

.....
The Miracle of Pure Love
.....

THE STORY OF SATHYA SAI BABA

Volume 3

G. VENKATARAMAN

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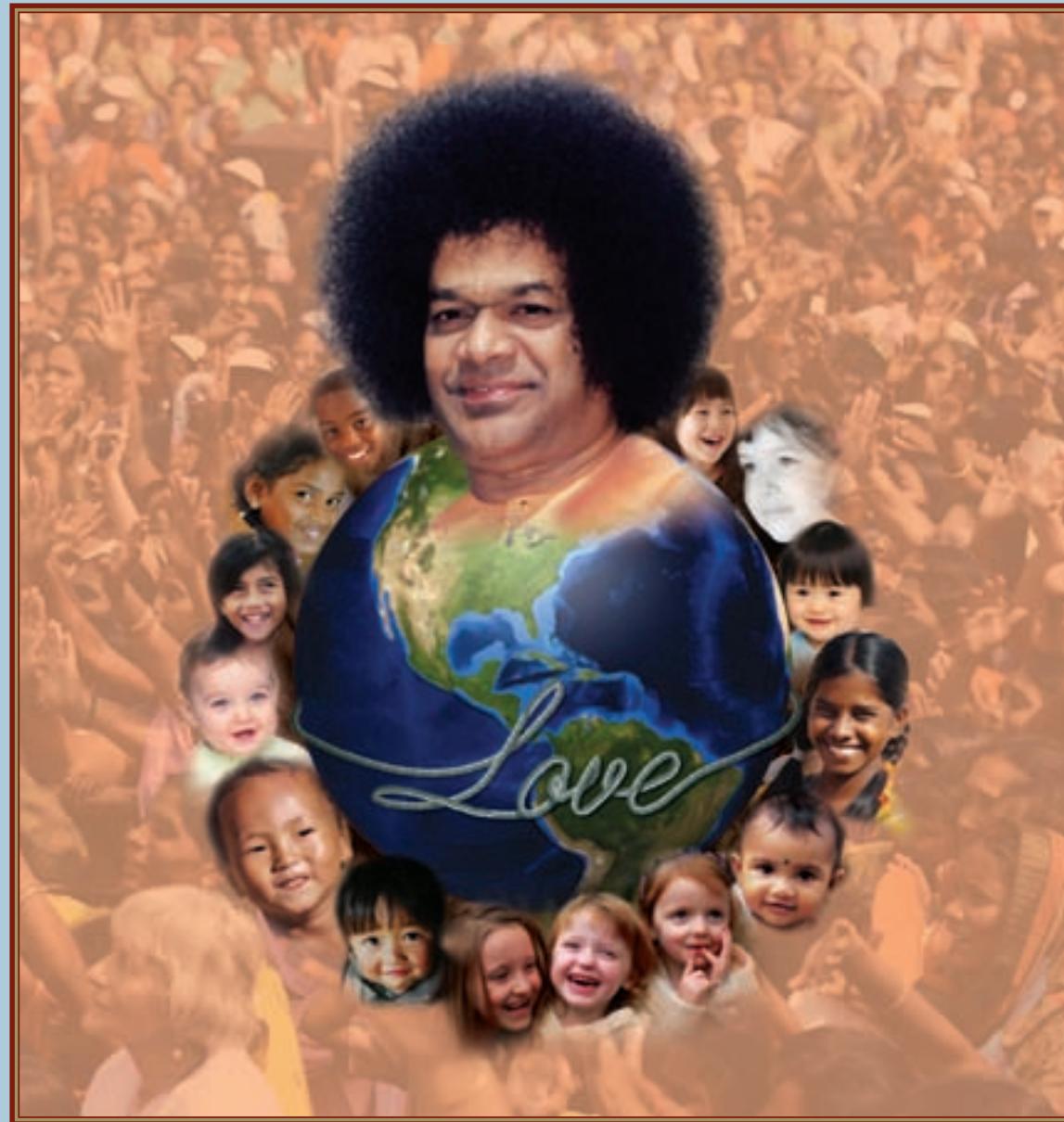
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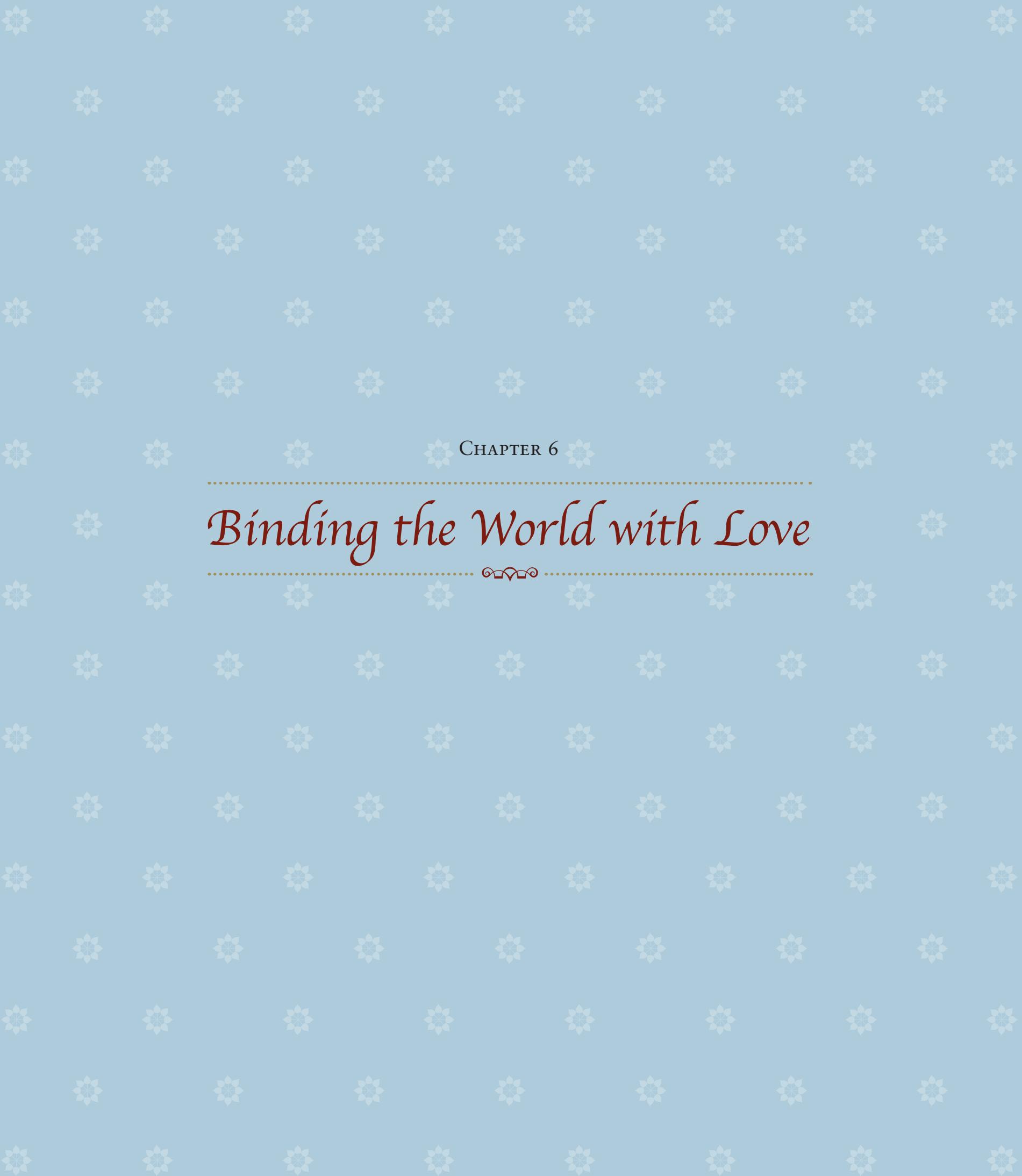
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After briefly describing how Baba's Love reached people in many lands and how he drew devotees from all over the world, the book is brought to a close with a brief description of Baba's last days and a philosophical discussion of his legacy.



CHAPTER 6

Binding the World with Love



The Last Tours

Baba spread Love both by going out to the people and by drawing them to him. For decades he traveled extensively, no doubt in response to calls from devotees. After 1990, however, he traveled less frequently, especially following a hip fracture in April 2003. Baba underwent surgery and recovered, but unfortunately in August of the same year he slipped and injured his leg once more. Surgery was recommended again, but this time Baba refused. Painful though the injury was, he chose to live with it. When asked why, Baba just shrugged and said, "Pain is an inevitable part of life. If you are able to rise above body consciousness, you can get on with life without being distracted by pain."

After this, Baba restricted walking to short distances. Later he began moving around in a special chair that was part of a Toyota Porte. Fitted in the front of the car and next to the driver's seat, this chair could, after the car was stopped, be robotically swung around, deposited on the ground and disconnected from the car, after which it could be pushed like a wheelchair.



Baba was always full of energy. In earlier years he was often given to walking fast, if necessary. After two fractures of his leg in 2003, his movements became rather restricted. Since walking was difficult, he traveled in a Toyota Porte, which had a seat that could be detached and then be wheeled around. Pictures here show how Baba used to arrive by that car for Darshan and then move around in the hall in the chair that was one of the two front seats of the car. Baba usually wore a saffron-colored robe, but on special occasions he wore a yellow, white or maroon robe.



Travel now meant great personal inconvenience, but for the sake of devotees, Baba ignored his discomfort and visited a few places. Wherever Baba went, so did the Porte car. Between 2005 and 2010 Baba visited Kodai a few times, went once to Chennai in 2007, and spent the summer of 2008 in Bangalore. In October 2009, Baba went to Hadshi in the state of Maharashtra. He was already tired from an earlier visit to Kodai in April; nevertheless, because of the persistence of a devotee who had been praying to Baba for years, he agreed to this visit.



Hadshi is a small town in the Western Ghats, between Mumbai, the financial capital of India, and Pune (formerly Poona, in British times a military center but now a city with many manufacturing and software industries). A devotee of Baba who has a large farm in Hadshi invited him to come and bless a temple he had built. He had been making this request for many years, and Baba finally consented to visit Hadshi in October 2009. The visit lasted three days and was memorable. Huge crowds came to see Baba from long distances, including Mumbai and Pune. Pictures on this page and the three that follow were taken during this visit. Among other things, they show the large crowds that came to see Baba.

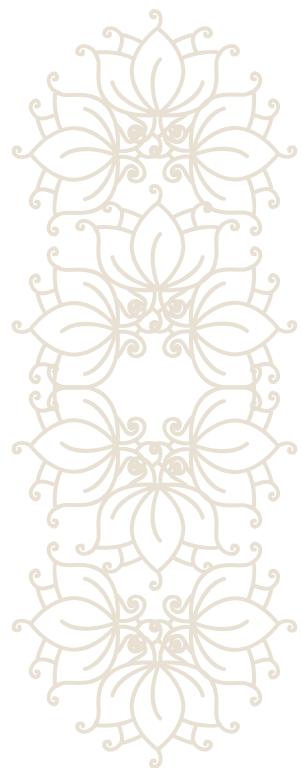


An aerial view of the crowd that came for Baba's Darshan. A large number of cars can be seen parked in the distance, at the foot of the hills rising behind.

Baba took a few guests and several students with him. The guests were accommodated in rooms surrounding a pool seen in the picture alongside. Baba stayed elsewhere, as did the students. On the right, Baba coming to see the guest quarters.

Behind the pool was a balcony commanding a panoramic view of the ghats. The picture below shows Baba enjoying the scenery from the balcony.







At night, the place was lit up like a fairyland, as pictures here show.



Women of Hadshi village waiting to say goodbye to Baba as he left for Mumbai.

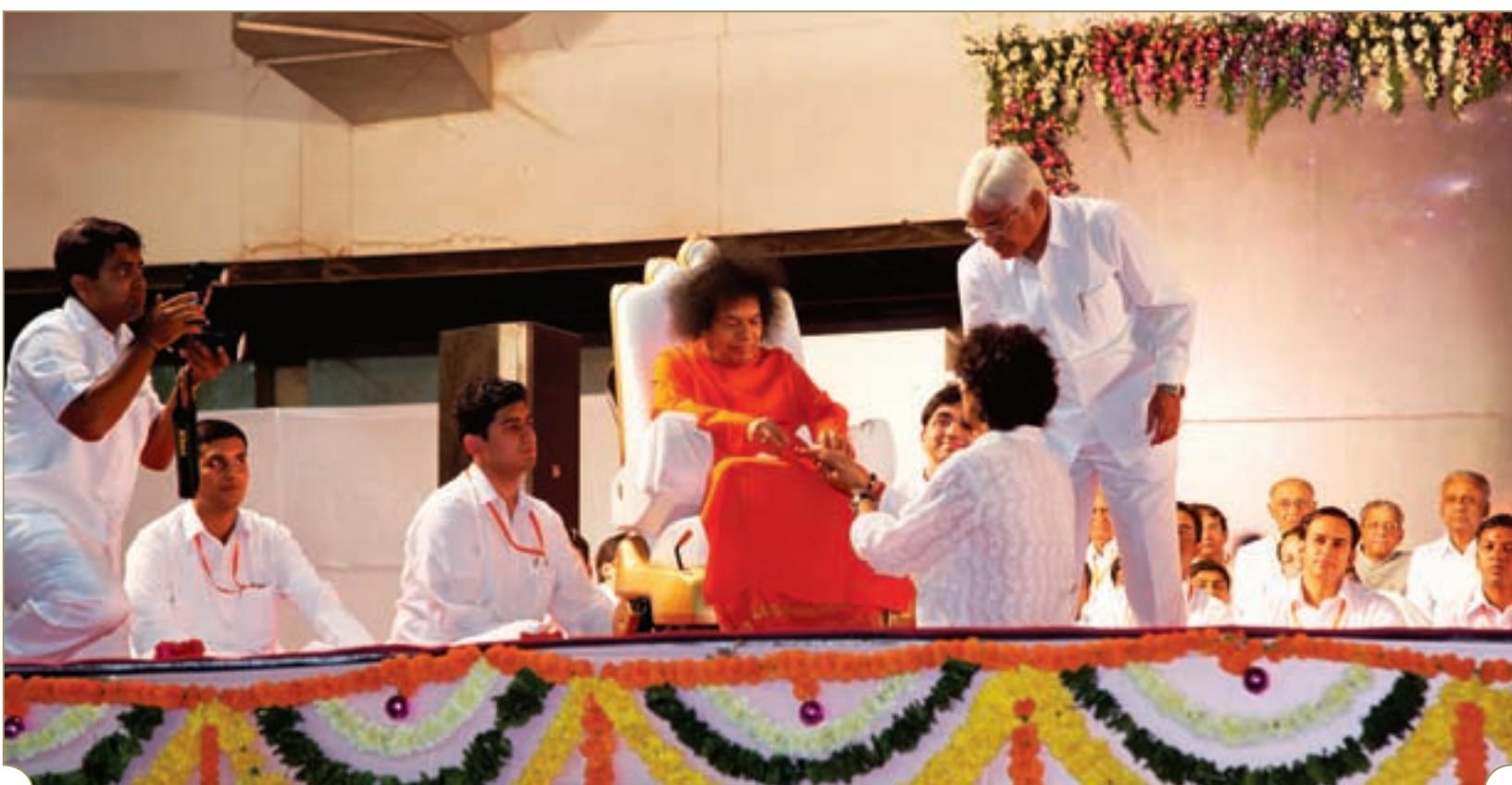
Located in the Western Ghats, the trip to Hadshi was brief but relaxing, especially since Baba had a large group of his students with him. From there, Baba's party drove down to India's financial capital, Mumbai. In earlier years, Baba had often visited Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay); this time he stayed for barely two days.



From Hadshi Baba drove to Mumbai, a city he had regularly visited since the mid-1960s. The picture alongside shows the headquarters of the Sai Organization in Mumbai, which is where Baba always stayed when he went to that city. To the left can be seen a pillar symbolizing the unity of faiths.



A number of bankers and industrialists called on Baba to pay their respects. Pictures show Baba meeting and talking to them.



While in Mumbai Baba gave several public Darshans. Pictures here were taken during an evening Darshan in North Mumbai in a large indoor stadium. A well-known musician sang on that occasion; one picture shows Baba blessing him.



Scenes from the Darshan Baba gave in South Mumbai. The city being huge, it became necessary to accommodate the wishes of people living in different parts.



The last event of Baba's visit to Mumbai was yet another Darshan, this one arranged in the huge Brabourne Stadium. The pictures at the top show Baba arriving and balloons being released by way of greeting him. Just above, Baba being welcomed.

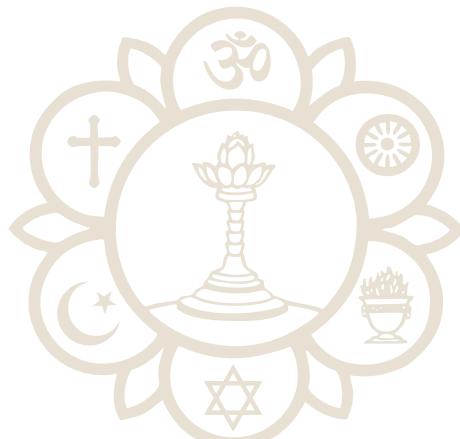


After the welcome, Baba's students presented a scintillating music concert, entertaining the gathering.



A Google view of Brabourne Stadium, where Baba gave Darshan and his students gave a musical presentation. On the left, flanking a seaside road known as Marine Drive, is the Arabian Sea.

In April 2010, Baba made a brief trip to Delhi and Shimla (formerly Simla). Delhi becomes quite hot in April, with the mercury hovering mostly over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. And yet Baba went, largely on account of the desire of devotees in the capital city who complained that he had not been there for 10 years. While Delhi because of its heat was unquestionably a big strain, the brief visit to Shimla was an entirely different experience. Nestled in the Himalayas, Shimla provided a welcome and much-needed relief from the heat of Delhi. However, the respite was brief, since Baba was anxious to be back in Puttaparthi.



The last trip that Baba made was in April 2010, which included a brief visit to the capital city, Delhi, and to the hill station Shimla in the Himalayas. In Delhi, Baba gave Darshan in many places. Pictures shown on this and the following two pages were taken in the Darshan area adjacent to the building where Baba was staying. Since the space there was limited, Baba also gave Darshan elsewhere.



More scenes of Baba's Darshan adjacent to his residence in Delhi.



Devotees were able to see Baba from close quarters. Below are pictures of a distraught mother with a very sick child, crying and praying to Baba. When he blessed the child, the mother was overwhelmed and is seen expressing her gratitude.

