ashamed that he never made again his mad proposal to the queen.

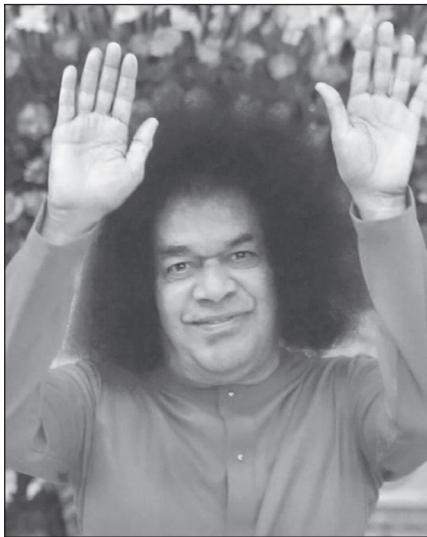


- Compiled by Vatsala Ravikrishnan

India has been a land of sages and rishis. It is considered that gurus played an important role in the preservation and continuity of various schools of Hinduism. Without them, the tradition would have been lost forever.

In modern times, we have had many such illuminated and realized souls such as Veera Brahmendra Swāmi, Shirdi Baba, Ramana Maharshi, Swāmi Nārāyan, Lahari Mahāsaya, Yogānanda, Rāmakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, etc., who have initiated numerous aspirants into their paths and contributed to the revival of Hinduism.

Among the contemporary gurus of today, one such guru who has been a major influencer and whose philosophy was that of inclusivity, based on the principles of *sanātana dharma*, is *Shri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi*. He was one among the prominent gurus who has had tremendous appeal for millions of devotees across the world in the recent times. The important characteristic of His religious movement was that it drew people from all religions, ethnicities and social classes. His approach was to build synthesis of the world religious traditions



and build unity through interfaith understanding. The Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization, founded by Him was directed towards the purpose of helping individuals take service activities as a means for spiritual enhancement. Scholars across the world identify His approach as that of a New Religious Movement. Many of His devotees believe Him to be the re-incarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba.

Shri Sathya Sai Baba hailed from a nondescript village called Puttaparthi, located in the Anantpur District of the state of Andhra Pradesh. It is 120km north of Bangalore. Sathya Sai Baba was born as Sathyanarayana Raju on November 23, 1926 in the village of Puttaparthi. Even as a child, His spiritual inclination, contemplative nature and miracles set Him apart from other children of His age and He was known as 'Guru' and '*brahmajnāni*' (knower of Brahman or Godhead) among His peers and others in the village. However, it was not until October 20, 1940, the day He made the historic declaration of His Avatarhood, (*avatāra* - Divinity Incarnate), that the world at large learnt of this divine phenomenon. He proclaimed

His message – to bring about the spiritual regeneration of humanity by demonstrating and teaching the highest principles of **Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-violence**. With that announcement, He left his childhood home and began his mission.

By personal example, Sathya Sai Baba has inspired and continues to inspire millions of followers throughout the world to the ideal that Service to man is Service to God. His numerous service projects, be it free hospitals, free schools and colleges, free drinking water supply projects, free housing projects, or disaster relief operations, all stand testimony to His selfless love and compassion, especially for the needy and less-privileged.

Prashanti Nilayam is the abode of Shri Sathya Sai Baba. Prashanti Nilayam is literally translated as the 'abode of the highest peace'. The *Āshrama* here is the most important site in Puttaparthi, as it is the main *āshrama* where Shri Sathya Sai Baba gave *darshana* to His visitors. Therefore, this highly revered *āshrama* has become a synonym for Puttaparthi over a period of time. Today, it is visited by tourists and devotees from all over the world on account of its peaceful and positive ambience.

The mandira --its Genesis and Growth

In the early 1940s, Baba was a charming youth of seventeen years. Three years earlier, He had declared, "I am Sai Baba of Shirdi who has come again for the redemption of mankind!". In spite of the revealing declaration, many people around Him in Puttaparthi were skeptical

about His might and mission. One such person was Lakshmaiah, although he had a deep love for the divine boy.

One day, Baba told Lakshmaiah, pointing to the hillocks, south of the village,

The Sai Pravesh (the advent of Sai) will transform that region into Prashanti Pradesh (a region of the highest peace). There will rise a bhavana (mansion)! Lakhs of people from all over India, why only India, from all over the world, will come and wait there for Sai darshana (sight of Sai)!

Lakshmaiah expressed his doubt. Baba asserted,

You will have to believe it when you have to stand where we are now, trying to catch a glimpse of me, standing on the porch of that bhavana.