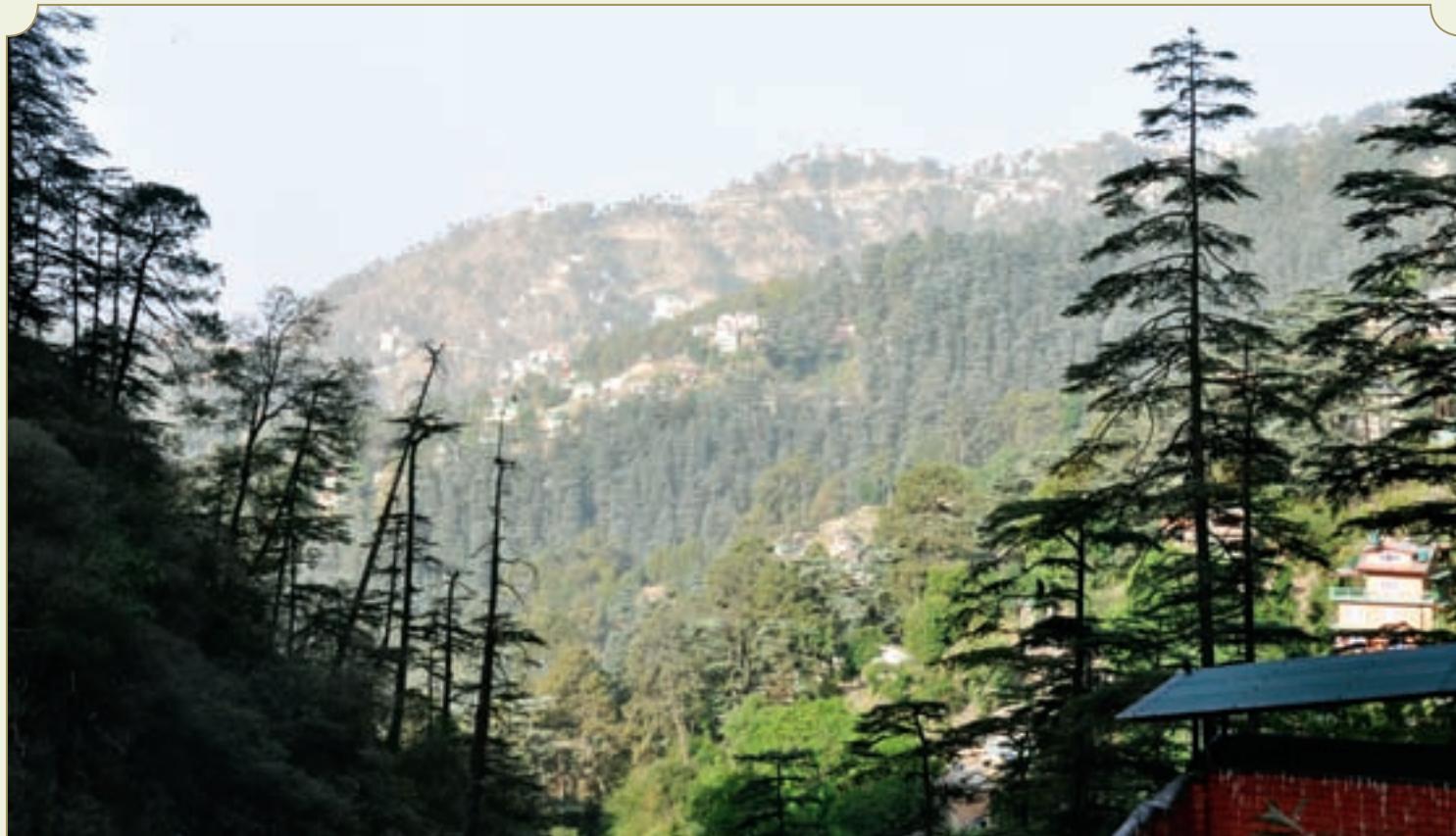




Pictures on this page and the one following were taken in an area that permitted large crowds to come for Baba's Darshan. Though it was very hot and Baba was rather tired, he graciously went several times to that area to fulfill the wishes of his devotees. Special programs of music and dance were arranged on those occasions. Pictures here show a view of the huge gathering and also a leading musician singing devotional songs.







Views of the mountains near Shimla.



Shimla is a hill station in the Himalayas that in British times was the summer capital of India. After visiting Delhi, Baba paid a brief visit to Shimla. He had visited it once earlier, in the 1970s. Pictures above show people waiting near the airport for Baba's arrival and greeting him as he drove to the place where he was to stay.



The state of Himachal Pradesh, of which Shimla is the capital, is relatively rural.

A large percentage of the population consists of ethnic groups, each with their own traditions. Most of them live in the valleys, engaged primarily in farming. Baba was very popular among these people, and it was no surprise that large numbers came to see him.

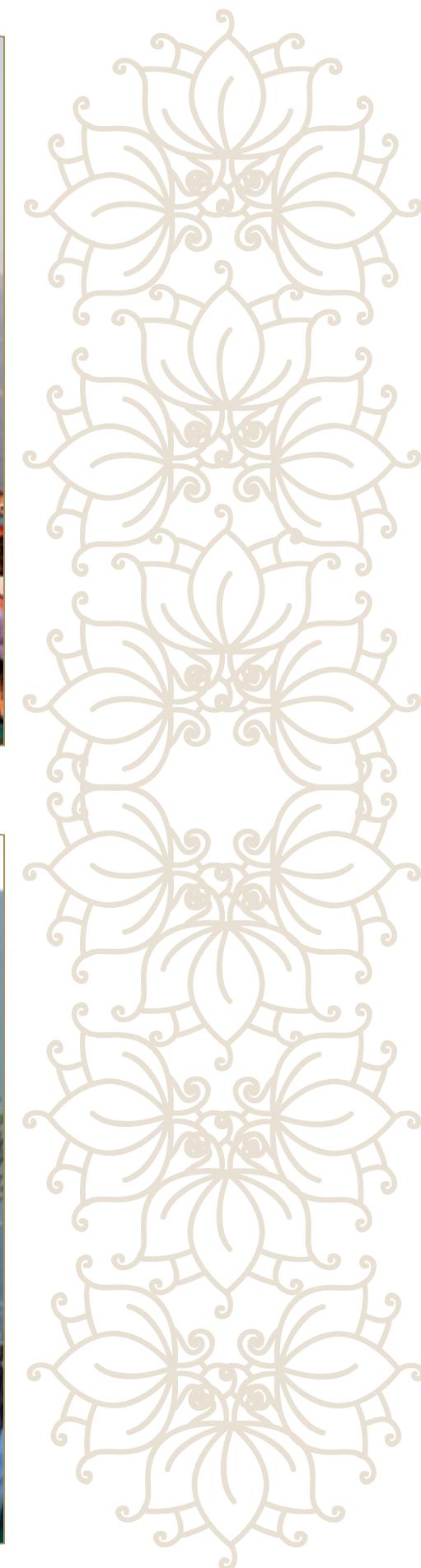
Pictures on this page show Baba giving Darshan and then moving among the devotees.



To accommodate the crowds, some Darshans were arranged outdoors. The pictures on this page and the two pages that follow offer glimpses of those Darshans.







A particularly memorable moment was the impromptu music concert offered by the boys in the plane while returning from Delhi to Puttaparthi. As it turned out, it was not only special, but one of a kind, for Baba never traveled again.



After the completion of the Delhi-Shimla visit, Baba returned by air to Puttaparthi. During the flight some of Baba's students who had accompanied him gave an impromptu musical concert. These pictures capture that rare event. This trip turned out to be Baba's last.





The Global Reach



Victor Kanu.



Students going to classes.

Back in 1950 when Prashanti Nilayam was inaugurated, few imagined that Baba's message would spread far and wide. Baba, however, foresaw this clearly and hinted as much in his letter to his elder brother in 1947. Baba became widely known for two reasons: his unmatched Love and his exceptionally simple message. All he said on most occasions was: "Help ever, hurt never. Love all, serve all!" Nothing could be simpler, as Michael Nobel of Sweden once remarked; it was trans-religious, beyond all controversy, compelling and absolutely unifying. All it required was for the Head to cooperate with the Heart. If that could be managed, then Baba's teachings could be put into practice almost anywhere.

Victor Kanu of Sierra Leone went to England for higher studies and later became the ambassador of his country to the United Kingdom. However, his diplomatic career did not last long; a change of government occurred at home, and he promptly lost his job. Meanwhile, he heard about Baba and came to Puttaparthi to see him. Baba called Kanu for an interview and asked him to start a school. "Where, Baba?" "Go to Zambia." "But I have no money, Baba!" "Sell your house!" Kanu recalls, "It reminded me of the Bible where Jesus says, 'Give up everything and follow me!'" And that was what Victor Kanu decided to do.

It took much effort to start a school, especially in a country that was not his own, but Victor Kanu did it. In the beginning it was very difficult to find teachers and even more so to find students. So Kanu began by admitting school dropouts and orphans. Running a school for a bunch of tough, street-bred children was much more difficult than he had bargained for, and soon Kanu realized that the only way he could do it was with Love, as Baba exemplified; and it paid off. In a few short years, Victor Kanu's school not only won acclaim but was also hailed as a miracle school, becoming a model for others to follow.



Two views of the school established by Kanu in Ndola, Zambia.



Above, Kanu is seen welcoming state leaders to his school. The picture on the top right shows a school assembly in progress.

FEATURES

Ndola school registers stunning results again

Education The Post

No. 3225/59 MONDAY, APRIL 10, 2000

SATHYA SAI TEACHERS DISCUSS ORIENTATION

FEATURES

Sathya Sai School: Perfect example of good education standards



The pictures here show a Sathya Sai School in Bahia de Caráquez in Ecuador, South America. Founded in 1996, it has 11 grades. In 2011 the school was selected as the site of a month-long teacher training program, based on the five human values espoused by Baba.



Followers of Baba engage in service wherever they are and whenever they can. This is the way they try to practice Baba's teaching: LOVE ALL, SERVE ALL. When required, they join hands with the local community while rendering service. Pictures on this page show a medical camp in progress in St. Louis, Missouri, USA.



Latin America appears so far away from Puttaparthi that one can hardly imagine people there hearing about Sai Baba. But they did and also came to Prashanti Nilayam, only to be swept away by Baba's Love. Once that happened, service activities in the name of Sai began spreading everywhere in Latin America. Presently there are educational programs and service activities inspired by Sai Baba all the way from Mexico to Chile. The same is true all over the world.





During 2005, which marked the eightieth birthday of Baba, doctors from the United Kingdom conducted a series of eye camps all over Africa throughout the year. Their goal was to treat 8,000 patients in all. Pictures on this page were taken during a camp conducted in Kenya during August of that year.



Getting organized before leaving for Fiji.



Often the camps are held in schools, as this picture shows.

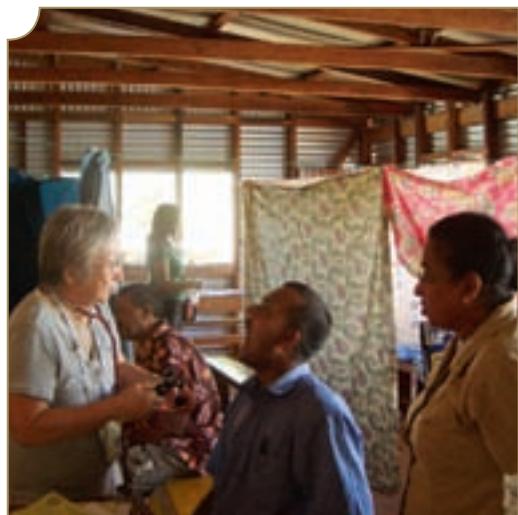


Patients waiting.

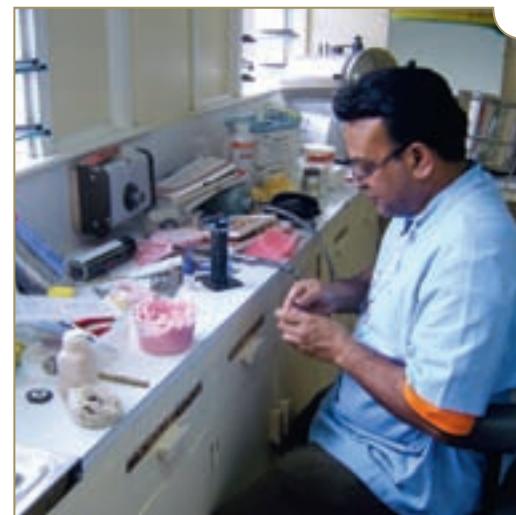


Patients lining up to see doctors after registration.

From time to time, Baba's devotees in New Zealand and Australia come together to run an extended medical camp in Fiji. The camp lasts several days, taking the medical team to many islands that make up the country. Pictures on this page and the one that follows offer glimpses of this service activity.



More pictures from the Fiji medical camp. Doctors examining patients.



A dentist's assistant preparing a mold.



A dentist in action.



A view of the pharmacy.

What has been presented here is but a mere sample. Service inspired by Baba goes on all the time, intensifying whenever there is a natural calamity. In Taiwan the local Sai Organization has such a fine blood donation campaign, that it has now been officially asked by the government to lead a private initiative in this area. In Mexico, the human values-based educational program introduced by followers of Baba as an experimental measure has now become quite popular all across Chihuahua District, because it made students not only more disciplined but also more sensitive. Likewise, at the time of the (Indonesian) tsunami of 2004, volunteers of the Sai Organization in Indonesia coordinated with the Sai Organization in Singapore to arrange with the Singapore air force to fly in emergency medical supplies. And, at the time of the recent Haiti earthquake, Sai volunteers from all over Latin America converged to do their part, often moving relief materials using the resources of the Sai Organization in neighboring Dominican Republic.



A mobile blood donation camp in Taiwan.



A child care center in Ecuador.



Patients waiting in a medical camp run by U.K. doctors in Malawi.

More pictures of service being done by members of the overseas wing of Baba's service organization.



Caring for handicapped children in Australia.



Volunteers organizing a soup kitchen in Japan.



Volunteers in New Zealand taking care of the elderly and paraplegics.



Distributing snacks and small gifts to young boys in a juvenile camp in Nigeria.



A healthcare center in Ghana.



Distributing blankets to the street children in Zambia.

Decades earlier when he dropped out of school, Baba explained that he was doing so in order to serve the world. Back then it hardly made sense since neither he nor his brother had seen anything of the world, other than the few villages and towns they had visited. The radio and the telephone had barely made a feeble entry into India, and there were not many newspapers either. Yet, as young Sathya, he was quite clear about exactly what he meant and did keep his word about serving humanity. He did not have to actually go around the world in order to do it. Instead, he let his Love spread and do the job. Considering that Baba did not travel overseas except for one short trip to Africa in 1968, his outreach is truly astonishing.



The Magnetism of Pure Love

Baba loved music, and right from the beginning, leading musicians of India, both from the north and the south, came to Prashanti Nilayam to perform in his presence. Baba not only blessed them but invariably showered them with gifts. Seen above are pictures of Baba with some of the artists. Top left, the artist in the picture is the late Bhimsen Joshi. Top right, the artist is Amjad Ali Khan. In the picture below that, Baba is honoring the late M.S. Subbalakshmi, who was called the Nightingale of India. The artist singing in Baba's presence (in the picture just above) is Parveen Sultana.

Baba always loved giving and never asked anything from anybody, especially for himself. What pleased him most was to shower Love on people, the more the better; and it was that selfless Love that drew people from all over the world. Beginning with people in small groups coming from neighboring villages and towns in his district, it soon expanded to people coming from all over southern India. And once Baba began traveling and became more widely known, people flocked to Prashanti Nilayam from all over the country. It was not long before important and famous people also started coming, merely to be in his presence, experience his Love and benefit from his spiritual company.



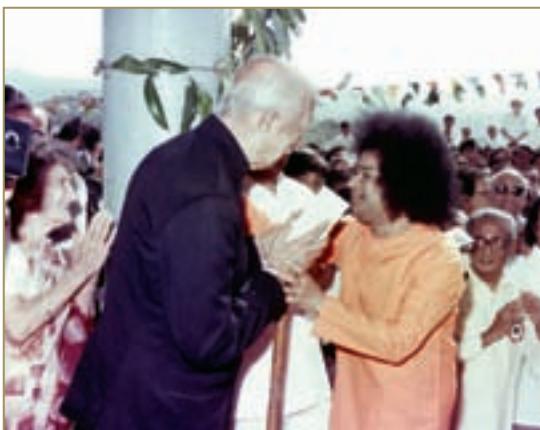
Many sports personalities also came to Baba, and in December 1996, two famous cricketers, one from India and one from the West Indies, organized a one-day international cricket match in the sports stadium in Puttaparthi. The players participating came not only from India but also from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, England, etc.

The match was unique in many ways. Not only was attendance free, but also there was no commercial sponsorship of any kind. It was basically the players offering their love to Baba by staging the match and competing for the prize called the Unity Cup.

Shown here are pictures taken on that occasion. The then Prime Minister of India, I. K. Gujral, came to inaugurate the match.

Above can be seen Baba and the Prime Minister greeting the members of the Indian team. On the right below are some action pictures, and on the left below is one taken during the closing ceremony. In the latter picture are seen, from left to right, Kallicharran of the West Indies, Clive Lloyd also of the West Indies (addressing the crowd), Baba, Zaheer Abbas and Hanif Mohammed of Pakistan, and, finally, Sunil Gavaskar of India. Some of the spectators can be seen in the background.





Baba with Field Marshal Cariappa, the first Indian to hold the post of commander in chief. While he was alive, Cariappa came to Baba often, describing himself as Baba's first soldier.



Baba with Atal Behari Vajpayee, who came often. At the time this picture was taken, Vajpayee was the Prime Minister of India. When Baba went to Delhi in 2010, Vajpayee wanted to come for Baba's Darshan; however, he could not because he was bedridden. Baba went to him instead.



Baba with the then President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam.

Baba with the then President of India, R. Venkataraman.

Not surprisingly, leading members of society, including politicians, came to Baba, mostly for his blessings and spiritual company. At times, there were also important visitors from overseas. Shown on this page are some of the pictures taken during such visits.



Baba with the ambassador for the Emirates in Russia and his wife.



Baba with Sheikh Nahyan, Minister for Education, UAE.



Baba with the President of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Kumaratunga.



From the late 1950s, foreigners began to come to Baba. However, it was only toward the late 1980s that the number of devotees coming from overseas began to increase. They came from everywhere, from Japan to Latin America. In those days Baba would receive letters from them, stop to talk to them, and even listen to them singing for him. He also often called them for group interviews. In fact, it was those interviews that made them come again and again. Shown on this page and the next are pictures that capture Baba's interaction with overseas devotees.

T

hat people came from all over the country was no great surprise. What was far more touching was that people came from far-off places - not only America, Australia and Canada, where Baba was known to some extent, but also Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, Japan and some countries in Africa. They spoke various languages, followed different faiths, and came from diverse cultural backgrounds. Yet like bees in search of nectar they came, and that was the magic of Baba's Love. Particularly striking was the sudden appearance of Russians in Prashanti Nilayam after 1991, almost as if from nowhere. That no Russians came before then is no surprise - those were the days of the Soviet Union. But how was it that they began to come in such large numbers so suddenly after 1991, especially since no one had gone to Russia to tell them about Sai Baba? No one knows; but it did happen, because there was a great hunger for Love in that country where, for over a century, the people experienced nothing but two vastly differing brands of extreme despotism. Currently, there is even a Russian colony in Puttaparthi, where many Russians spend long periods just to be near the abode of Baba!







With so many overseas people coming, Christmas celebration in Prashanti Nilayam not only became an annual feature but also was observed with great joy and reverence. Shortly thereafter Buddhists began to converge in a like manner to celebrate *Buddha Poornima*, which marks the day Buddha attained *nirvana*. Interestingly, Chinese from the Far East (excluding mainland China) also occasionally celebrated the Chinese New Year in Baba's presence. It was not long before symphony orchestras began performing in Prashanti Nilayam for Baba's enjoyment! Considering that outside the *ashram* walls Puttaparthi continues to be largely a rural town in the Telugu heartland, this was incredible; but then, that was the magic of Baba's Love!



Once the number of foreigners visiting Prashanti Nilayam increased, the celebration of Christmas in Prashanti Nilayam followed automatically. Over the years, the crowds arriving for Christmas increased substantially. For days, the place would buzz with people busy decorating not only the hall but even the roads.

On the evening of Christmas Eve, there was traditionally a concert and a choir program. Since the participants came from different countries, there was intense practice before the event. The picture at the top shows one such concert in progress. The picture just above shows part of the decorations, a depiction of the nativity scene.



In earlier times, Baba, dressed in white, would come early in the morning before sunrise and give a special Darshan to overseas devotees. Before this, there would be a candlelight procession by the devotees around the ashram. The devotees would then assemble in the main hall to await Baba.

Shown here are two pictures taken at the turn of the century. Until walking became difficult, Baba used to give Darshan from the balcony (as seen in the picture on the top). Later, Darshan was given from the porch, as seen in the picture below.