The *bhavana* (mansion) that Baba spoke of on that day is the *mandira* in Prashanti Nilayam, the sacred abode of Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba. Shri Kasturi, the octogenarian biographer of Baba, writes about the *mandira*, "It has been the scene of countless transformations of character, revolutions in belief, confirmations of faith, curing of disease, calming of temper, discarding of hatred, salvaging of souls and reunions of hearts." Indeed, the *mandira* today stands as the symbol of the redemption of the world through the transformation of man. This *mandira* is the nucleus of Sai's mission of *dharmasthāpanā*.

Prashanti Nilayam, the simple-looking two-storied building of granite, was inaugurated on 23 November 1950,

the twenty-fourth birthday of Baba. The *mandira* 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 *shanthi* (peace) and *prashanthi* (supreme peace); and that really is the message of the Prasanthi *mandira*.



Another interesting anecdote that is oft narrated with respect to the building of the *mandira* is the miraculous transportation of huge girders for the central prayer hall from the railway station at Penukonda, 16 miles away. These girders had been transported from Tiruchirappalli by rail. Since the route from the station to Puttaparthi was very precarious and needed to pass through dilapidated culverts, narrow streets of villages and vast expanse of sand roads, the engineers gave up all hopes of transporting them and placed before Baba, alternative proposals for roofing the hall. But Swāmi (as Baba was fondly and respectfully addressed and referred to) had other plans.

One fine morning, the R.T.O. of Anantpur, who was a devotee of Swāmi, found a surprise in front of his house. A huge crane from the Tungabadra dam site had stopped in front of his house and was not able to move further. The driver of the crane requested the officer to help him repair the vehicle. It was agreed that the crane would help transport the girders if it was repaired. The R.T.O. hurried to Puttaparthi and prayed to Baba, who materialized some *vibhuti* (sacred ash) and gave it to him. This *vibhuti* was smeared on the engine, and the driver was asked to start it, and lo, the crane started moving! The surprised driver went happily to Penukonda railway station, lifted the girders with the giant arms of the crane and started toward Puttaparthi. The sight of this giant carrying the girders was a great surprise for the villagers, who greeted it by lining up on the roadsides.

The *mandira* was built in 1944 and is referred to today as the old *mandira*, and its construction lasted about two years. Sathya Sai Baba can be said to be



the architect and engineer who directed the entire work for construction.

The *mandira* has had many makeovers over the years, as a result of the increasing popularity and people visiting for His *darshana*. In 1990's, the last major reconstruction was done with



(SAMĀDHI Of SWĀMI)

marble flooring and a beautifully appointed ceiling, adjoining the *mandira*. This was called the Sai Kulwant hall.

The Sai Kulwant hall is the place where Swāmi had been giving *darshana* to lakhs of devotees from all around the world. Today it houses the Samādhi of Swāmi and the prayer hall where all the daily rituals are performed. Every day in the morning and evening, prayers in the form of Veda chanting and *bhajan*s are offered to Him. Thereafter, the devotees are allowed to go near the Samādhi shrine and offer their prayers. The Sai Kulwant hall is the extension of the original *mandira* or the *bhajana* hall which is being maintained in its pristine form even today. The early morning prayers

which include *omkara*, *suprabhātam* and *abhishekam* of the deities are performed in the *mandira* on a daily basis. Adjacent to the *mandira* is the Poornachandra hall which was built by Swāmi in the year 1973. It is here that the conferences, cultural programs and the yagnas during Dussehra were performed; this continues even now.

Another striking feature inside the *āshrama* is the 50-foot-high pillar called the **Sarva Dharma Stupa**, celebrating the unity of all religions and inaugurated by Bhagawān on His 49th birthday in 1975. At its base are the symbol of all major world religions and on its crown is a fully bloomed lotus, symbolizing spiritual enlightenment. This stupa represents in a nutshell, the universal message of unity that Bhagawān always emphasized.

At the entrance of the *āshrama* is located the famous Ganesh temple. This was built around the same time as the main *mandira*. To the south of this shrine is the Subramanya temple.

Besides these, there are beautifully laid gardens inside the *āshrama* housing Gāyatri temple, Lakshmi temple and the Sarva Dharma garden. There is a beautiful temple of Lord Dattātreya at Prasanthi Nilayam. Bhagawān Baba inaugurated this temple on 13th January, 1986 in response to the prayers of the devotees of Lord Dattātreya. In this temple, Lord Dattātreya is seated under an *audumbara* tree, surrounded by nine gurus of Navnāth Sampradāya.

Ample facilities for accommodation for devotees have been

built inside the *āshrama*, with facilities such as canteens and shopping complexes. The entire facility is run on the strength of the volunteering service provided by the *sevadals* or the official volunteers. These dedicated selfless volunteers, men in blue scarves and women in orange scarves who come from all across India on rotation basis, have nurtured the *āshrama* with their love and dedication. It is they who are present in all areas across the *āshrama* and facilitate the activities of the pilgrims.