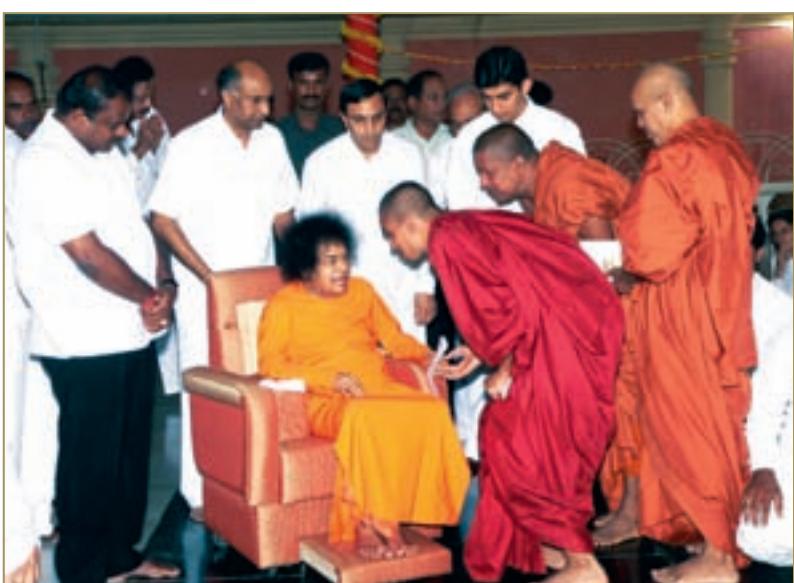
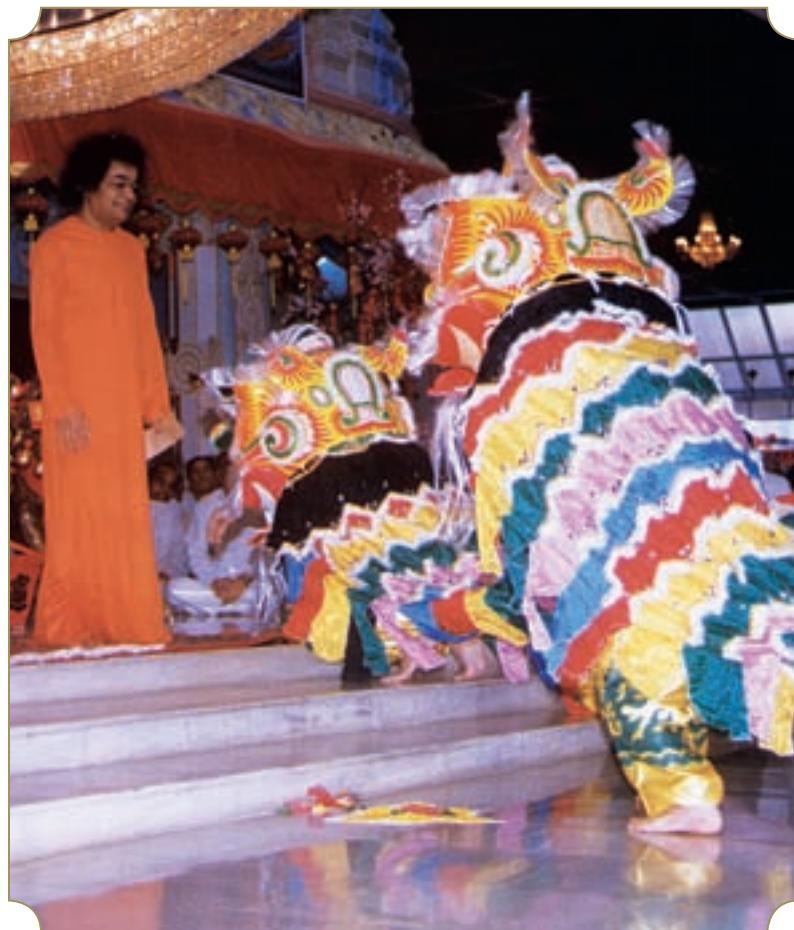


Christmas did not stop with the predawn Darshan. On the contrary, devotees assembled again after breakfast around 8 o'clock for the morning session. This would essentially consist of programs by students, which would include music by a band, boys singing carols, etc. Even Santa Claus would make an appearance, throwing sweets to the public. In other words, Christmas celebration was not restricted to overseas devotees. On some occasions, after the morning function, there would even be a private mass, usually presided over by a regular priest from among the overseas devotees.

In the evening, there would be some speeches followed by a special Christmas discourse by Baba, often containing references to incidents from the life of Jesus.

Pictures on this page capture some of what has been said above.





Besides Christmas, Buddha Poornima (which usually falls in May) also came to be celebrated. The Buddhist countries (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, etc.) took turns organizing this function. Shown on the left are pictures of Buddha Poornima celebrations in Baba's presence. For a while, Chinese New Year's Day was also celebrated in Prashanti. The two pictures above recall those celebrations.



Baba's magnetism was such that symphony orchestras also began performing regularly in Prashanti Nilayam, the initiative for this coming largely from Italian devotees. The musicians came from all over the world, including Japan and New Zealand. They would assemble several days before the concert and practice. Baba loved the concerts and also the musicians, with whom he would spend a lot of time after the concert was over.

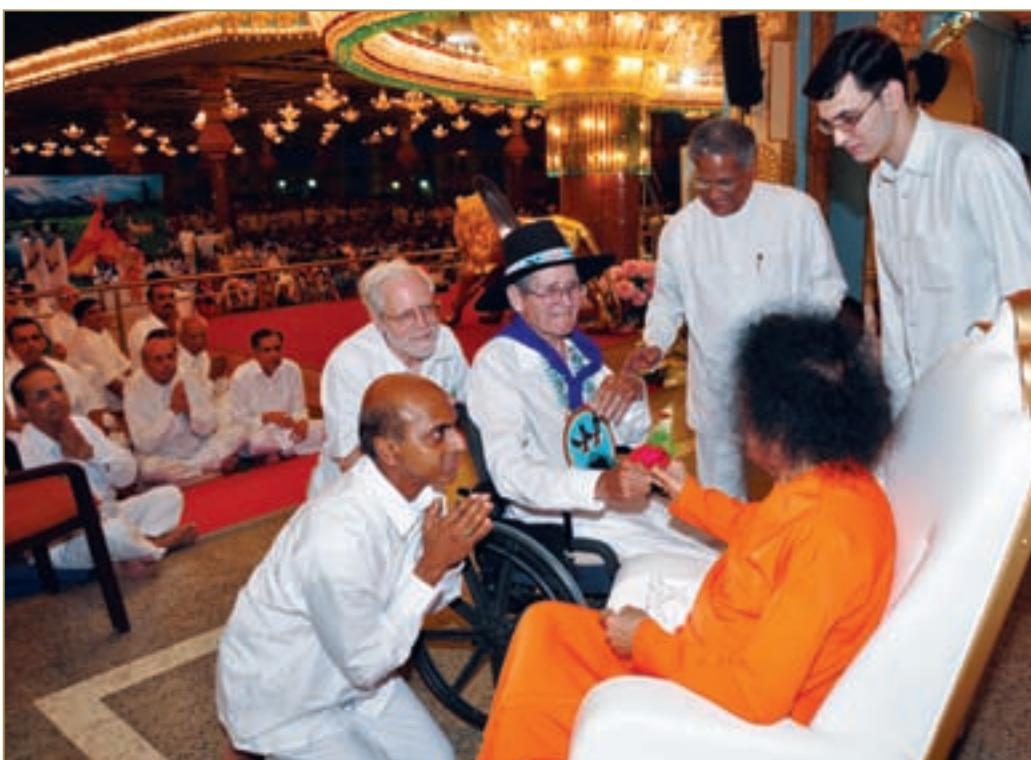




Shown on the previous page and this one are pictures taken at the time of various concerts.

The year 2010 was a distinct high point. The global economy was down, and travel had become unaffordable for many who earlier were frequent visitors. Nevertheless, throughout the year large groups arrived in a steady stream, not only from various parts of India but also from all over the globe, just to be in Prashanti Nilayam during the year that marked the eighty-fifth birthday of Baba. Given the limited accommodations available in the *ashram*, the visiting groups coordinated among themselves to stagger their arrivals suitably.





The year of Baba's eighty-fifth birthday was 2010, and, beginning in July, big groups came to Prashanti Nilayam from various parts of the world to have Baba's Darshan and offer programs in his presence. On this and the following several pages are photographs taken during these events. It all began with a group from the United States that presented not only a concert but also a play. A unique feature of this presentation was songs sung, by a Native American; it was, in fact, a first.

Pictures on page 46 show two women explaining the concert program to Baba after offering him a rose, and the concert in progress. Above can be seen the Native American singing.

One of those who came as a member of the group from the United States was George Walking Bear Gillette, a member of the Tubatulabal tribe in California. Born in 1927, George served in the navy during World War II. In the picture alongside, George is offering a rose to Baba; the person behind the wheelchair is Prof. David Gries, who teaches computer science at Cornell University.





After the Americans came a big group of devotees from various countries that formed part of the former Soviet Union. The members of this group of Russian-speaking countries presented a medley of wonderful programs, scenes from which can be seen above. In the picture at the bottom right, Baba is seen distributing gifts to the participants, who came one by one to receive the gift from his hands.

Until the 1970s, it was easy to catch Baba's eye, get called for an interview and have an experience etched deep into one's memory. But in the final year of Baba's life, people considered it a great blessing to be merely in his presence, absorbing the Love he radiated. What a thrill it was to see people from all parts of the world coming to Baba! Years earlier, Howard Murphet wrote a book titled *Where the Road Ends*. Indeed that proved true in 2010 as far as Baba's followers were concerned.



It was the turn of the Latin American countries next. The banner above carries the flags of all the countries from which the devotees came, while the other pictures show the devotees performing and Baba meeting them.



The next big group to come was from the southern European countries. They too gave a music performance and were blessed by Baba.





Baba has ardent followers in many African countries. However, because of their economic circumstances, groups from those countries were not able to visit Prashanti Nilayam as often as they would have liked. That said, a few groups did come during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Shown on these two pages are pictures taken in 2009 when devotees from Nigeria presented an African choir.



Months crept by, and finally it was November 2010, the month of Baba's eighty-fifth birthday. In accordance with the established tradition of celebrating every fifth birthday with extra gusto, special plans were made for this particular one, since it was expected that Baba might not be able to handle the strain of big celebrations in the future.

Festivities commenced a week in advance, with celebrated artists offering music programs. After that came the annual Ladies' Day, made special this year by the presence of the President of India, Pratibha Patil, the first woman to be elected to that position. Immediately following that was the twenty-ninth convocation of Baba's university, and by way of honoring Baba, the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, came as the guest of honor. Dr. Singh was no stranger to Baba and his university, having attended the convocation 15 years earlier. At that time he was the Finance Minister and introduced economic reforms that subsequently allowed India to make rapid progress on the economic front. It turned out that this particular convocation was also the last major public occasion when Baba delivered a discourse.



Baba with the President of India.



Every year, November 19 is observed as Ladies' Day. In 2010, the President of India, Pratibha Patil, was invited to be the guest of honor. Mrs. Patil had come earlier also, but this time she came specially to participate in the Ladies' Day celebrations. The picture above shows the President delivering an address.



The annual convocation of Baba's university is held every year without fail on November 22. In 2010, the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was the guest of honor on the occasion of the twenty-ninth convocation of the university. Pictures taken on that occasion are shown here. Dr. Singh had come once before, but that was in 1995, when he was the Finance Minister of India.

Finally came the day of days, November 23. Huge crowds gathered at the Hillview Stadium, and Baba was given a rousing reception when he arrived. Departing from the usual routine, this time about half a dozen people representing the tens of thousands who had benefited from Baba's various missions were also on the stage, alongside the VIPs. And they made the occasion particularly memorable by recounting how Baba's compassion gave every one of them a new life in some manner.



Some close-ups of the birthday crowd are shown here and on the following several pages (57-61). The double spread (on pages 58-59) shows a procession leading Baba into the stadium, while that on pages 60-61 shows devotees raising their hands in love and adoration as Baba passed by them.













A unique feature of the birthday celebration of 2010 was that representatives of the beneficiaries of various social service projects implemented by Baba came on stage. They described their experiences and how these projects made a big difference in their lives.

In the picture at the top, a resident of one of the 731 villages that received potable drinking water as part of the Anantapur drinking water program is expressing his gratitude to Baba for solving their age-old drinking water problem.

In the picture on the side, Ajaz Ahmed, a taxi driver from Bangalore describes how Baba came to his rescue by enabling him to undergo a complex heart surgery free of cost, in the Bangalore Super Specialty Hospital.





Over the years, many branches of Baba's service organization had started schools that, while imparting education as all schools did, laid particular emphasis on character development. By 2010, there were nearly a hundred such schools, and it seemed desirable to tightly bond them at all levels—academic, social and spiritual. The general idea was to create a network of model schools that would receive large-scale public attention and thus help in the promotion of integrity and moral values across the entire country. Baba enthusiastically approved the idea and gave valuable advice with respect to planning and implementation. A key factor at the operational level was the electronic networking of all the schools. Tata Communications, a leading telecommunications company in the country, volunteered support in this task. As part of the birthday celebrations, Ratan Tata, Chairman of the Tata group of companies, expressed his gratitude to Baba for accepting his company's offer of service and sought his blessings.

As mentioned in the text, Baba made a major decision to link the numerous Sai schools set up all across the country not only to establish uniformity in academic standards but even more to achieve enhanced coherence at the social, cultural and spiritual levels. Tata Communications came forward to create the required electronic networking and software support facilities. This picture shows Ratan Tata, Chairman of the Tata Group, expressing his gratitude to Baba for giving his company a chance to serve society as part of Baba's mission.



Baba on stage listening to students (seated on the right) presenting a musical program.

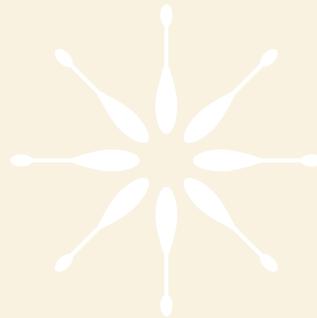


The program came to an end with students singing a traditional hymn of reverence and homage. Usually a sacred flame is waved at the end of such functions. This time students seated on the ground in front of the dais waved candles, which created a wonderful sight, as can be seen in the picture above.

The evening program, which marked the end of the birthday season, was produced by Baba's students (those studying and those serving in the various institutions in Prashanti Nilayam). It was a heart-warming bouquet of specially composed songs that highlighted the various shades of Baba's Love. As the boys sang, giant screens projected visuals appropriate to each song. The last song was particularly moving and based on a popular tune of an earlier era. It was not so much the tune but the lyrics, which were a celebration of Love, that stirred the emotions of all present. Appropriately, the song began with the words: "You are an ocean of Love!" Because it was a popular song, the huge gathering joined in the chorus, making it a grand finale. Baba, who always resonated with his students, did not appear to feel the strain though the program came at the end of a long day and a tiring season. On the contrary, Baba listened attentively and enjoyed the program. It was a great moment that put everyone in a euphoric state, as a display of lights and fireworks brought the day and the birthday season itself to a close.



Looking Back



.....
**LOOKING BACK, IT IS
ASTONISHING THAT
THE PROMISE TO
SERVE HUMANITY**

**MADE BY A 14-YEAR-
OLD BOY WHEN
WORLD WAR II
WAS GATHERING
MOMENTUM WAS
FULFILLED THE WAY
IT ACTUALLY WAS.**

 ☺☺☺

The story is told that in 1950, just before the inauguration of the new *Mandir*, Baba was showing the *bhajan* hall to his mother, Easwaramma, when she asked Baba, “Why do you need such a big hall? Do you think enough people would ever come to fill such a big hall?” The prayer hall then under construction was indeed bigger than the corresponding hall in the tin-shed *ashram* (which, incidentally, served many purposes, other than as a *bhajan* hall). But aside from that, one wonders whether Easwaramma was upset because her favorite son would be moving far away from her house. In any case, what happened was that Baba took Easwaramma near the main entrance to the hall, stood there, looked out into the open space ahead (stretching all the way to the river and beyond), pointed to a spot a few hundred feet away and said, “The day is not far off when people will be sitting up to there for *bhajan* sessions.” That did happen, like many other things, exactly as Baba had forecast to his elder brother earlier in 1947.

Looking back, it is astonishing that the promise to serve humanity made by a 14-year-old boy when World War II was gathering momentum was fulfilled the way it actually was. There is only one explanation for it, namely, everything connected with Baba, his thoughts, life and actions were totally centered on Love. Baba’s Love was sublime and transcendental, but he always had his feet on the ground. That is how Baba was always able to inject the flavor of human values into all his words and actions.

The point is worth stressing because during the last two decades or so a large number of “gurus” have sprung up all over India, offering a variety of spiritual “services,” no doubt for a price. As a result, spirituality itself is now beginning to get a bad name, trashed by the elite and the intelligentsia as nothing more than a business. This is sad and a highly tragic development that totally loses sight of the primordial struggle of man to rise from the level of the mundane to the highest levels of sublimity.

For thousands of years India had a noble tradition of great masters who immersed themselves in contemplation and gave genuine spiritual guidance to seekers. It was people like Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Shirdi Sai Baba (mentioned in the Preface) who “democratized” spirituality in the sense that they were not only readily accessible to the masses but also explained the esoteric aspects of spirituality in simple language that most people could understand.

Sathya Sai Baba not only belonged to that tradition but went further by traveling extensively in his earlier days spreading the message, rather like Buddha did after

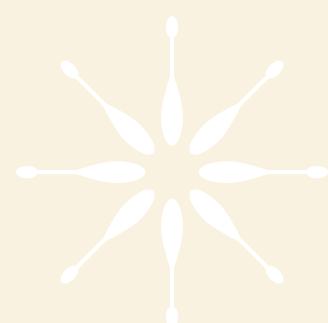
enlightenment, of course, to a much lesser extent. And just as the Buddha gave his spiritual teachings in the language spoken by the masses, Baba also always spoke in his mother tongue, Telugu, in fact right until the end. However, when his audience became cosmopolitan, he always had a translator.

There was absolutely no commercial element whatsoever in anything that Baba did; nor did he permit it in his organization. Baba's approach to spirituality was rooted in the age-old tradition of India wherein masters served society by helping ordinary people to make life a journey to the Divine, by living nobly and exhibiting love, compassion and sacrifice. At the same time, Baba knew as well as anybody that money was an essential aspect of life. Which is why Baba always reminded his devotees that while seeking wealth and fulfilling legitimate desires cannot be frowned upon, all actions without exception must be rooted firmly in *Dharma* or Righteousness. Where he personally was concerned, Baba always put Love first and money last. Thus, although he kept going from one project to another, on no occasion did he personally ask for contributions or allow anyone to conduct fund-raising campaigns on his behalf. As he always advised those who wanted to do service projects, "Do not begin by thinking about money. Do your work with sincerity, love and compassion. Unknown to you, those virtues will shine like beacons, draw others to what you are doing and slowly your mission will expand. When that happens, the community around you will wake up and make its own contribution. Focus on Love and the money part will take care of itself."

This is very true. When Baba was in Chennai in 2007, during a public *Darshan* a leading doctor announced that, inspired by what Baba had done for the city with his massive drinking water project, a hundred clinics and hospitals had joined together to keep one bed available in every one of their institutions throughout the year for a patient who could not afford to pay. If patients came through a panel of doctors who belonged to the city branch of Baba's organization, then they would receive treatment in their clinics with no charge. In other words, thanks to the inspiration provided by Baba, a virtual hundred-bed hospital was born! It was a new idea, certainly as far as Chennai was concerned, and is typical of how Love can spread, doing good in unexpected ways.

Throughout his life, Baba stayed in his native village exactly as he promised his mother he would. He never broadcast on the radio or appeared on TV; nor did he ever give a press conference. Few knew about his vows, and fewer still bothered about them. But he never forgot them and did all that he vowed he would, largely through Love. Because he was so exceptional, I frankly find it very difficult to do justice to all that Baba stood for and did. The best I can come up with is to recall what architect Critchlow said: "Just totally incredible—there is no other word for it!"

.....
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.....