Other major attractions in Puttaparthi:

While the Prashanti Nilayam *āshrama* is the main attraction of this town, over the years, many important sites have developed in and around the *āshrama* and have gained relevance and importance for the visiting pilgrims. Some of them are -

Chitrāvathi River : Puttaparthi is located on the banks of Chitrāvathi river. The river is located about ½ km from the *āshrama*. It is considered by many as being the new Gangā, as Bhagawān bathed in the river, played on the banks of the river and also displayed many miracles and manifestations there.

Kalpavriksha: Another interesting feature located near the river bed is the *Kalpavriksha*. This 'wish-fulfilling' tree is an old tamarind tree from Bhagawān's childhood. It is believed that in his boyhood, Swāmi used to display his miraculous powers to his playmates by asking them to think of any fruit, in or out of season, and the same would appear hanging off the branches of the tamarind tree. Thus, the name 'wish-fulfilling tree'

was given. Today, the tree is a great look-out point over the Chitrāvathi river. It is located on the side of a hill on the banks of the Chitrāvathi. One needs to take a trek of 200 steps to reach the top of the hillock where the tree is situated.

Chaitanya Jyoti Museum: This beautiful structure was inaugurated in the year 2000 to commemorate the 75th year of advent of Bhagawān Sathya Sai Baba. It is a place which depicts scenes starting from early childhood of the spiritual leader, till the end. The divinity of His life is told by the medium of presentation in the stories associated with him. The place is deemed as an architectural marvel. It is a blend of Chinese, Thai, and Japanese architecture and it is one of its kind in India. Gothic arches, Chinese roofs and synthesis of various architectural styles make the museum unique.

Shri Sathya Sai Space Theatre – Planetarium: Inaugurated in the year 1985, this planetarium is associated with the Shri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher learning. The Shri Sathya Sai Institute is the first university of the country to employ the planetarium for educational purposes. The planetarium chamber is a well-equipped, automatable, multimedia facility that provides opportunities for multipurpose, interdisciplinary use beyond the realm of astronomy. With primary, secondary, college and university education at one complex at the Sathya Sai University, the planetarium acts as a catalyst in not only creating interest but also increasing the understanding of the basic concepts of

astronomy, mathematics, physics and other disciplines. This Space Theatre with a capacity of 200 is well-suited for classroom lectures.

Sri Sathya Sai International Centre for Sports: This is a state-of-the-art Olympic-standard, multi-discipline indoor stadium. It has facilities for Basketball, Volley ball, Tennis, Squash, Table tennis, Badminton, Gymnastics and Yoga/Aerobics. It was inaugurated on November 22, 2006, by the President of India, Hon'ble Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. The stadium has all amenities such as state-of-the-art training facilities, electronic scoreboard and sports equipment. This sports facility is restricted to the students and management of the *āshrama*.

Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Science: Among the major services that Swāmi has bestowed on his devotees is the super-specialty hospital 9 kms away from Prashanthi Nilayam in Puttaparthi. This hospital provides high quality state-of-the-art diagnosis and medical treatment at the tertiary level, completely free of charge to all, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, economic status or race. This 300-bedded tertiary care hospital is equipped with 14 operation theatres, one intensive care unit, two cardiac catheterization laboratories, five in-patient wards and a 24-hour emergency unit. The hospital has specialists in cardiology, cardiovascular and thoracic surgery, urology, ophthalmology, plastic surgery, orthopedics, gastroenterology, anesthesiology, laboratory services and

medical imaging. This magnificent facility was inaugurated by the Prime minister of India in the presence of Swāmi in the year 1991. Doctors from across the world come here to provide free services to the patients. The unique architecture of the hospital and the atmosphere of love and peace that pervades it have inspired people to hail it as a 'Temple of Healing'. The uniqueness of the hospital does not just stem from the fact that it provides treatment entirely free of charge, but more importantly because it treats the patients with love, compassion and dignity.

Besides the medical institute, Swāmi established Sri Satya Sai General Hospital at Prashanti Nilayam where patients from economically weaker sections are provided treatment for general ailments.

Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning: Built around the philosophy that education is for life and not for a living, the educational institutes established by Swāmi include colleges for graduation and post-graduation level, as well as research for doctorate purposes. It is a deemed university with campuses at Prashanti Nilayam, Whitefield in Bangalore as well as a college in Anantapur for girls. Besides higher education, they also run primary and higher secondary schools in Puttaparthi. The system of education at all levels is value-based with emphasis on character building and personality development. Like all services, the education provided is completely free of cost. Huge campuses of the educational

institute and their hostels can be seen along the way to the *āshrama*.