CHAPTER 7

The Curtain Comes Down

The Year Begins



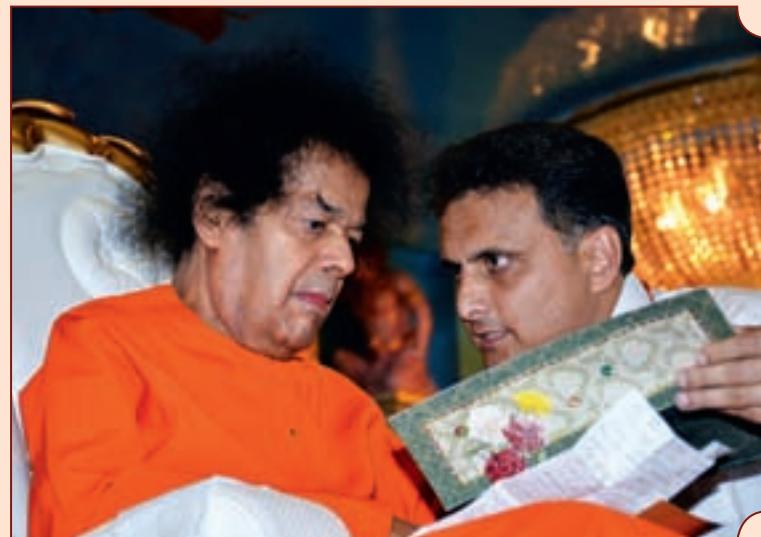
A collection of pictures taken at the time of the Old Boys Reconnect, which was spread over New Year's Day and the day following. Most of the pictures here (pages 70 and 71) were taken on the second day, when Baba met the alumni and their family members separately in a different hall. We see Baba entering, accompanied by the Vice Chancellor, being offered a rose and shown the program, cutting a cake, moving around students and also talking to the spouses.

For the last few years, New Year's Day had become Old Boys Day, when former students of Baba would come back for an emotional reconnect with one whom they invariably referred to as Mother Sai because he showered “the love of a thousand mothers.” January 1, 2011, was thus planned once more as a reconnect event, but with a difference; this time the function was spread over two days, i.e., New Year's Day and the day following. As in 2010, the alumni would come with their families, parents included.

Typically, a reconnect event would be preceded by two days of service to the poor in the neighboring villages. On New Year's Day the alumni would assemble in the main hall and offer a program that included some music and short nostalgic recollections, as well as expressions of gratitude to Baba for giving them love and shaping their character. Following this, Baba would either move among the students or call them one by one to have a short conversation. As in the previous year, the formal reconnect function was held on January 1 in the main amphitheater, with speeches by the alumni, mostly nostalgic recollections, and some music. The following day was reserved for personal contact, which took place in a hall adjoining the Mandir, at which time Baba moved around and talked to both former students and members of their families.

THE MONTHS GO BY

Speculating about Baba's movements was a favorite pastime among his devotees. Such guesswork would begin around New Year's Day, with people wondering where Baba would go when the weather became hot in Puttaparthi, which it usually did in early April. Regarding the trips he took, Baba would say, “I am



personally not interested in traveling but do so to make people in various places happy. My main interest is in spreading happiness." This year, too, there was some speculation, but not as intense as earlier. Baba was not feeling well; yet he maintained a busy schedule beginning in September 2010 and stretching right through the birthday festival. It was therefore not reasonable to expect him to bear the additional strain of travel so soon – that was the general feeling.

There was no travel, but *Darshan* went on as usual, with special programs and cultural presentations being kept to a minimum to avoid physical strain on Baba. Since *Darshan* was always the most important event for devotees, Baba did his best not to skip it. Back in earlier times, no one could recall Baba ever missing *Darshan*. If he went on a visit and the hour of arrival was late, he would still insist on giving *Darshan* since people would be waiting. He did it in Kampala in 1968, for example, when he arrived there around 1:00 A.M., after a long drive from Nairobi.

As the months slowly wound their way through the calendar, Baba's *Darshans* became somewhat irregular. At times he would skip the morning *Darshan*, but he tried not to miss the evening event since the crowds were always bigger. However, in spite of his best efforts, on some evenings the word would come, "Baba is resting and will not be coming out today. Please carry on with prayers, etc., in the usual fashion." At first the absences were few, but slowly they became more frequent.



The program of music presented on New Year's Day included band music. The band was made up of alumni who used to be members of the Institute Brass Band.



Siva Rathri is one of the early festivals in the calendar and was always a big draw in Prashanti Nilayam. The word *rathri* means night, and *Siva Rathri* was an austerity dedicated to Lord Siva that called for an all-night vigil, with people singing *bhajans* nonstop until dawn. According to Indian spirituality, there are three aspects to the Universe, its creation, its protection as well as sustenance and finally its dissolution, or the event that brings about the end of the Universe (which, by the way, is one of the possibilities allowed by Einstein's theory of gravitation). The three aspects of Divinity associated with the three features mentioned above are symbolized by the deities Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, respectively.

Baba would always remind his audiences that there really is only one God, who in the ultimate is abstract. However, to help human minds focus better, one God was given different names depending on whether He was involved with Creation, Sustenance or Dissolution. Siva, Baba would add, symbolized austerity, total purity and the ultimate in sacrifice. The lunar calendar determined the exact date of the occurrence of *Siva Rathri*, and it was observed around the conjunction of the thirteenth and fourteenth day after a particular new Moon. The mind, Baba would explain, is symbolized by the Moon. Through rigorous spiritual drill, the control exercised by the outward-looking mind over the individual had to be gradually brought down. *Siva Rathri* represents the occasion when the ardent seeker walks the last mile to completely "dissolve" what is left of the mind, achieving thereby total purity and the eligibility to become one with the Divine. That is the reason why this function is observed just before a new Moon. Why is merger with the Divine important? That, explained Baba, was because real happiness comes only through union with God!

Siva Rathri of 2011 fell on a Wednesday and drew big crowds as usual, but almost everyone knew instinctively that Baba's presence would be subdued and limited, and so it turned out to be. He came in the evening, signaled for the all-night vigil to commence, stayed for some time listening to the students singing *bhajans* and then withdrew. In earlier years, he would come again in the middle of the night and stay for some time just to encourage the singers. And, on the following morning he would be there quite early to be present at the conclusion of the all-night vigil. This year he also came, though a bit later than usual. In spite of the fact that Baba did not deliver discourses at both the beginning and end of the function, everyone in the huge crowd felt deep inner



In 2011, *Sivarathri* fell on March 2. Baba being rather weak, his participation in the function was minimal, in contrast to what was usually the case. On the evening of March 2, Baba came out later than usual. He came by car and drove first past the ladies and then the gents (two pictures on page 73). The hall was packed, with devotees awaiting his arrival to commence the night-long *bhajan* singing. Picture at top of page 72 shows Baba making his way to the porch where he usually sat while giving *Darshan*, with devotees eagerly looking up to him. The picture below it shows Baba arriving to witness the completion of the all-night vigil. That morning Baba did not use the car so that he could be better seen.

satisfaction because Baba's very presence filled all Hearts with Love.





A panoramic view of part of the Siva Rathri crowd, also showing Baba on stage listening to bhajans. At the beginning and end of the all-night vigil, the songs are sung by students of Baba's university, both men and women. In between, various bhajan groups, including those from overseas, participate in the program.

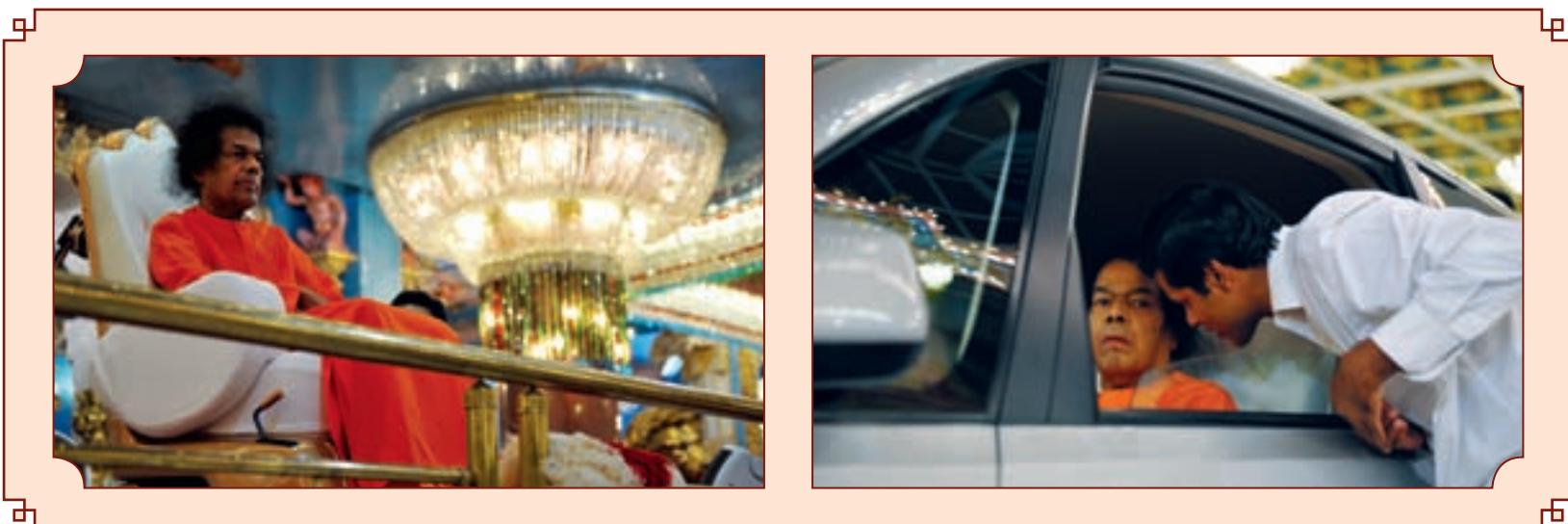


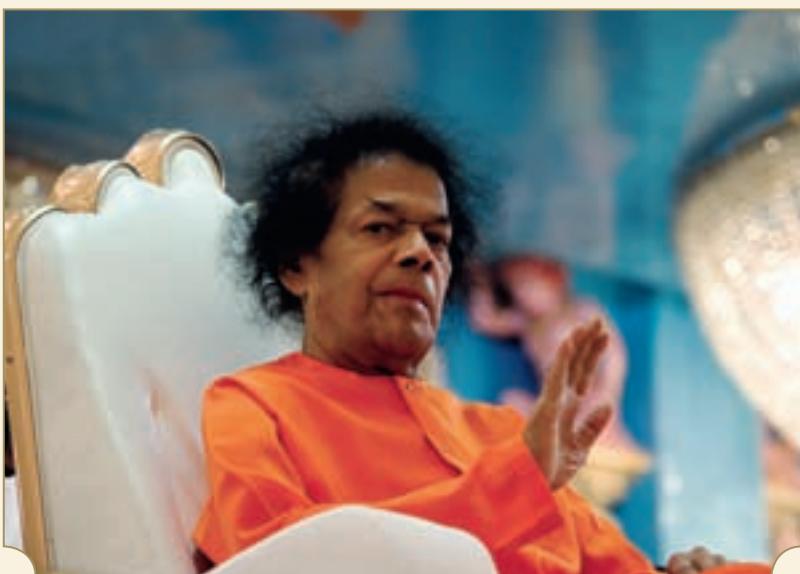


Pictures on pages 76 to 79 were taken during the evening Darshan of March 20, which, being a Sunday, attracted a very big crowd. Pictures here show Baba arriving for Darshan while a large crowd of women eagerly looks toward him. Also shown are pictures of a student speaking to Baba as he drove past and Baba seated on the stage.

Throughout March Baba continued to come for evening *Darshans* as often as he could, but his physical weakness was becoming increasingly evident. And yet, once he sat on the stage, the crowd forgot everything, focusing largely on his face. As always it was calm, radiating the quiet peace that everyone was hungering for.

March 20, 2011. Because it was a Sunday, there was a larger crowd than usual, and Baba did not disappoint. He came out as usual in the evening and gave an extended *Darshan*, in the course of which he signaled to many students seated in front of him to come close to him one by one. And when they did, he spoke a few words, listened to their prayers and requests, maybe took a letter and finally blessed them. Earlier, such interaction with students used to be a daily affair, but later it became less frequent. It had been quite a while since the last such interaction, and the boys were absolutely thrilled, including those who were not called but merely watched. During the next four days, Baba came on alternate days only.



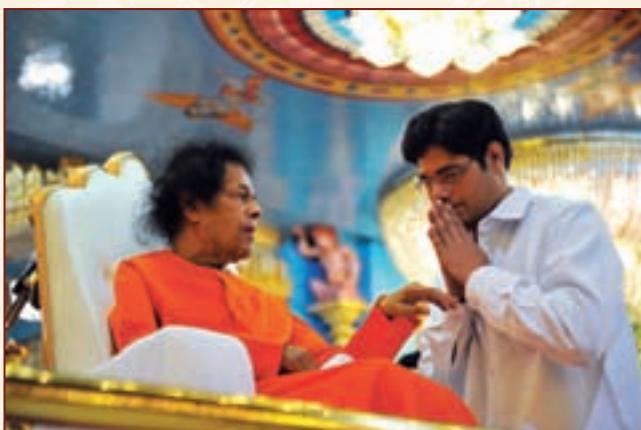
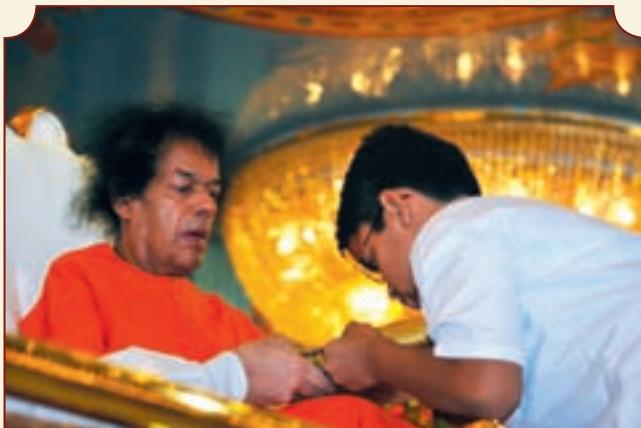


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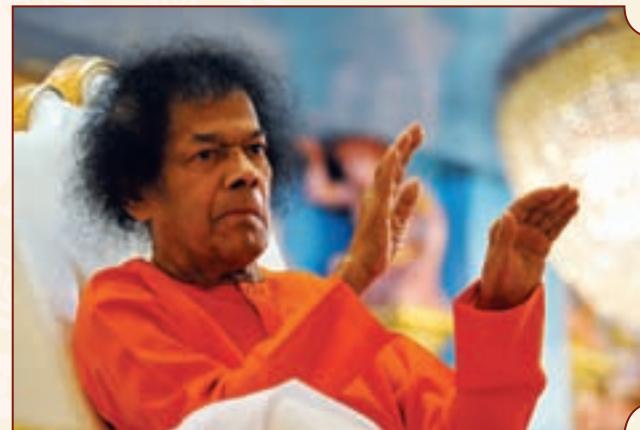


The pictures here are memorable for students, for this was the last occasion Baba called many students up to him, spoke to them and blessed them. No one realized then that this would be the students' last opportunity for this.





Friday, March 25, 2011. Baba came in his car and drove around the crowd twice, enabling people seated even at a distance a chance to catch a glimpse of him. After that he sat on the porch and granted *Darshan*. As always, he blessed the huge gathering by raising both his hands before going back. Not a single person in the crowd realized then that this would be Baba's last *Darshan*. True, everyone was aware that his health was not quite what it used to be. At the same time everyone also believed that Baba would be with them for a long, long time. After all, are there not aged people who live for a long time despite being frail?



The Fade-Out

People may have expectations, but Destiny has its own will. On Saturday, March 26, Baba did not come for *Darshan* in the evening. Since this was no longer unusual, the people who had assembled in the big hall took it in their stride, went through the normal routine and dispersed. Baba did not come on the following day also.

Monday, March 28, 2011. Sometime around 3:00 p.m., an ambulance came to Baba's residence, and he was taken to the hospital, the very same one that he had specially built for the poor and the needy, way back in 1991. News spread rapidly, and there was anxiety not only in the *ashram* but around the world – which is no surprise since Baba had devotees everywhere from Japan to Chile, and these are the days of the cell phone. Interestingly, Baba was not taken on a stretcher; he went in his wheelchair; it was just that the chair was carried by the ambulance.

On arrival at the hospital, Baba was swiftly taken to the catheterization laboratory, where everything had been kept in readiness. His heartbeat was irregular, and a pacemaker was implanted, following which he was moved to the intensive care unit (ICU). The crisis was over, and Baba was resting peacefully – so the doctors thought. For a day or so that was indeed the case.



Pictures on pages 80 and 81 are historic for they offer glimpses of the brief Darshan that Baba gave on Friday, March 25. Before he left, he blessed the gathering. As can be seen, Baba looks rather tired. Everyone knew he was somewhat weak, but none realized that this would be the very last Darshan. Baba did not appear for Darshan on Saturday, but that was not considered unusual. However, something most unusual did happen on Sunday, March 27; that afternoon Baba was taken to the hospital to be fitted with a pacemaker. Everyone thought that he would soon return, but sadly he did not.



Meanwhile there was deep concern not only in India but wherever his followers were. Baba had never been hospitalized before, even when he had to undergo surgery for a hip fracture in 2003. For his devotees, such an event was simply not possible – it just could not happen to Baba, so they believed. But now that it had actually happened, they turned to prayer as never before. They prayed for him in temples, mosques, churches and every other place of worship one could think of – this is no surprise, for his followers belonged to various faiths.

Most touching of all was the manner in which the people of Puttaparthi responded. For them, Baba was extra special. After all, was he not one of them from day one? And, had he not, single-handedly, placed this once obscure hamlet on the map of the world? It was because of him that what was once a mere hamlet now enjoyed great prosperity, in sharp contrast to the other towns and villages in the neighborhood. Indeed, how else could a simple illiterate village woman selling flowers or bananas in Puttaparthi utter a few words in Russian or German to her customers?

It was not just the prosperity that he brought that made the people of Puttaparthi literally revere Baba. Back in earlier days, he gave them shelter and food when there was a heavy flood. He had built a mosque for the Muslims so that they did not have to trek miles to pray on Fridays. And he built an entire housing colony for the poorest of the poor. Besides this, thanks to Baba there was a school and also safe drinking water. And what about the two hospitals, to which they could go for everything from delivery of a child to heart surgery without any worries about paying bills? Baba hardly went into the village, but he had no need, for he was their very own. All that the villagers saw of him was the occasional glimpse they had as he drove past once in a while. They rarely came for *Darshan* because they were wage earners working several jobs to feed their families; but their love for Baba was matchless.

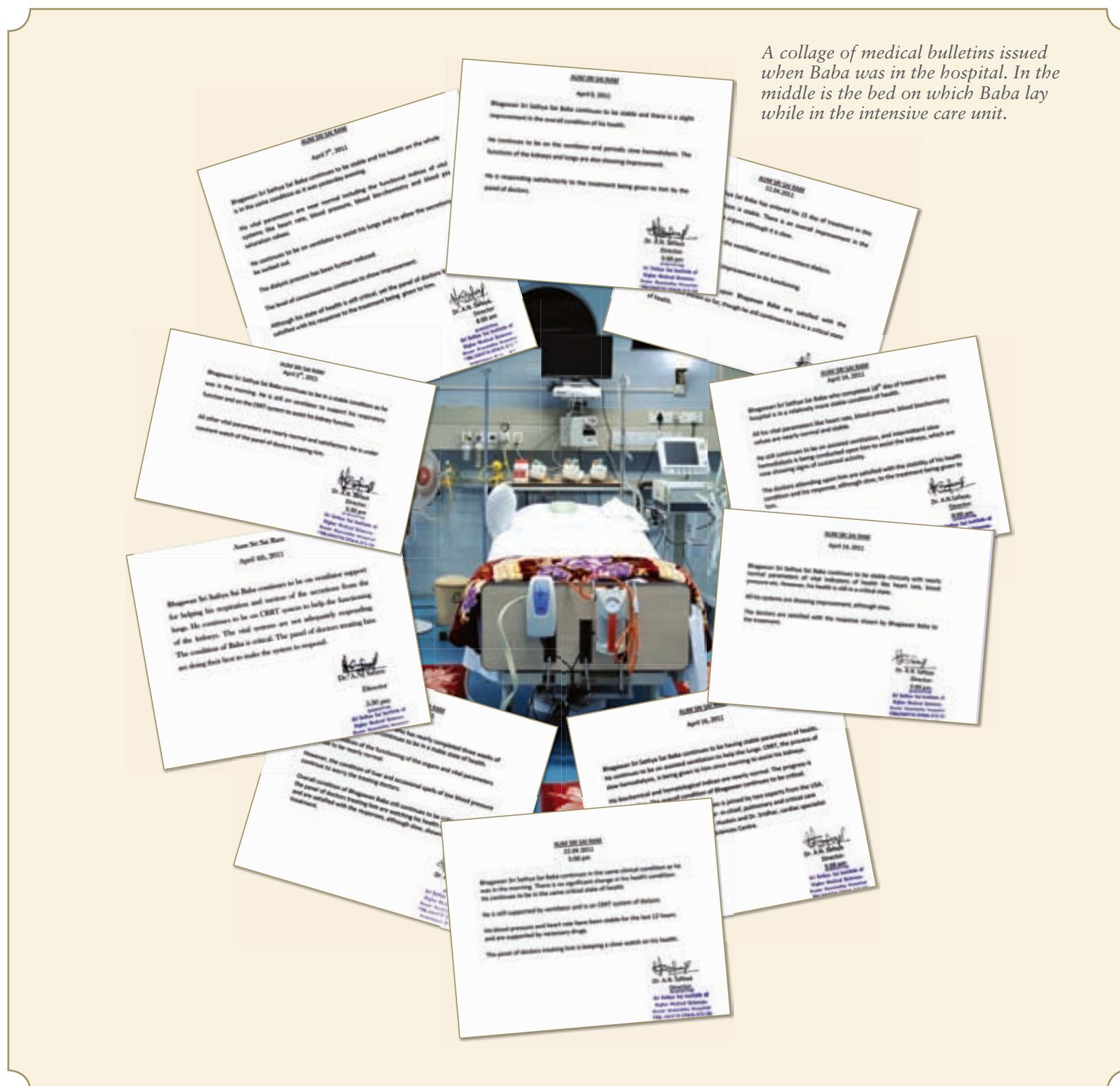
For the residents of Puttaparthi, Baba was very special, being one of their very own.

They missed him whenever he went on a trip and greeted him joyously when he returned as the pictures on page 82 show.

Alongside is a picture taken many years ago when Baba went into the village to attend a function. Here the residents can be seen singing and leading a procession;

Baba arrived in a car, which cannot be seen in the picture. The picture below shows the residents in a candlelight procession and praying for Baba when he was in the hospital.





After the initial good signs, Baba's recovery slowed down because of several complications. There were vigils everywhere, even as the doctors did their best. Top specialists in the country flew in out of their great respect and regard for Baba, and some even came all the way from America. Anxious leaders made phone calls, and messages praying for speedy recovery poured in. Meanwhile, the cryptic, daily

medical bulletins kept everyone on tenterhooks; some were encouraging, while others were quite disturbing. While the daily trend appeared to fluctuate, it was merely riding on an overall slow but steady decline. The end came eventually on Sunday, April 24, 2011, which, incidentally, happened to be Easter. An exceptional era had come to an end, the like of which may not come again for a long time.

The Homage

Given the prolonged hospitalization, the end did not come as a surprise. And yet for the faithful it was a traumatic shock, since they could never imagine a world without Baba. Within India, this was the major news story, and many stayed glued to their television sets, since there was national coverage. While others could take time off to mourn, those running the *ashram* and various institutions set up by Baba now had to suddenly play a very different role. Until now they were there to fulfill Baba's wishes and implement his instructions; it had always been that way, and indeed that is why they were there in the first place, to serve him as an expression of their love for him. But now they had to be in charge and handle diverse responsibilities, ranging from handling a news-hungry media to making arrangements for

the public to pay homage, to organizing security, and taking care of VIPs who came in droves.

It was difficult, especially since the crowds were huge and unstoppable, but years of strict discipline that everyone grew into quite naturally while serving Baba came in handy for all involved. In fact, even those not officially connected with various arrangements pitched in, for example, by offering water and food to those waiting in a long line to pay their respects. TV cameras were hardly ever seen in the *Mandir* except on rare occasions, but this time many national channels covered the entire proceedings; even overseas viewers could see it both on select TV channels and on the internet.



AUM SRI SAI RAM
24.04.2011

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is no more with us physically. He left His earthly body on 24th April, 2011, at 7:40 am due to cardio-respiratory failure.

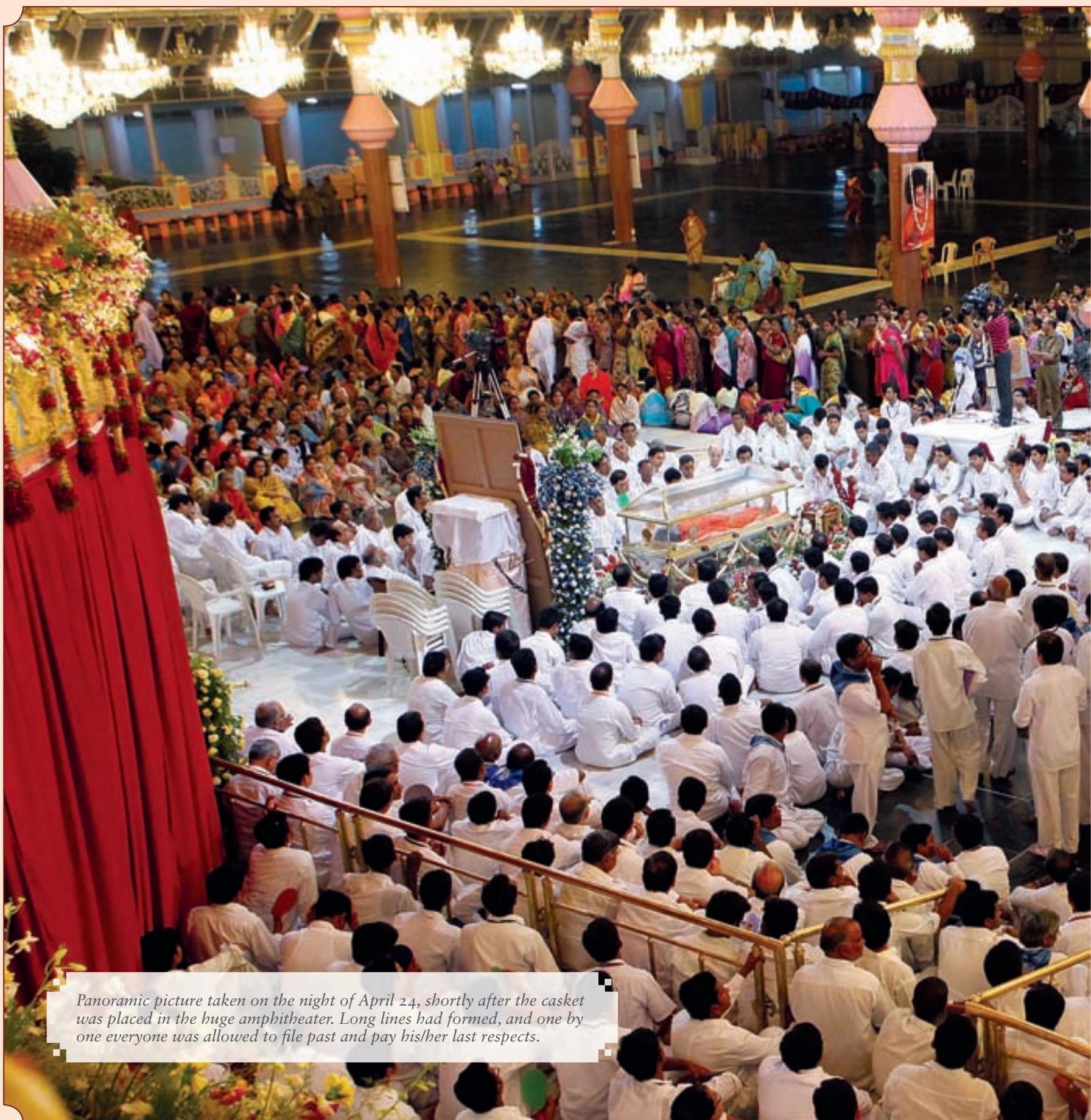
Bhagawan Baba's Body will lie in state at Sai Kulwant Hall for two days (Monday and Tuesday). Arrangements will be made for Darshan after 8:00 pm today, at Sai Kulwant Hall.

We appeal to all not to rush to the hospital, but to remain calm and have Darshan in an orderly manner.

Dr. A.N. Sathy
Director,
DIRECTOR
Sri Sathya Sai Institute of
Higher Medical Sciences
Swami Speciality Hospital
RAJANTRI GRAM-818134
Anantapur Dist., AP

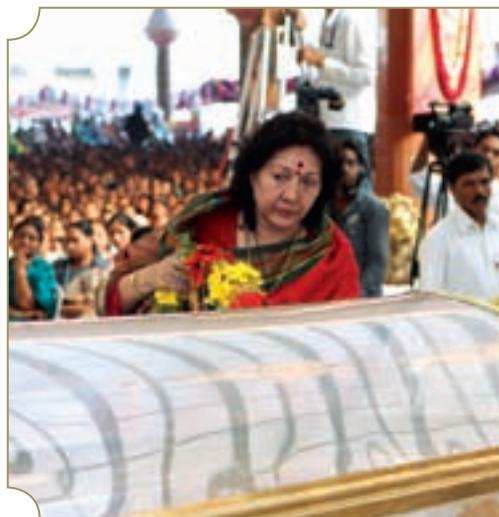


The picture on the top left shows the body being moved from the intensive care unit for placement in a casket. The picture alongside shows the casket placed in the main hall in preparation for public viewing.



Panoramic picture taken on the night of April 24, shortly after the casket was placed in the huge amphitheater. Long lines had formed, and one by one everyone was allowed to file past and pay his/her last respects.

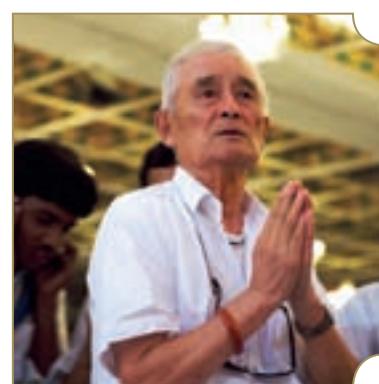




Pictures showing devotees offering their respects. Elaborate arrangements had been made for the public to file past, and during the three days the body lay in state, the crowds were very orderly and most respectful.







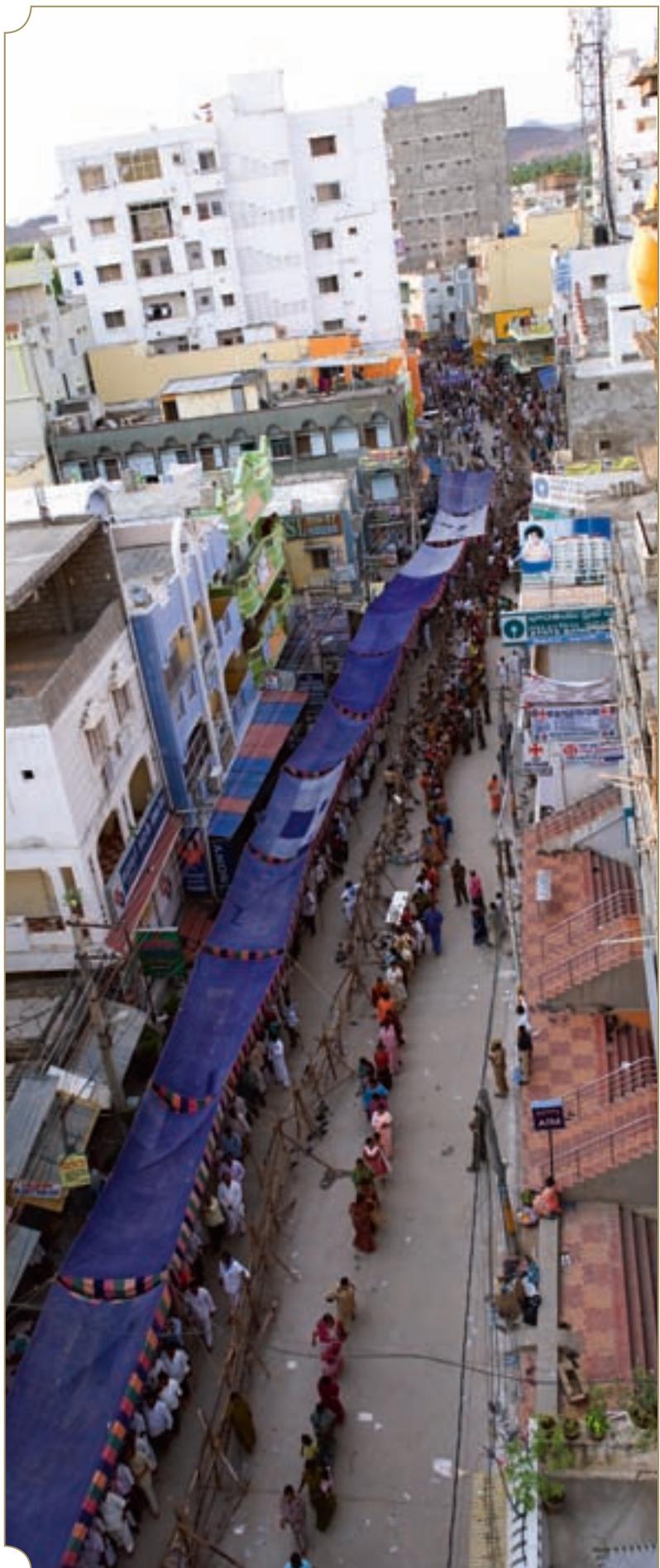
Close-up pictures that capture the sorrow, grief and anguish of people having their last glimpse of their beloved Baba, whom they all took so much for granted. Soon, all they would be left with would be memories, including those of this very last Darshan.



This picture taken soon after the casket was brought to Prashanti Nilayam shows a small section of the huge crowd that had gathered outside. There was no commotion or stampede. Everyone was assured that once the arrangements for filing past were complete, all would have a chance to go inside and pay their respects.

The lines were long, separate for men and women, and extended a couple of miles outside the ashram. Nevertheless, the lines moved in an orderly fashion, allowing everyone to experience those precious few seconds when they could have their last glimpse of Baba.







Everyone waited patiently for their chance, while shopkeepers in the village set up tents under which the line could move forward. The picture above (taken inside the main hall) shows a policeman directing the attention of an old Muslim to where Baba was lying in state.







Pictures on these two pages show how the local residents rose to the occasion, offering snacks, food and water to those waiting in line. In one of the pictures, a Muslim gentleman can be seen serving food.





Pictures here show Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi laying wreaths. Later, they sat for a while during bhajan singing (see picture on top of page 99). Below on the same page, Mrs. Gandhi can be seen signing the condolence book. Also seen is the Governor of the state offering his respects.







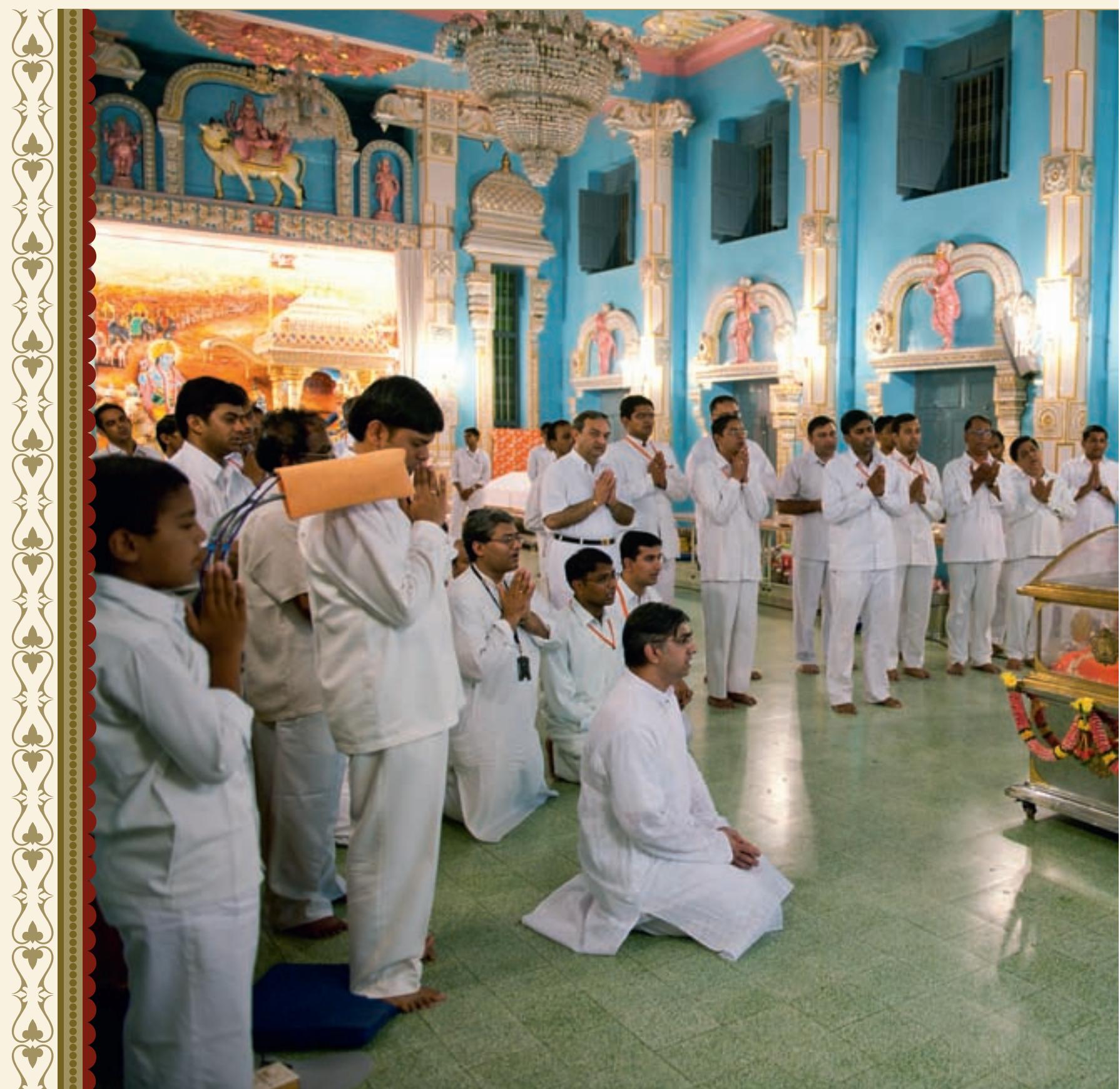
For three days non-stop, the lying in state and the final laying to rest were covered by the media. Television pictures of the proceedings were seen not only all over the country but also all over the world, especially via the internet. This picture shows some of the mobile TV vans parked just outside the ashram gate. It is humbling to recall that just across the wall to the left of the picture is the new Mandir into which Baba moved in 1950. At that time, Baba was little known; moreover, this spot seen in the picture was almost in the middle of nowhere.





For the benefit of the public, giant screens were placed at many places so that those who were not able to come inside could still have Darshan of Baba.





On the night preceding the final laying to rest, the casket was placed for a few hours inside the bhajan hall of the Mandir, the very hall where, from November 23, 1950, onwards, Baba had given many Darshans, talked to various groups and also delivered countless discourses.





Three days passed, during which tens of thousands from all walks of life and from all parts of the country lined up to offer their final respects.

Wednesday, April 27, 2011. All that lives must die, wrote Shakespeare, passing from here to eternity. Slowly the moment approached when the body had to be laid to rest. Elaborate arrangements were made that included, most appropriately, a prayer function in which religious leaders of many faiths participated. It was close to noon, and exactly as Baba had wanted, his body was laid to rest in the very *Mandir* he had used for more than half a century as his mission headquarters, and at the very spot where he had given countless *Darshans* besides delivering any number of discourses.

It was April 27, 2011, and the time was fast approaching to lay Baba to rest. Prior to that, religious leaders belonging to various faiths offered prayers. Seen alongside are pictures showing an Imam, two Sikh priests and Buddhist monks offering prayers. The pictures at the top of page 105 show prayers being offered by a Rabbi and a Christian. At the bottom of the same page is a picture of the state police offering a formal salute on behalf of the government of Andhra Pradesh.