Sri Sathya Sai Mirpuri Music College: Another unique institution founded by Baba was the Music college at Puttaparthi. This music institution focuses its attention on teaching vocal music of Hindustāni and Carnātic styles. People interested in music can also get training in numerous musical instruments including Tablā, Mridangam, Veenā and Sitār by taking admission in diploma or foundation courses.

Sanathana Samskruthi Museum: The Sanathana Samskruthi Museum or the Eternal Heritage Museum promotes one of the cardinal teachings of Bhagawān, the message of the unity of all religions. The exhibits highlight the main precepts of the major religions of the world and also the lives and teachings of great



saints and spiritual masters whose mission has been the spiritual uplift of all humanity. It is constructed in the shikhara style of architecture, characteristic of Jain temples in India. It was inaugurated by Bhagawān on 19th November, 1990.

Sri Sathya Sai Hill view Stadium: The stadium has been built for

conducting the sports day event for the students studying in the educational institutes at Puttaparthi. Every year on the 11th of January, the annual sports day takes place here. Many of Swāmi's birthday celebrations have been conducted here.

Overlooking the stadium are the statues of great spiritual masters and Avatāras like Krishna, Shirdi Sai Baba, Shiva, Buddha, Zoroaster and Jesus Christ. At the peak of the hill is the 65 feet-high statue of Lord Hanumān, that was built to commemorate Bhagawān's 65th birthday.

Vat vriksha or the Meditation tree: The meditation tree is a banyan tree planted by Bhagawān on 29th June 1959, under which He has installed a 'yantra', a copper plate with mystic markings on it. This 'yantra', measuring about 15 inches X 10 inches, was materialized out of the sands of river Chitrāvathi by Bhagawān, sometime in April 1959, when He had gone to the banks of the river along with some devotees, as He often would, during those days. Bhagawān has said that such 'yantras' are an aid to meditation as they help develop concentration of the mind and control of the senses. He has also declared that the tree will attract Yogis (spiritual adepts) who have reached a certain level of attainment in their spiritual pursuits.

Temples and holy shrines around Puttaparthi

Ānjaneya Temple: Located at Gopuram Road in Puttaparthi is the Ānjaneya Temple. The temple has an entrance with a beautiful Shiva Lingam. Upon entering,

the devotees can get a view of the presiding deity Hanumān. There is always a pool of water at the feet of Ānjaneya (Hanumān) representing the tears he sheds in His love and longing for Lord Rama. The temple is associated with a remarkable incident that occurred during Bhagawān's childhood days. One day, young Sathya and His friends visited the temple to perform the customary circumambulation. They had gone around the sanctum sanctorum once and were about to go around it again when Sathya suddenly stopped and stood rooted to the spot as if held by some invisible force. Some of his stronger mates tried to move Him but couldn't. He explained to His wonderstruck friends that it was Lord Hanuman who was holding Him back, and even as He said these words, the boys could see Lord Hanuman holding Sathya's feet tightly and saying, "Lord, it is I who have to circumambulate you".



A **Shiva temple** in Puttaparthi village signifies the birth-place of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The temple was opened by Baba in 1979. Legends of His birth and boyhood *leelās* can be visualized here.

The village mosque and the hall opposite was constructed and opened by Baba in 1978. At a certain borderline from Puttaparthi, accidents would happen and diseases would set in on travellers. Bhagawān asked local people in the area to dig at a certain spot, and a plate was discovered, containing various Muslim inscriptions. The plate was moved into the *mandira*, and all inauspicious events stopped. A mosque was built in Puttaparthi and the plate was taken on yearly processions to the mosque from the *mandira*.

Another sacred place of visit near the Āshrama is **the samadhi of Bhagawān's parents**, Sri Pedda Venkappa Raju and Smt. Easwaramma. Every year during Eswaramma Day, May 6th, special *bhajanās* are conducted here and hundreds of poor people are fed. In earlier years, Bhagawān used to offer obeisance to His parents on His birthday every year and travel in procession to the Samādhi.

Long before it was called 'Puttaparthi', the village was known as 'Gollapalli' (home of cowherds). It was the land of a large number of beautiful and strong cows. In a strange turn of events, a cowherd noticed that his favorite cow yielded no milk since she fed a cobra. Enraged, the cowherd killed the serpent with a stone and in its last moments, it threw an angry curse that the place will be full of ant-hills. The cattle declined in numbers and health. Ant-hills spread all over and the name soon changed to *Valmiki Pura* (since Valmika in Sanskrit means an ant-hill) or *Puttaparthi* in common parlance. To avert the curse and



(Gopalaswami temple)

help cattle to prosper again, a temple was built and endowed by the Raju family for Venugopal, otherwise known as the **Gopala Swami Temple**. It is a small temple but of immense significance to the village folk.