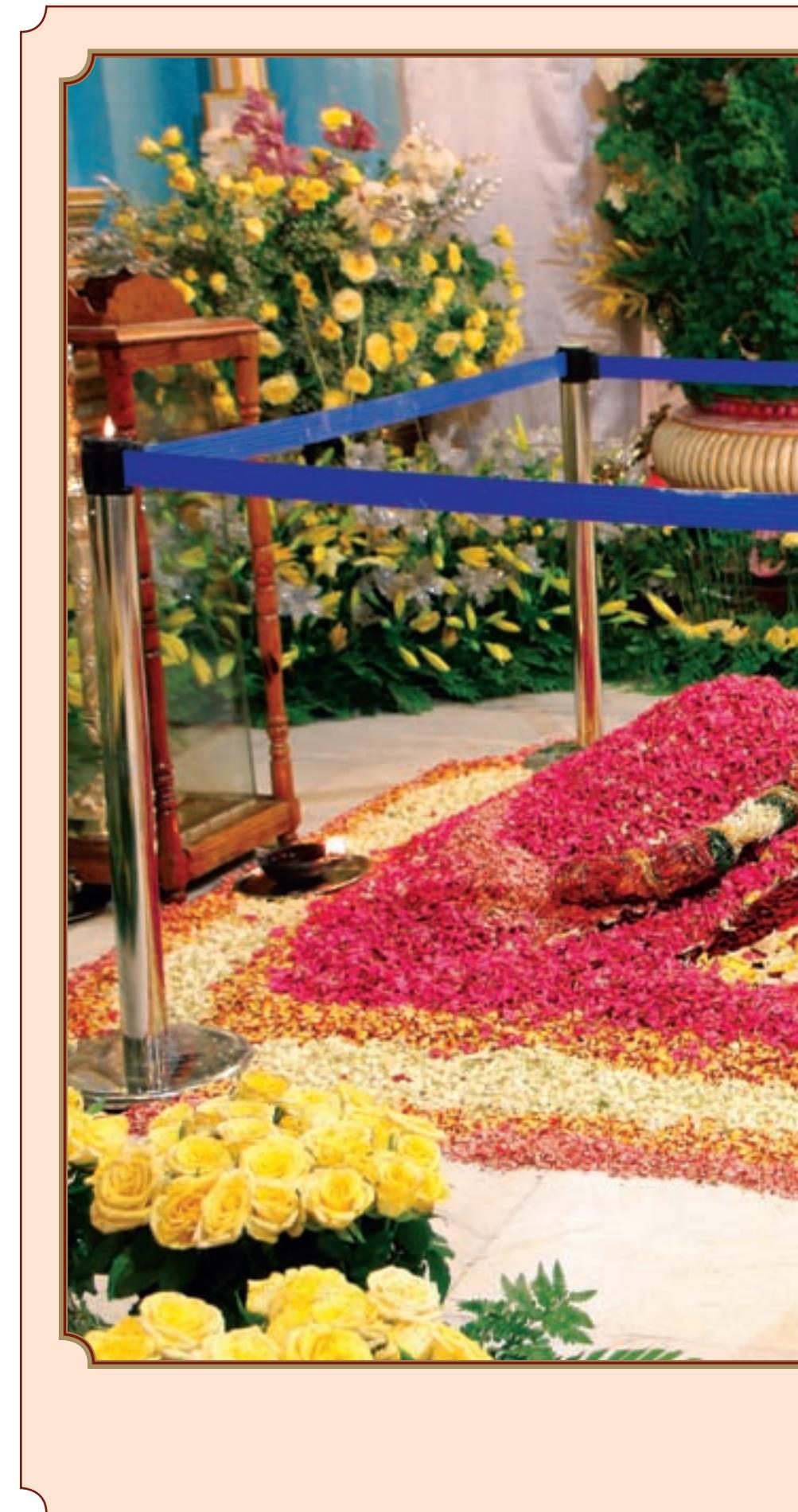






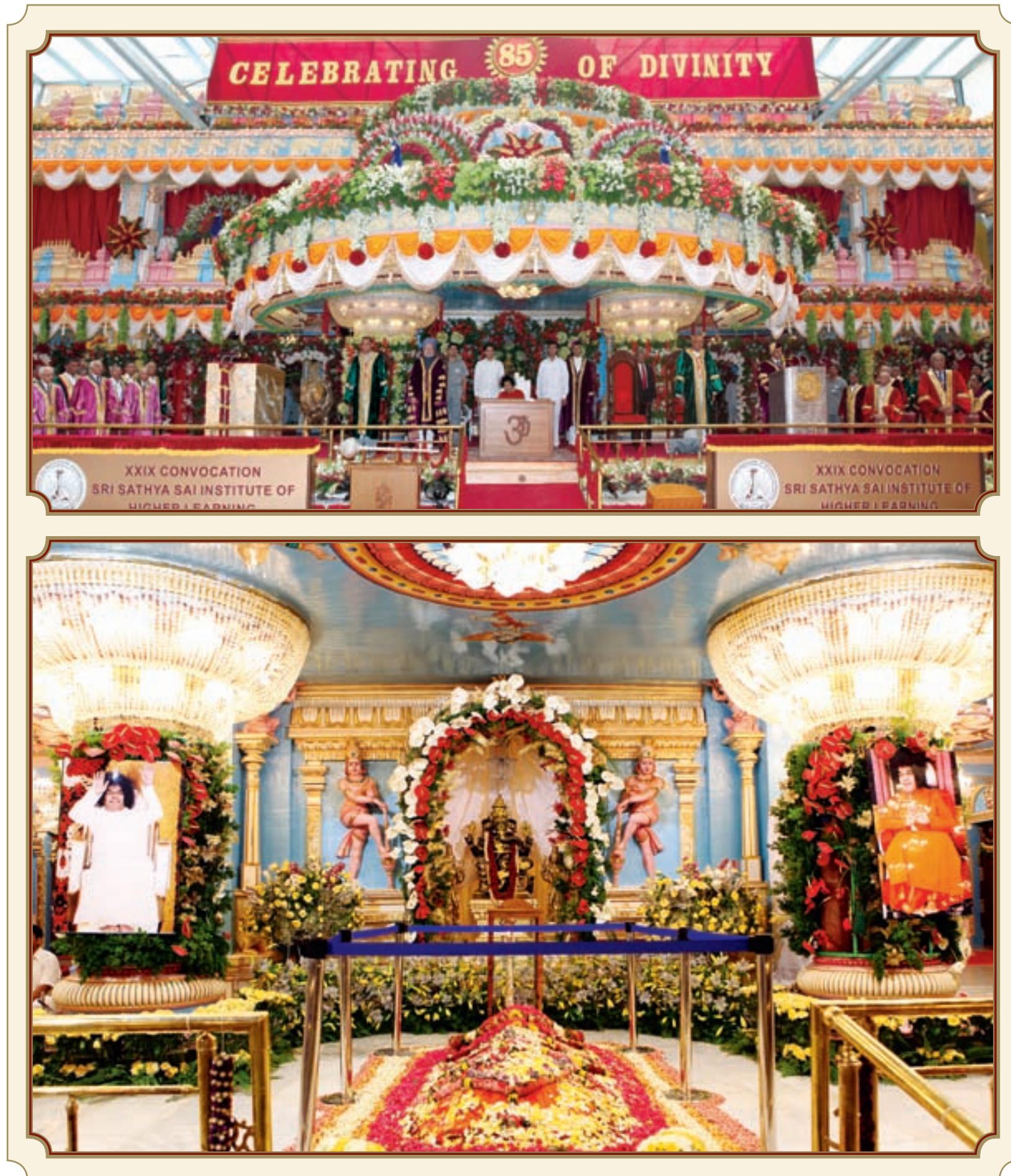
It was time to move the casket to the very spot where Baba gave Darshans; a pit had already been prepared there. At the top, the casket is ready to be moved, even as all arise as a mark of respect. The other two pictures on this page and those on the next page are scenes showing a close relative of Baba performing rites in the Hindu tradition.







The moment came at last to lay the body to rest. At that point a curtain was drawn around the stage, and the body was lowered. Later the curtain was raised, and senior members of Baba's organization, as well as those who had served him closely for years, were allowed to pour sacred ash into the pit. As Baba once said, ash is symbolic of that which cannot be burned, namely, purity. By evening, the resting spot was covered with floral decoration.



The glowing face that radiated Love would no longer be seen, and the voice that was sweet during a private conversation and charged with power during a discourse would no longer be heard; but for those who had seen him and experienced his Love in innumerable ways, the memory would linger for a long, long time. However, that is not all, for Baba also left a legacy.

The word *legacy* is often taken to mean something that is handed down from one generation to another. But that is not all, for there is another kind of legacy that is not merely inherited but enduring; legacies left behind by great masters belong to that category. Those who inherit them not only cherish what has been handed down but also protect, nourish and build upon what has come to them. In a way, Baba's legacy was rich, and yet it was also simple, for it was all about selfless and universal Love that anyone and everyone could claim, at all points of time. The Pure Love that Baba personified would endure as long as there is life, for is not life nourished and sustained by the love and sacrifice of every mother? Besides an enduring legacy, Baba also left an important message that has great relevance to the present troubled times. A discussion of that message is reserved for the next chapter, which concludes this book.



In India, the resting place of a saint is known as samadhi. Devotees of Baba refer to his resting place as Mahasamadhi; the prefix means great. Pictures on these pages indicate exactly where the Mahasamadhi is located. It is at the precise spot where Baba used to give Darshan and also deliver discourses. At the bottom left is the Mahasamadhi as it was before a marble structure was erected; below is a picture of the Mahasamadhi as it appears today.



Tributes

TRIBUTE: A NATIONAL ICON REMEMBERS ANOTHER

'Can there be a better role model to promote nation?'

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam
■ [hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com)

I admire Bhagawan Sri Baba for his selfless work and contributions to the welfare of the people by providing drinking water for the rural population, free healthcare facilities for the rural and poor and free higher education.

The major factors in human resource development are value-based education and quality healthcare. In addition, the infrastructural requirement like availability of potable water is an essential need of the human resource. While the government is actively engaged in providing these resources to the citizens, Baba has been sensitive to these essential needs of the Indian population, particularly of the people living in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, for over four decades.

Keeping this in mind, he has created vast infrastructure for providing value-based quality education to children from primary to university level, established super specialty hospitals in rural areas – as early as 1991 when there were no corporate hospitals in such interior regions – and worked on a project to provide potable safe drinking water for people of Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. I would like to discuss the unique characteristics of these institutions.

VALUE-BASED EDUCATION

The best part of a young person is his or her childhood in school and the best time spent is from 6 am to 6 pm each day in the school. This is applicable for all children in the age group of five to 20 living in both urban and rural areas.

Baba has realised the problems of the rural poor and has made it a point that education is absolutely free in all the schools and colleges established by the Sri Sathya Sai Trust.

Interestingly, the Sri Sathya Sai Educational Institutions cater equally to the development of the mind, heart and the body. This

THE MAJOR FACTORS IN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT ARE VALUE-BASED EDUCATION AND QUALITY HEALTHCARE. BABA HAS BEEN SENSITIVE TO THESE ESSENTIAL NEEDS OF PEOPLE

is achieved through integrated education, which lays equal emphasis on keeping the body healthy, the mind active and sharp and the heart pure. Baba, being the chancellor of the institute, spends substantial amount of time with the students to groom them into ideal citizens.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba says, "Students are the foundation of the nation, the only wealth that I cherish. Students are my life; my entire property consists of students. I have offered myself to them." He also says, "The end of education is character and the end of knowledge is love." This is the reason why Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning emphasises character building as an important component of education apart from acquiring academic excellence.

Nobility in character comes out of humility, generosity, compassion, helpfulness and respect for moral values. The single thread that runs through all the activities of the institute, curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular is that education is for life and not for mere living. Experience has shown that leading organisations and companies in the country absorb Sai students. It is claimed that the students so recruited bring about a quiet change in work ethics and inject team spirit as well as a value-based approach to all aspects of organisational activity.

WATER MISSION

In 2004, Baba made a moving reference to the difficulties experienced by the people of Rayalaseema region in getting safe

drinking water and suggested that the century-old problem needed urgent attention. In 2006, he added a new dimension to his societal mission by the trust, undertaking work to provide good and safe drinking water to as many people of Anantapur district as possible in the shortest possible time, irrespective of the difficulties experienced and the cost.

Tapping ground water was considered as an option, but was ruled out because of the fluoride problem. It was decided to use rainwater by driving water during the monsoon and storing in special reservoirs.

Most of the water sources were in the northern part of Anantapur district and the terrain to the south sloped upwards. Hence, bringing water to the southern region needed creation of large number of pumping stations to pump water against gravity. This called for extensive civil and engineering work. In spite of all the difficulties, the water was made available to Anantapur district in 18 months. After a year of regular operation, the entire water works was handed over to the people of the state as a gift. The scheme covers 750 villages and provides water to over one million people.

India needs a thousand such organisations to provide cost effective potable drinking water to the billion people spread in different parts of the country.

HEALTHCARE

During the 1980s, a substantial number of super specialty corporate hospitals came into being in our urban areas. However, due to commercialisation, they could cater only to the needs of urban rich people. There was wide gap in the availability of medicare for the rich and poor and between rural and urban population.

Keeping this in mind, Baba declared on November 21, 1990, there would be a world-class hospital in Puducherry area within a year and it would offer free treatment to everyone who comes there, especially



Sathya Sai Baba shares a light moment with former President APJ Abdul Kalam.

the poor. This hospital was inaugurated on November 22, 1991.

After its inauguration, the super specialty hospital has conducted many major heart surgeries and catheterisation procedures. Specialist surgeons from reputed hospitals, both from India and abroad, voluntarily take leave from their regular work and come to Puducherry and perform operations free of cost. Same is the case with nursing services.

I understand the convalescing patients provide voluntary help to the new patients who come to the hospitals for operation. Also the hospital premises are maintained in a clean, calm, serene and divine atmosphere. We can see the power of service consciousness flowing in the entire hospital environment.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Whether it be a super specialty hospital at Puducherry or provision of safe drink-

ing water for Anantapur or provision of drinking water to Chennai by solving the problems associated with Karikalur reservoir; all projects have been completed to meet the specified objective within the prescribed time and cost. How this has been possible? I was thinking about it.

The major reason appears to be that the projects have been entrusted to socially committed project managers, contractors and sub-contractors. They have executed the project with a spirit of co-operation, the spirit of sacrifice and dedication. The programme chiefs have followed the five core human values — truth, right conduct, non-violence, love and peace — while executing the projects. Can there be a better role model than this for promoting a nationwide welfare, societal transformation mission?

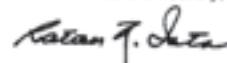
Dr Abdul Kalam is former President of India.

Swami Sri Satya Sai Baba has touched the souls of millions of people – rich and poor. He has worked selflessly to enhance the livelihoods and to benefit communities and the downtrodden. He has treated everyone alike and he leaves behind a legacy of high values, goodness and kindness. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing him have been awed by his presence and the good he has done for so, so many.

He will be dearly missed and the greatest tribute that all of us can give to his memory is to continue, in the best form we can, the good, the vision and the enormous sensitivity that the great man did in his lifetime. His memory will live on for generations to come.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,


Ratan N. Tata

Tributes flowed in, as was only to be expected; presented here is a tiny sample. Above is a reproduction of an article by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in The Hindustan Times. On the left is a tribute from Ratan N. Tata, an iconic figure in the Indian business community.

Postscript

Over seven decades ago, Baba, then known as Sathyanarayana Raju, dropped out of school, telling his elder brother, Seshama Raju, that he was giving up home and family to serve humanity. Such a claim by a mere 14-year-old hardly made any sense. Seven years later, in 1947 to be precise, Seshama wrote an anguished letter to his younger brother, now known as Baba, that the latter had literally thrown away a wonderful future. In a long reply Baba not only reiterated his earlier declaration but made several explicit promises or vows. Among other things he said:

I have a Task: To foster all mankind, and ensure for all people lives full of *Ananda* (Bliss).

I have a Vow: To lead all who stray away from the straight path, back again into goodness and save them.

I am attached to a “Work” that I love: To remove the suffering of the poor and grant them what they lack.

Back then they were just promises, made while Baba was living in a tin shed that served as his *ashram* and was hardly known outside of a small (but most attached) circle of devotees. Few knew about his vows then and indeed now. Baba, however, never forgot them. In fact he spent all his life quietly implementing them, in as many ways as possible. Looking back, who can say that he did not fulfill his promises, and in full measure?



On May 25, 1947, Baba wrote an important letter to his elder brother (see Chapter 2), in which he spelled out explicitly what might be described as his mission objectives. The three pictures here illustrate that indeed he fulfilled his promises, in good measure.



Removing suffering.



Giving bliss.



Leading into the path of goodness.



As we saw in Chapter 6, throughout 2010, groups came from all over to sing and present programs before Baba. That continues to be the case, as we see in this double spread, which shows a large group from Germany presenting a concert. The group had made its travel plans much earlier and insisted on traveling to Puttaparthi and performing, even though Baba was no longer physically present. For them, it was Baba's Love that mattered; that Love, they declared, was very much present and could be experienced by them. This is by no means an isolated occurrence. Subsequently, a big group came from Poland, once again to be in that ambience, perform for Baba and experience his unstoppable Love. Baba might not be physically present, but his magnetic draw remains as strong as before.





More pictures of the German group performing, offering their respects and posing before the Mahasamadhi.





RAINER BENDA
GERMANY

In November 1981, someone in Germany told me about Baba, and when I heard a recording of his talk, my immediate reaction was – this is it! I wanted to see this person. When I saw him, the purity of his life and the beauty of his personality took me over; I was at home. Even now when I see *Mahasamadhi*, for me it is not a tomb. It is the symbol of the supreme and sublime peace.



ALLEN LEVY
USA

After coming to Baba, my life has turned from concerns of self into a sharing of the burdens of life that others seem to bear. The real value of this life I call mine has become the intense desire to respond to the cry of pain from others, who are my own self in disguise.



KAYA GUNATA
TURKEY

I have been coming to Baba for more than 30 years, starting in 1981. Whenever we came to Puttaparthi in groups, Baba gave us interviews and filled us with overpowering love. When I heard about Baba leaving his body, I was not upset because I feel he is always with me. In fact, I feel he is more close to me now.



TINA AND SEVERIN TRIFUNOVIC
SLOVENIA

When we heard the news that Baba was hospitalized, all of us in Slovenia were very sad, but it was only temporary because we knew that his work and blessings will go on. There is no stopping because Baba is the Spirit – he is the truest and purest inspiration for all of us.

When we came for the Sai World Youth Conference held in Prashanti Nilayam in 2007, toward the end of his discourse Baba said, “I am feeling the waves of happiness and love coming from you to me... I love you all.” We were really overwhelmed what a blessing it was! What else do we need? We just have to lead our lives in total peace and grow spiritually.



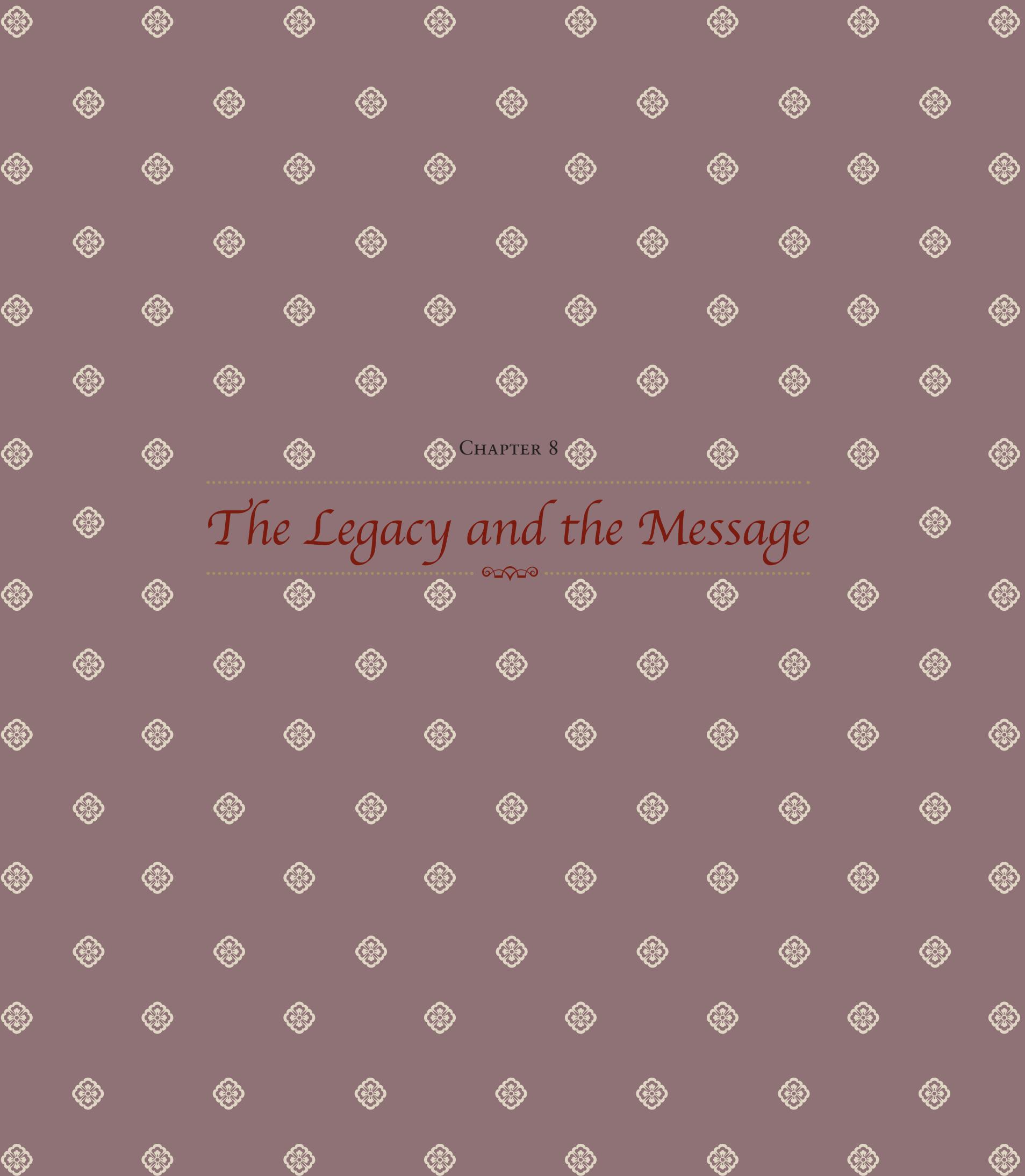


Captured on the opposite page are the thoughts of some who came to Puttaparthi after Baba gave up his body. People continue to come in large numbers. The form may be missing, but Baba's Love, which is transcendental, continues to flow and draw people from all parts of the world.



CHAPTER 8

The Legacy and the Message



Introduction

BIRTH IS SUCH
A COMMON
PHENOMENON
THAT WE SELDOM
PAY ATTENTION TO
THE DIFFICULTY,
SACRIFICE AND PAIN
THAT ALL MOTHERS
UNDERGO FOR THE
SAKE OF BRINGING
A NEW LIFE INTO
THE WORLD. THAT IS
WHAT SELFLESS LOVE
IS ALL ABOUT. LOVE
IN THE OVERARCHING
SENSE IS
MEANINGLESS UNLESS
IT IS ACCOMPANIED
BY COMPASSION AND
SACRIFICE; EQUALLY,
COMPASSION
WITHOUT SELFLESS
LOVE IS IMPOSSIBLE.

So, that was Sathya Sai Baba, his life and his missions. Is that the end of the story, or are there any significant and meaningful take-home lessons? If so, what are they? This chapter not only deals with such questions but also links the answers to Baba's philosophy of an overarching and all-encompassing universality that is the undercurrent of the diversity that is so evident to our senses.

All of us are deeply influenced by what happens around us, i.e., in the external world; no surprise in that since that is an aspect of our emergence from lower species after a long period of biological evolution. On the other hand, we are also aware of a Voice within that alerts us not to do anything immoral. As a result, every individual faces an internal tussle due to two contrary pulls. On one side is the Head, insisting on being governed entirely by the external world, while on the other side is the Heart, constantly cautioning that one's actions cannot go against the moral compass. Seen from a higher and philosophical perspective, this struggle between the Head and the Heart reduces to a tussle between a short-term and a long-term focus in life. While the short-term view is always mind driven, the long-term consideration is guided by Conscience or the Voice within. According to Baba, it is not a question of either/or but both, in balanced proportion, i.e., one can have worldly ambitions as well as desires but within appropriate limits and held in check by non-negotiable moral imperatives. This might sound like a delicate balancing act; indeed it is. However, says Baba, such controlled steering of one's life is feasible and even becomes easy when *Prema*, or selfless Love, becomes the primary motive force of life. Once that happens, adds Baba, even the seemingly impossible is achievable.

CONCERNING PREMA, OR PURE LOVE

Baba was always focused on *Prema*, or Pure and absolutely selfless Love, and all that he said and did could ultimately be traced to *Prema*, including his megaprojects. Many who hardly knew Baba would dismiss his works with the remark, "Even governments with their huge administrative apparatus and funds are not able to do such things without cost and time overruns; how then can one individual and his Trust do such projects?" As opposed to this, others who had actually seen the projects and even worked on them would say, "Baba, we do not know how you manage to do all these things but this much we do know – no one else can do it." With a gentle smile Baba would reply that it was all the result of selfless Love. All humans, he would say, are endowed by the Creator with that Love; however, this gift of the Divine is embedded deep in the (spiritual) Heart. What was required was for individuals to open their Hearts, broaden their vision, turn the switch on and allow Love to flow through appropriate feelings, thoughts, words and actions. Once that was done, wonderful things, big as well as small, were possible. It was not the size of the project that mattered, but the relief, joy and happiness that were brought to a suffering soul.

Love is not concerned with quantity but with quality. That said, if many like-minded people come together, then even large problems could be solved; such is the power of Pure and unselfish Love.

Prema, or Pure Love, being an unfamiliar concept, people often had difficulty in understanding what exactly Baba meant although he discoursed on it frequently. Patiently, he would then offer a simple example. "Within a minute of its birth," Baba would say (a paraphrase), "a calf is able to stand up and drink milk from the mother cow which, meanwhile, licks its newborn clean. People describe this as natural behavior and a consequence of the survival instinct. I would describe it as an aspect of Cosmic Love that envelops all living beings. Contrast the calf with a newborn human baby. At birth the baby is utterly helpless, and unless the mother lifts and feeds the baby it will be hungry. Imagine what would happen if the mother just walked away. Birth is such a common phenomenon that we seldom pay attention to the difficulty, sacrifice and pain that all mothers undergo for the sake of bringing a new life into the world. That is what selfless Love is all about. Love in the overarching sense is meaningless unless it is accompanied by compassion and sacrifice; equally, compassion without selfless Love is impossible. That is why I always place Love at the apex and strongly advise that it alone ought to be the spring from which all thoughts, words and actions must flow. If this happens and is sustained, then much good can be done, as has happened throughout history." That is indeed the case, and one has merely to recall the examples of St. Francis (1182-1226), Father Damien (1840-1889), who spent a good part of his life serving those afflicted with leprosy on a small island that now forms part of modern Hawaii, and Mother Teresa (1910-1997), a Catholic nun of Albanian ethnicity who spent the greater part of her life in Calcutta (now Kolkata) helping in various ways the poorest of the poor, especially those who were dying.

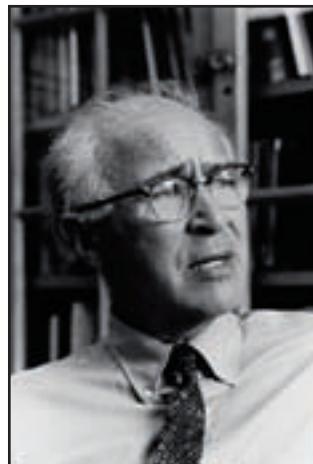
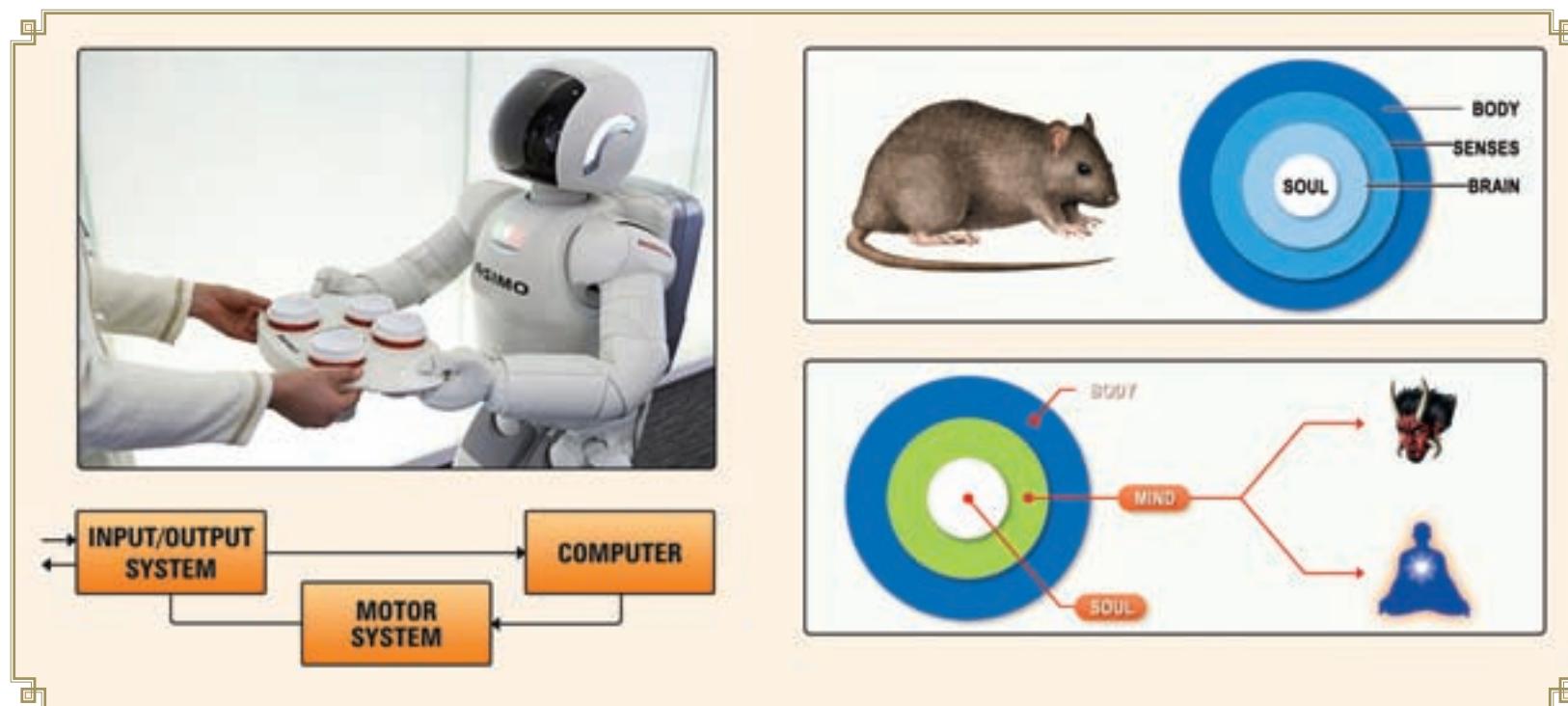
The above remark should not give the impression that only those in holy orders can sacrifice and engage in service. As Baba repeatedly stressed, selfless Love being inherent in all, anyone can turn the switch on and render service as Florence Nightingale (1829-1910) demonstrated so beautifully. Born in an upper-class British family, Florence Nightingale instinctively felt drawn to looking after the sick and in 1853 set up in London a center for taking care of sick women. Soon came the Crimean War. The moment Florence Nightingale

heard horrifying reports about the condition of the injured she promptly got official permission and, landing in the theater of war with a group of about 40 women trained by her in nursing, plunged into helping the wounded. Through her work Florence Nightingale not only became famous but also brought into existence the cadre of paramedics. Further, her small book titled *Notes on Nursing* literally gave birth to the nursing profession. History is replete with examples of people who, driven by selfless Love and compassion, have generously given of themselves to help others and bring joy to those served. Baba's point was that it is not necessary for everyone to spend all of one's life doing service the way Mother Teresa did, for example. As we saw in Chapter 4, Baba formed a service cadre similar to the Peace Corps that allowed people to continually elevate themselves spiritually, by regularly taking time off for service. Keeping all of the above in mind, we can now turn to Baba's philosophy of life, linking it to Love and spirituality on the one hand and day-to-day life as well as service on the other.

CONSCIOUSNESS – SOME PRELIMINARIES

Most people are accustomed to thinking of a human being purely in terms of the physical body. Indeed evolutionary biologists, particularly nonbelievers, are passionate advocates of this view. According to them, human behavior is controlled by the way the neurons of the brain are wired, which in turn is a function of biological evolution. As Francis Crick (who along with James Watson first unraveled the structure of DNA) famously said, the so-called mind is nothing but a meat machine. However, many psychologists differ strongly, arguing that there does exist an entity called the mind that is different and quite distinct from the physical brain. They offer many reasons in support of such an assertion, but that discussion need not detain us. What is pertinent to us is that psychologists link the mind to consciousness, feelings and thoughts.

Pure and Absolute Consciousness is central to Indian spirituality. The term Consciousness might sound rather abstract but becomes easier to understand once we realize that consciousness is closely related to awareness. The primary difference between an inert machine and a living being is that the latter is self-aware. Every living creature is conscious that it exists, and it is this self-awareness that is the source of the instinct of self-protection. In turn, the drive for self-protection often leads to selfishness, since the latter often has its origin



George Wald (1906-1997) was an American chemist, well known for his work on the importance of vitamin A to vision, the mechanism of photochemical reactions in the rod cells that enable night vision, and the identification of color-sensitive pigments in the cone cells. For his important contributions, Wald shared with two others the Nobel Prize for Medicine awarded in 1967.

The graphics above relate to remarks on pages 123 and 124. They compare and contrast a robot, a lower being such as a rat, and finally a human. A robot has sensors connected to a computer in which is loaded a powerful program. Guided by the program and the input signals it receives from the sensors, the robot is able to perform various functions. The rat is a living being and, like the robot, guided by the brain and the senses, it also is able to do many things. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the robot and the rat, which is that the latter has limited consciousness or external awareness. It knows it exists, and it is this (low-level) self-awareness that endows it with the instinct of self-preservation.

In the case of humans, consciousness plays a much bigger role. Blessed with a mind, humans can also look within, since the mind can connect to the soul. The mind is immensely powerful. Although it can look toward the soul, it can, led by the senses, also become deeply engrossed with the external world. In such a situation, the mind dominates the personality of the individual, who could even become devilish. On the other hand, if the mind goes close to the soul, the person becomes spiritually elevated.

in the survival instinct. It should thus not come as a surprise if humans tend to be selfish and have strong self-interests. This is how evolutionary biologists explain human behavior, and they would be perfectly correct, provided one restricts analysis to a limited perspective.

SCIENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Baba elevates the entire discussion regarding consciousness or awareness to a higher and more subtle plane that offers an entirely different perspective. Baba emphasizes that the consciousness of living beings did not come from nowhere, nor is it the product of mere biological evolution. Rather, the capacity for awareness that living beings have is inherited from Pure Consciousness that transcends the physical Universe. In fact, adds Baba, the Universe itself was born of Pure Consciousness. Further, Pure Consciousness pervades all of space and time, suffusing every created entity in the Universe, from the micro to the macro. As a result, a bit of Pure Consciousness is immanent in everything in the Universe, be it small or big, inert or living. However, this immanent Consciousness or the capacity for awareness is manifested in varying degrees in different species. Thus it is said that consciousness sleeps in a stone, stirs in a plant, awakens in animals and eventually finds an opportunity to flower in humans. Interestingly, Harvard Professor George Wald

came more or less to the same conclusion and says:

It came to me quite lately, as a new and extraordinary idea, both tempting and repellent, since it shocked my scientific sensibilities. Then I realized with some embarrassment that many others had been there before – not only mystics, over past millennia, but also a few most thoughtful physicists quite recently.

It is the view that, just the contrary of consciousness appearing as a late outgrowth of evolution of life on this and other planets, that this Universe breeds life and consciousness because Consciousness is its source, because the stuff of this Universe is ultimately mind-stuff. What we recognize as the material of the Universe, the Universe of space-time and elementary particles and energies is actually an Avatar, the materialization of Primal Consciousness. In that case, there is no waiting for Consciousness to arise. It is always there, at the beginning and at the end. What we wait for in the evolution of life is only the culminating Avatar, the emergence of self-conscious bodies that can articulate Consciousness, that can give it a voice, a culture, literature and art, and science.

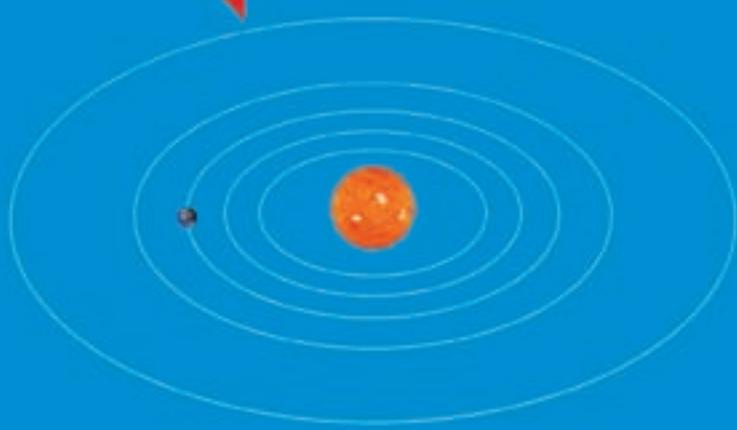
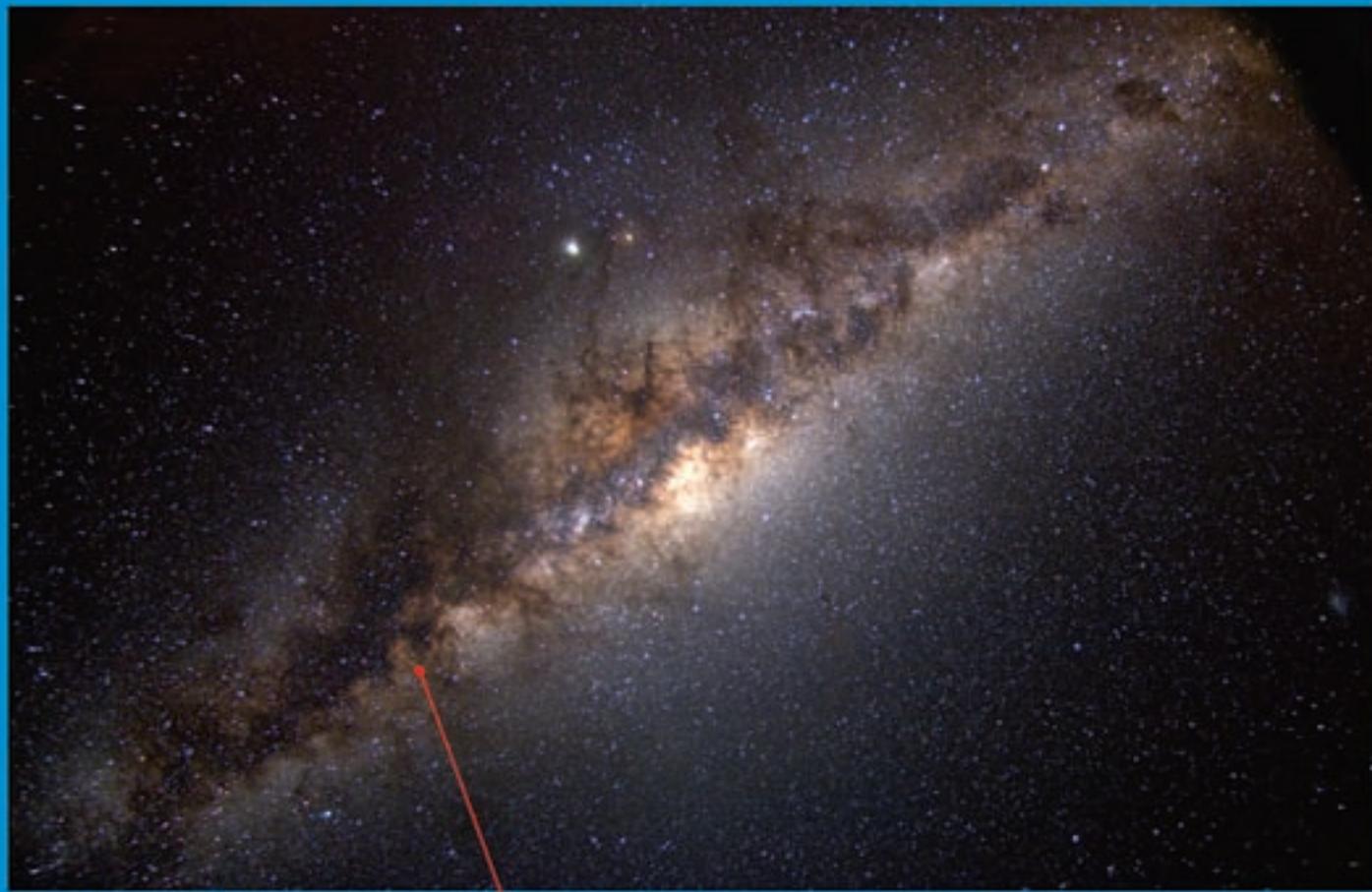
Wald arrived at the above conclusion after convincing himself that the logic of science, bound as it is by space and time, **cannot** explain the mystery of life, central to which is awareness or consciousness since it lies beyond what limits the physical Universe. Much later other scientists tried using science itself as a stepping stone to look beyond space and time into the realm of consciousness. David Bohm (to whom a reference was made in Chapter 1) was a pioneer in such studies. Triggered by many unanswered questions raised by quantum mechanics (the best tool physicists have had for nearly a century for dealing with Nature both at the subatomic and the cosmological level), Bohm ventured to “retune” quantum mechanics itself. In the process he slowly came to the conclusion that when we try to see the Universe in bits and pieces, which also is what any experiment in science does, we will never get the **total** picture. The efforts of modern science are thus very much like that of the five blind men trying to describe the elephant by feeling parts of it. True, science does give an amazing and incredible description of the “local” picture, meaning the “bits and pieces” of the diversity that the Universe is packed with. These can be cognized by the senses and studied in detail by scientific instruments of various kinds, all of which are nothing but extensions of the senses. Indeed, it is such knowledge that allows humans to do