Another famous temple of Puttaparthi is the **temple of Sathyabhāmā**. Also called 'Sathyammā Temple', this is a temple dedicated to the worship of Mother Sathyabhāmā, the divine consort of Lord Krishna. This is a unique temple because seldom in any part of India, this type of homage is offered to Mother Sathyabhāmā. It was built by the pious Sri Ratnākaram Kondama Raju (the Bhagawān's paternal grandfather). He was persuaded to build this unique tribute to Sathyabhāmā by events that occurred during a dream. In the dream, Kondama Raju saw Sathyabhāmā, alone, expectant and

forlorn, waiting anxiously for her lord, who had gone on an errand to bring her the much-coveted 'pārijātham' flowers. The minutes increased to hours and the hours accumulated into days but still there was no sign of Lord Krishna! So, Sathyabhāmā broke into tears. There ensued a huge storm accompanied by thunder, lightning and a heavy shower of rain. Luckily, her eyes fell on Kondama Raju who was passing across the place where she stood and she asked him to provide some shelter. This led to the determination of Sri Kondama Raju to raise a temple for the Consort of the Lord.

Puttaparthi was a small insignificant village till the advent of Swāmi. Today it has gained popularity across the world and has become a major pilgrimage centre. Though there are many such beautiful places near and around Puttaparthi, the Prashānti Nilayam beckons its devotees from all around the world to help gain inner peace and quietude, feel the presence of the divinity around them through selfless *sevā* and exult in the sublime bliss of the divine vibrations that exude in the ambience of the place.

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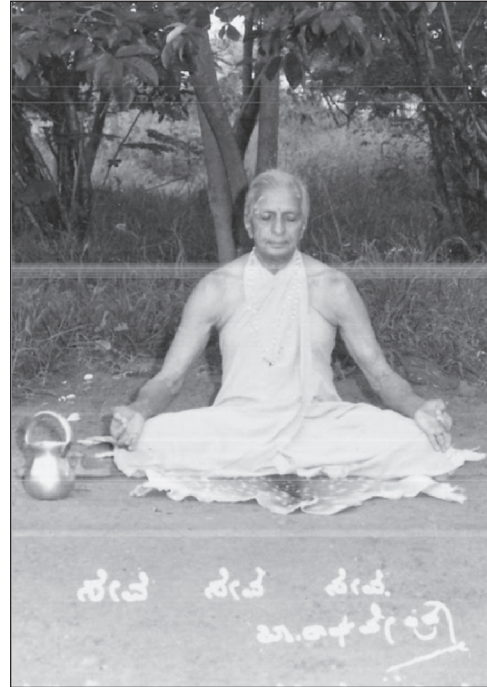
- Swāmi Chidānanda

I take you in this article to the year 1978, 42 long years back in time. Though it was a short meeting that lasted perhaps 30 minutes, it was something that very much justifies the second part of the general title of this series – ‘enduring impressions.’

This was during my college days in Dāvangere, Karnataka, and I had not been introduced to Vedānta. I had a general interest in any eminent person, in any field for that matter, not necessarily spirituality. For example, when Sāi Prakāsh, a genius in chess, about 24 years old then, came to Dāvangere and visited our college, I was one of the four chess players who faced him in a ‘simultaneous match,’ where he played blindfolded! He defeated three of us and drew with the fourth! His eminence in the game of chess and his simple personality had greatly impressed me. He and I connected again after 40 years and are now in touch with each other in a different domain altogether, that of social service! People from various walks of life, with certain excellence about them, used to inspire me. Little did I know that I would be drawn to Vedānta within a few years from then.

Meeting a Yogi

A classmate of mine, named Rāmaswāmy, hailed from the village Mallādihalli which is about 40 kms to the



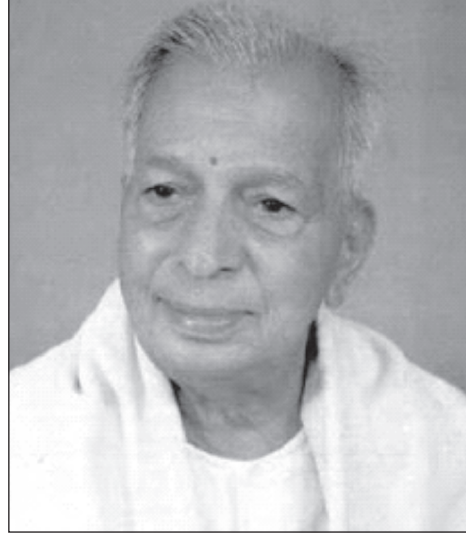
south of Dāvangere. From my other friends and him, I heard a lot of fascinating things about this astonishing man – Rāghavendra Swāmi – who had been a dedicated teacher of yoga, speaker on spiritual topics, and above all, engaged in serving the poor villagers in many ways. Rāmaswāmy welcomed me to visit his village and offered to take me to the Āshram of the Swāmiji.

So it was, that on a Sunday, I boarded a bus and headed off to Mallādihalli. Rāmaswāmy received me at the bus stop in his village, took me first to his house, served some refreshments and coffee, and then led me to the

'Anātha-Sevāshrama' (Centre for orphans and allied services). We were at the campus of this Swāmiji now, who had taken the pen name 'Tiruka', which, in Kannada, means 'a beggar'. It is said that he had no hesitation in asking people for donations, which he badly needed all the time, for his centre was feeding thousands of people daily and was providing various other services like free medical care.

We said to someone at the office that we were very keen to meet Swāmiji and were told that Swāmiji was on his rounds, visiting different departments of the large set-up. We were asked to go around, see the facilities and then come back. Accordingly, we went and saw the different wings of his institution, active in service to humanity. What remains very clearly in my memory is a large hall for teaching yogāsanas, which had windows with grills (metal frames) depicting various yogic postures. I was told Swāmiji had personally supervised the making of these windows.

About an hour later, we were blessed to meet the *mahātmā* (great man) at the Āshram's office. He was cheerful, full of energy and was very welcoming. He seemed to be extremely busy but spoke to us lovingly, making some enquiries about our background. The 20 or 30 minutes passed very quickly, and, before we realized it, we were done with everything and were at the exit gates of the centre.



Sevā, Sevā and Sevā

The indelible memory I have of my visit is how I had asked Swāmiji for a message to us, youngsters. He said to us very emphatically, "Sevā, sevā and sevā!" He urged us to live for the service of others, and said everything else should revolve around it. His reference to sevā (service) with so much emphasis was filled with a lively quality, rather than bookish flavour, because this man was literally engaged in serving people day and night.

We hear that, during his 106 years of life, he was relentlessly engaged in teaching yoga to people, providing Ayurvedic medical care to patients, giving spiritual discourses and writing books on spiritual themes. Doing so much and yet remaining energetic made him a true yogi in the conventional sense.

One of the anecdotes mentioned about him is that he once ran the whole night to reach a village where he was to

serve people in the morning. When he had gone, along with two disciples, to the railway station to board a train to the destination, he found the train had been cancelled (or was going to come many hours later). Leaving his disciples behind, he just ran on the track. The next day, when the disciples reached that village by train, they were astonished to see Swāmiji already attending to large numbers of people! Thus, his life fully reflected his ideal, which he shared with us, the college boys who met him that day.

The Yoga Teacher

During his lifetime, it is believed that Rāghavendra Swāmi of Mallādihalli had taught Yoga to more than 4.5 million people all over the world. His extraordinary life came to an end in 1996. Three months before that, he was in a hospital, where his disciples had admitted him following some health issues. While delivering a lecture, he had collapsed on the platform and people had taken him to the hospital. At



midnight, he regained consciousness and, removing all the tubes and other things attached to his body, made his way out from the window of the first floor

of the hospital, and ran back to his Āshram! Three months later, he peacefully breathed his last at his own Centre.

How it began

The future yogi was, in his childhood, a *rogi* (sick person). Right from his infancy, he had been a chronic asthmatic. He was just wheezing day and night. His parents tried a lot of medicines and did whatever they could, but the boy was just wasting away. When he was about 12 years of age, a Yogi came by and the parents asked him to heal the boy. The Yogi said, “This boy is anyway not going to be of much use to you. If you keep him with you, he will die. Give him to me; I will take him with meart.”

This yogi was known as Palani Swamy. He used to walk alone and generally did not recruit any disciple. This boy, however, became an exception. The visiting yogi took him along and trained him in the ways of yoga. The boy not only grew out of his ailment, but grew into a physically strong wrestler who lived a happy, long life.

There is a video on YouTube where Sadhguru Jaggi Vāsudev mentions his association with the Swāmiji of Mallādihalli. Among other things, Sadhguru remembers that this Swāmiji would sometimes get down to wrestling with three youngsters at a time and would be victorious! Wrestling was a passion with him, which he also taught to many of his students.

Swāmiji was adept in the of āyurveda too and knew how to examine



'nādis' (similar to checking a patient's pulse). People used to believe that, by examining a patient's pulse, he would not only tell what disease the patient had on that day but also what diseases the patient would get in the years to come!

He would tell them remedial steps. Every Monday, he used to travel to distant villages and treat patients free of cost from early morning till dusk. Such was his energy that when he visited a village, it used to be a festive atmosphere all around – he used to tell jokes and make everyone laugh the whole day.

Looking back, I have no doubt that it was my good fortune to have met him and talked to him. His blessings perhaps prepared the ground for me to come into contact with the great Vedānta master Swāmi Chinmayānanda within the next two or three years. I remember Mallādhalli Swāmiji with gratitude and devotion.



"Something hidden.
Go and find it.
Go and look behind the Ranges
Something lost behind the Ranges.
Lost and waiting for you. Go!"

- Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)



When Bill and Melinda Gates got married, Bill's parents gave the couple an interesting gift: a sculpture of two birds, sitting side by side, staring at the horizon. Twenty-four years later, Melinda said the statue still sat in front of their house.

"I think of it all the time," wrote Melinda back in 2018, "because fundamentally we're looking in the same direction."

Seems that the Gateses are still looking in the same direction. In addition to marriage and raising three children together, the two have worked together for years, running their charitable organization, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

But any couple who has attempted to live and work together will testify that doing so isn't easy - especially when you throw children into the mix. How do they do it?

I recently came across a post on Bill Gates's blog that asked the couple a tough question:

How do you handle disagreements?

The Gateses' answer reveals major lessons for teams of all sizes. It's a lesson in emotional intelligence, the ability to identify, understand, and manage emotions. This quality is invaluable when working as a team, because emotions play such a huge role in our dealings with others.

So, how do Bill and Melinda use emotional intelligence to navigate their greatest challenges?

***Here are three highlights:
They exercise empathy.***

Empathy is one of those qualities we all want others to show to us, but that can be difficult to show to others--especially when we disagree.

"I love Bill because he has a kind heart, listens to other people, and lets himself be moved by what they say," writes Melinda. "When I tell a story about what I've seen, he feels it. He might ask me to gather some data for good measure, but he doesn't doubt the reality of my experiences or the soundness of my judgment."

Melinda's description of Bill's behavior is a perfect description of empathy:

1. Listen first.
2. Identify with the other person's feelings.
3. Don't judge.

This is easier said than done. Just think of a time when a member of your team (or family, or a friend) complained to you about something you didn't think was a big deal. How did you react? For many, the tendency is to dismiss the other person's experience.

But when you can find a way to

relate to the other person's feelings, you'll reveal this automatically - in the words you use, the tone in which you speak, your facial expressions, even in your body language.

Empathy serves as a great foundation for any relationship. Because when someone treats you with empathy, you're moved to do the same for them.

They give valuable feedback.

"Some people see Melinda as the heart of our foundation, the emotional core," writes Bill. "But just as she knows I'm more emotional than people realize, I know she's more analytical than people realize."

Bill says the couple takes advantage of these strengths to keep each other balanced.

"When I get really enthusiastic about something, I count on her to make sure I'm being realistic," says Bill. "She helps me understand when I can push our teams harder (as I pretty much always did at Microsoft) and when I need to ease off."

Similarly, Melinda says, the couple has learned over time, to give each other feedback at home when they aren't reaching their goals in the office.

Teams of all sizes thrive when team members can trust one another to give constructive feedback. When change is needed, it's not about identifying who's right or wrong. It's all about continuous improvement.

Emotional intelligence is about learning both to deliver and receive feedback in the best way possible - one that is designed to help, not harm.

They begin with respect.

In a world where women are afforded much less opportunity than men, Melinda says she is thankful that she and her husband have achieved true equality-- both in their marriage and work relationship.

"This is a balance that married couples, and co-workers, all over the world are always trying to strike," Melinda writes. "One of the reasons this work has been so fun for me is that we've been on this journey together."

"We are partners in both senses that people use the word these days: at home and at work," Bill chimes in.

You may not work with your spouse, but there's a lot to be learned from the Gateses' experience.

Do whatever you can to give your team ownership, to make them feel that they are partners, not pawns. That means giving them freedom to explore and share new ideas, and rewarding them for doing so. At times, it also means learning to "disagree and commit."

Because once they feel respected and valued, and especially if they feel a sense of ownership in the work, they'll be ready to go all in, all together.



What do we learn from
the Upanishads?

What is here, you will find there too!

- Swāmi Chidānanda

yadeveha tadamutra

यदेवेह तदमुत्र

As far as the inner world is concerned, wherever we go,
we will meet the same bunch of
advantages and challenges.

The wise therefore do not attach undue importance to externalities like place,
people and objects.
They know that, really speaking,
a man makes a position great and it is not the other way round.

Whether we are in the noisy surroundings of cities or in the serene atmosphere of
Himalayan resorts, we first have to face our own mind!

Our likes and dislikes, our laziness or our false priorities don't spare us,
no matter where we go!

The mantra (2.1.10) of Kathopanishad thus asks us to recognize
the fact that golden
opportunities to live a right, spiritual life exist everywhere – *here* as well as *there*.
We must work on ourselves, wherever we are. We must not get carried away by
the glitter and glamour of places or the charming appearances of people.
Our main field of action is the arena called our own mind!

On a higher note, the mantra draws our attention to the same Self (*ātmā*) being present
in the midst of physical (or mental) associations (here) or
free of all associations (there).



- By Anthony de Mello, S.J.

One day the Master asked, "What, in your opinion,
is the most important of all religious questions?"

He got many answers:

"Does God exist?"

"Who is God?"

"What is the path to God?"

"Is there a life after death?"

"No." said the Master, "The most important question is: "Who am I?"

The disciples got some idea of what he was hinting at when they overheard him
talking to a preacher.

Master: "So then, according to you, when you die your soul will be in heaven?"

Preacher: "Yes"

Master: "And your body will be in the grave?"

Preacher: "Yes"

Master: "And where, may I ask, will you be?"



All beings are from the very beginning Buddhas

It is like water and ice:

Apart from water, no ice,

Outside living beings, no Buddhas.

- Hakuin (1685-1768)



कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभो देहे तिष्ठन्ति तस्कराः ।
ज्ञानरत्नापहाराय तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ॥

Unbridled desire, anger and greed stay like thieves in the body and mind of all human beings in this world and cloud their entire world (destroy their power of discriminating between right and wrong...). Therefore, beware and wake up, wake up from this stupor.



THE LESSON FROM A LEAF

I asked the leaf whether it was frightened because it was autumn and the other leaves were falling. The leaf told me, "No. During the whole spring and summer, I was completely alive. I worked hard to help nourish the tree, and now much of me is in the tree. I am not limited by this form. I am also the whole tree, and when I go back to the soil, I will continue to nourish the tree. So, I don't worry at all. As I leave this



branch and float to the ground, I will wave to the tree and tell her, 'I will see you again very soon'."

That day there was a wind blowing and, after a while, I saw the leaf leave the branch and float down to the soil, dancing joyfully, because as it floated it saw itself already there in the tree. It was so happy. I bowed my head, knowing that I have a lot to learn from the leaf.

- Thich Nat Hanh



D.A. Marcum

Dear God, if I've been careless
Or unkind with anyone...
Unresponsive to a helpful deed
That needed to be done...

If I've missed an opportunity
To say the word of cheer
That someone with a heartache
Would've been so glad to hear....

If I've scorned the one who turned to me
When failure came his way
Who depended on my wisdom
And encouragement today....

If I've let my little world come first
In a way that blinds me to
The great big world around me
And the good that others do....

If I've fallen short in any way...
I ask that You forgive it
And help me keep each coming day
As You would have me live it.



ETERNAL VIBRATIONS

DO NOT BE CHARMED BY SPECIAL POWERS



सिद्धस्य वित्तिः *siddhasya vittih*
सत एव सिद्धिः *sat eva siddhih*
स्वप्नोपमानाः *svapnopamānāh*
खलु सिद्धयोऽन्याः ॥ *khalu siddhayo'nyāh*

In the case of an enlightened man, his understanding of the ultimate truth itself is the (invaluable) power that he possesses. All other (supernatural) powers are comparable with dreams.

Saddarshanam, verse 37

(A composition of Shri Ramana Maharshi)

Since time immemorial, people have been enchanted by special powers (*siddhis*) like walking on water, flying in air, reading others' thoughts, knowing what will happen in future, etc. True spiritual wisdom attaches little value to these. We are instead advised to keep away from these powers. Knowing the Pure Self is the only thing – the best *siddhi* – that we ought to seek. All other powers vanish in thin air (or lose their value), just as dream objects disappear upon waking.

Such verses are extremely helpful to us in *sādhana*, as a hundred attractions of the world tend to distract us all the time.

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FOWAI FORUM

Wisdom for Right Action

Dissemination of spiritual and secular wisdom is the main objective of the Fowai Forum. Educational activities, human welfare and services to all life are its concerns. Insights and observations especially based on Indian culture and heritage will find expression in its activities.

This public trust came into being in the year 2006. Registered as per the Mumbai Public Trust Act of 1950, the Forum engages in organizing talks and workshops as well as in publication of books and audio-visual media.

F.O.W.A.I. = Flame Of Who Am I?

“Who am I?” is the most basic question of life. The understanding of the self, the ‘me’, can cause radical change in the quality of life. This requires turning (the flame of) attention towards thoughts and emotions. When likes and dislikes fall away, pure perception takes place. That heralds freedom.

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