amazing things. However, when it comes to the “totality of all these bits,” science is not able to say much. That, argued Bohm, is because we do not have the right integrating tool that can make the “bits come together.”

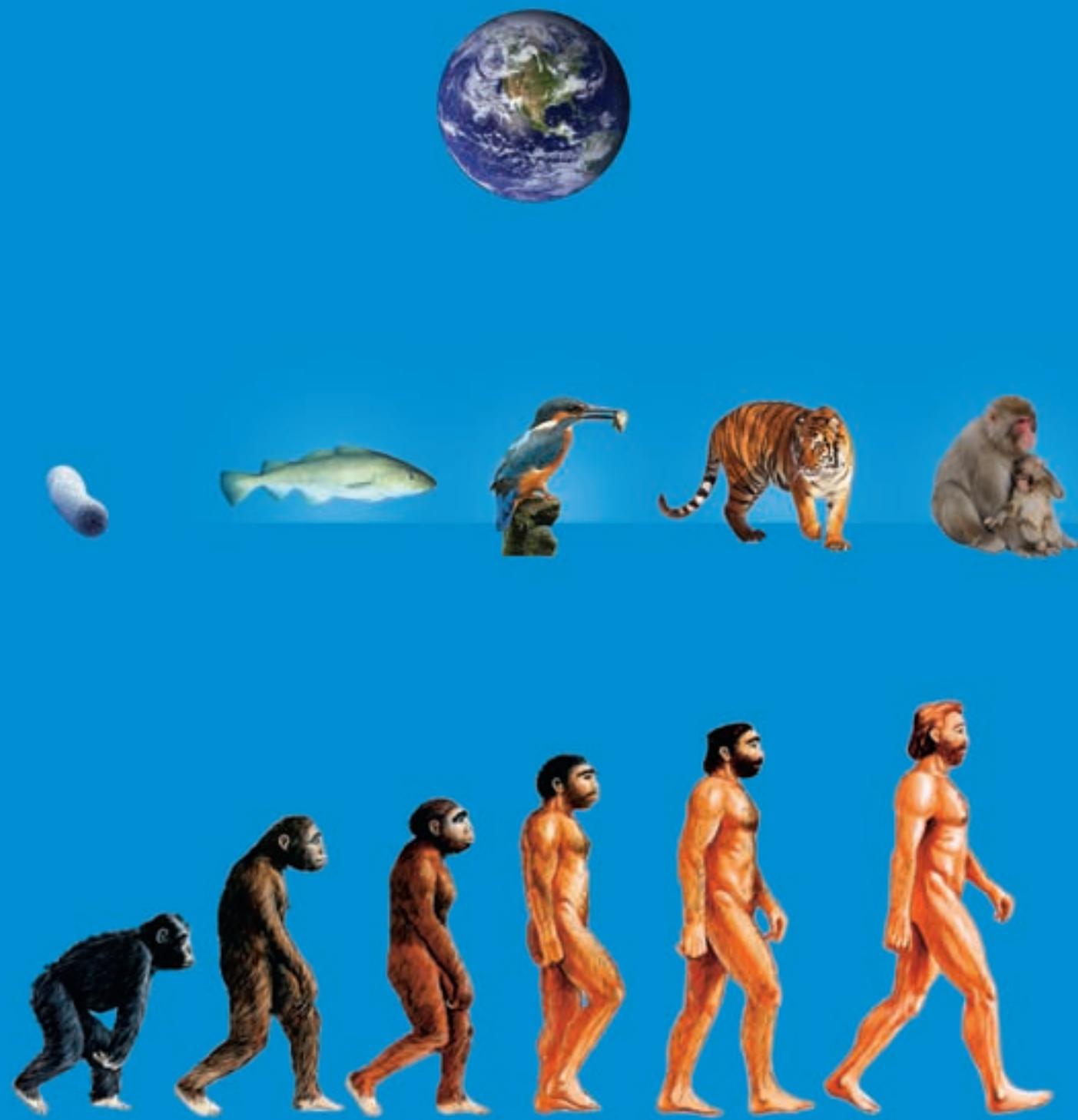




Shown at the top is the Big Bang, while the arrow depicts the evolution of the Universe. The surrounding blue indicates that the Universe is immersed in Consciousness, which permeates the whole of Creation, being present in everything from the smallest of the small to the largest of the large.



Our Sun is one of the billions of stars in the galaxy called the Milky Way. In the Universe there are billions of such galaxies. From a cosmological point of view therefore, our planet is an insignificant part of the Universe. Yet it is important because it supports life.



While Consciousness is present everywhere, it is passive in inert entities. It is in living beings that Consciousness becomes active. The lower beings can be aware of only what is external to them; their consciousness is thus limited. Humans are different and can be conscious of not only what is external but also what is within.



Consciousness flowers in humans, expressing itself, among other things, as great achievements. The photos above capture some of these achievements, such as the conquest of Everest, traveling into space and making great advances in technology (such as building supercomputers) and in science (such as building huge machines to probe the microcosm of the Universe at incredibly small levels). As we shall see later, human consciousness can rise to still higher levels, finding expression through qualities that truly reflect the Divine.

Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273), was a Sufi mystic and a Persian poet. Born in a village in what is now Tajikistan but was then part of the Persian Empire, Rumi eventually settled in a town that is part of modern Turkey. His writings have a universal appeal, transcending traditional barriers of religion, race, etc. Understandably, his work has been translated into many languages and attracted wide attention.

Rumi's poem quoted below reflects the evolution of consciousness through various stages, starting from the inanimate all the way to animate and humans in particular. It is interesting that Rumi refers to a stage beyond the human, where consciousness is united with where it came from.

*I died a mineral and became a plant.
I died a plant and became an animal.
I died an animal and I was man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?*

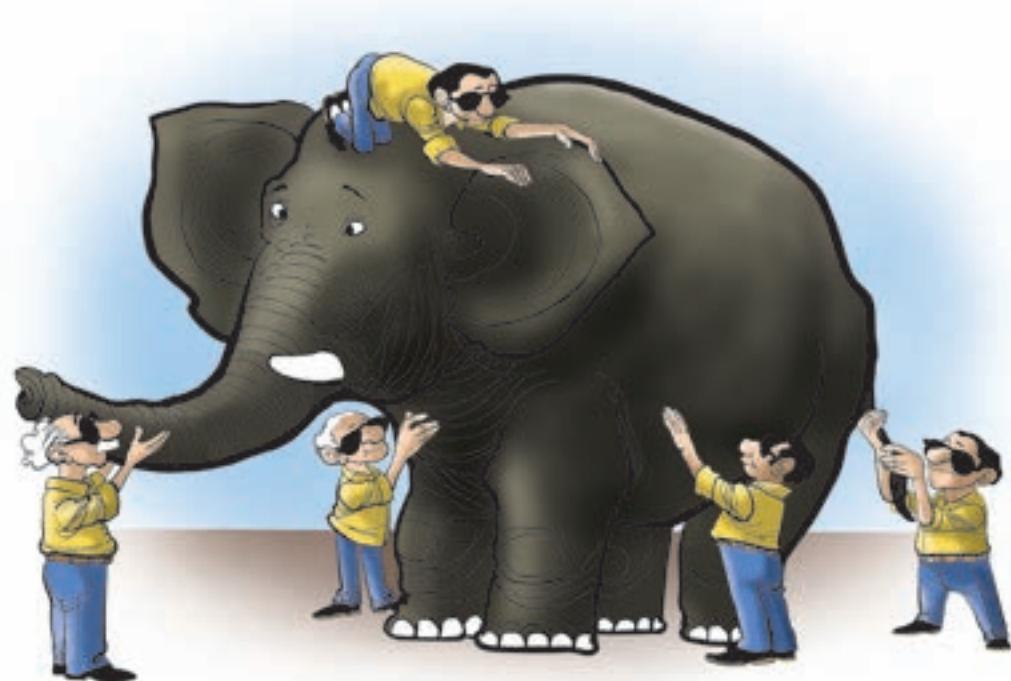
*Yet once more I shall die as a man, to soar
With blessed angels; but even from angelhood
I must pass on. All except God perishes.
When I have sacrificed my angel soul,
I shall become that which no mind has ever conceived.
Oh, let me not exist! For Non-Existence proclaims,
“To Him we shall return.”*

Stanford neurobiologist Karl Pribram, who spent a lifetime trying to understand the workings of the human brain, picked up from where Bohm left off. Pursuing a very different approach, he too came to the same conclusion. The brain sees the world, said Pribram, by “splitting it,” rather like a glass prism splits sunlight into seven colors. The question now became, “Was it possible to ‘go to the other side of the prism’ and see the ‘white light’ aspect of the Universe, i.e., experience the Universe in its unified aspect?” That precisely was the question Stanislav Grof of California investigated. Grof, who specialized in Freudian psychoanalysis, concluded that human consciousness can operate at two distinct levels, a lower mode that he refers to as *hylootropic* and a higher mode he calls *holotropic*. Almost all of us see the world the former way, experiencing nothing but diversity. If, however, one were able to rise to the level where one can have a holotropic view of the Universe, then one would see nothing but Cosmic Oneness. In other words,

depending on how consciousness is “tuned,” the Universe can present itself either as diversity in unity or unity in diversity. Modern science has thus almost inched its way to the doorstep of metaphysics, likening the Universe to a coin with two sides. One side shows diversity in Cosmic Unity, while the other side reveals that there is a Cosmic Unity beyond the diversity one experiences with the senses. As a result, what we see is what we want to see, depending upon the mode in which our consciousness operates!

Theoretical physicist Paul Davies, well known for his books on popular science, raised in his book *Mind of God* the question, “Is it at all possible to see unity in diversity?” Drawing from the far-reaching work of logician Kurt Gödel, Davies came to the following conclusion:

We are barred from ultimate knowledge, from ultimate explanation, by the very rules of reasoning that prompt us to seek such an explanation in the first place. If we wish to progress beyond, we have to embrace a different concept of “understanding” from that of rational explanation. Possibly the mystical path is a way to such understanding. Maybe (mystical insights) provide the only route beyond the limits to which science and philosophy can take us, the only possible path to the Ultimate.



THE UNIVERSE IS ONE THOUGH WE SEE DIVERSITY

Quantum mechanics came into existence in the late 1920s when it was found that the classical physics of Isaac Newton was inadequate in the world of the atom. As a tool for making calculations, the new mechanics was remarkably successful. However, its philosophical foundations were far from clear since it seemed very counterintuitive. There were thus passionate arguments among the experts, who included celebrities like Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr.

Despite its amazing success, Einstein was dissatisfied with quantum mechanics and in 1936 came up with a powerful argument to claim it was wrong. At that time, there was no way of testing Einstein's objections. However, in the 1970s, a brilliant experiment by Alain Aspect in France not only demonstrated that Einstein's objections were incorrect but also that there was a strange and mysterious connectivity between all the entities in the Universe, though they might appear to be different!

The victory for quantum mechanics was welcome news, but the mysterious connectivity across the Universe was a new headache! Commenting on it, the eminent physicist J. S. Bell said:

In these EPR [Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen] experiments (the reference here is to the actual tests) there is the suggestion that behind the scene something is going faster than light... It is as if there is some kind of a conspiracy that something is going on behind the scene, which is not allowed to appear on the scene. And I agree that's extremely uncomfortable.

On the same issue, physicist David Mermin commented:

This is a most curious state of affairs, and while it is wrong to suggest that EPR correlations will replace sonar, it seems to me that something is lost by ignoring them or shrugging them off. The EPR experiment is as close to magic as any physical phenomenon I know of, and the magic should be enjoyed. Whether there is any physics to be learnt by pondering it is less clear.

Physicist John Gribbin also offers a similar view:

CONSCIOUSNESS, AWARENESS AND SELF-AWARENESS

Before we proceed further, it is useful to have a summary of what has been said above, since rather unusual concepts have been introduced. First, scientists who have dared to investigate the Universe beyond the limitations placed on our perception by space and time have come to the conclusion that a limited perspective can reveal only the diversity aspect of the Universe. That said, there are strong scientific reasons to believe that the Universe is actually one whole. However, in order to have this perception one must, according to Prof. Stanislav Grof, retune one's consciousness/awareness to a

It (the result of the experiment) tells us that particles that were once together in an interaction remain in some sense parts of a single system which responds together in further interactions. Virtually everything we see and touch and feel is made up of collections of particles that have been involved in interactions with other particles right back through time to the Big Bang.

Interestingly, even before World War II, Eugene Wigner, one of the big names in quantum mechanics, ventured to explicitly bring consciousness into the picture with the following remark:

Through the creation of quantum mechanics, the concept of consciousness came to the fore again; it was not possible to formulate the laws of quantum mechanics in a fully consistent way without reference to consciousness.

Later, when Aspect's experiments clearly established that Einstein's conjecture of 1936 was wrong, Bell observed:

It remains a logical possibility that it is the act of consciousness which is ultimately responsible for the reduction of the wave packet.

Basically Bell was not only supporting Wigner's prewar conjecture, but actually relating it (in some vague way, though) to the fresh insight provided by Aspect's experiments. It must be mentioned that notwithstanding their eminence, Wigner and Bell were only thinking aloud and wondering to what extent consciousness was relevant to theories of physics.

To put all of the above in context, it must be pointed out that quantum mechanics started off with the stand that it would deal only with experimentally observable quantities. This later lead to questions about the role of the observer, i.e., the one performing the experiment. Still later, it led people to consider perception, cognition, etc. However, all these were at best half-serious musings. More recently, Aspect's groundbreaking experiment has made some daring scientists ask serious questions about perception and consciousness, a topic that will come up later in the chapter.

higher or the holotropic level. Such retuning would, according to Paul Davies, require a mystical experience of some sort which, by the way, great seekers of many lands appear to have had throughout history. All of this is a kind of bottom-up approach, namely, rising to the level of Cosmic Oneness from the usual level of consciousness where we perceive nothing but diversity.

Baba approaches the topic from the other end by pointing out that the Universe was born from Pure Consciousness. Baba adds that after the birth of the physical Universe, the

Gary Zukav was born in Texas and raised in Kansas. After graduating from Harvard, he joined the famous Green Berets and served in Vietnam. Later he turned to spirituality, and wrote many best sellers. In his book *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, Zukav offers the following comment on the basic unity underlying the Universe, as hinted at by the critical experiment performed to examine the foundations of quantum mechanics (briefly discussed in the previous box):

The philosophical implication of quantum mechanics is that all things in our Universe (including us) that appear to exist independently are actually parts of one all-encompassing organic pattern and that no parts of that pattern are ever really separate from it, or from each other... In short, the physical world, according to quantum mechanics, is not a structure built out of independently existing unanalyzable (indivisible) entities, but rather a web of relationships as a whole.

Geoffrey Chew, a distinguished American theoretical physicist and professor at the University of California, Berkeley, is more explicit than Zukav. This is what he says:

Your electrons and mine are only approximately distinguishable. In denying objective reality (that Einstein vehemently stood by), quantum mechanics denies absolute status to your individuality. The only individual is the entire Universe.

mother and child did not quite separate from each other. Rather, Pure Consciousness became immanent throughout the Universe and is thus present in every aspect of it, big or small, inert or living. That said, consciousness or the capacity for awareness is passive in inert entities and active only in living beings. Moreover, it is only in humans that this capacity for awareness is fully awakened, as George Wald also noted. And this is where Baba goes far beyond Wald and Western commentators like him. Baba draws attention to the fact that while the capacity for cognition in animals is almost entirely restricted to what surrounds them, i.e., the so-called external world, humans have far superior capabilities. Thus, humans can, after studying the external world, tap latent inner capabilities and innovate, invent, explore, etc., which is what George Wald referred to as the flowering of consciousness, that finds best expression via humans.

Let us explore further in what way consciousness or awareness is superior in humans. When it comes to the external world, lower beings often outdo humans. Whales, for example, can hear very low frequency sound that humans

cannot. Likewise, nocturnal creatures can see clearly in the dark, whereas humans cannot. However, humans can gather information about the “unseen” and the “unheard” in ingenious ways – that, of course, is due to modern science, which is one of the many aspects of the flowering of the human consciousness.

Baba goes even further and, in the tradition of Indian spiritual masters, poses a challenging question, the essence of which could be paraphrased as follows: “O humans! You are able to say so much about so many things in Creation. But do you know who exactly you are? Is your capacity for awareness as high as to make you Self-aware?” This question brings in a new issue, namely, that of “Self-awareness”; in essence, it means: can the individual know his/her true nature?

On the face of it, such a question might appear vague, abstruse, far too philosophical and having very little connection with day-to-day life. This is precisely where Baba’s remarkable capacity as a spiritual teacher shows up. Step by step Baba guides us to the answer, beginning with the observation that contrary to popular belief that a human being is a “composite” of only the body and the mind, in truth the individual is actually a coming together of three aspects, the body, the mind and the soul. The gross body is perishable and returns to the elements when it dies. The mind, on the other hand, is subtle, survives death and thereafter recycles through many bodies via rebirth until it “fades” away. Finally, there is the “individual soul” that is part of the Eternal, Immortal and Universal Soul or Absolute/Pure Consciousness. A human being is thus body plus mind plus soul and not merely the body or even body plus mind. The presence of the soul makes a huge difference, a fact that must be kept in view while going through what follows.

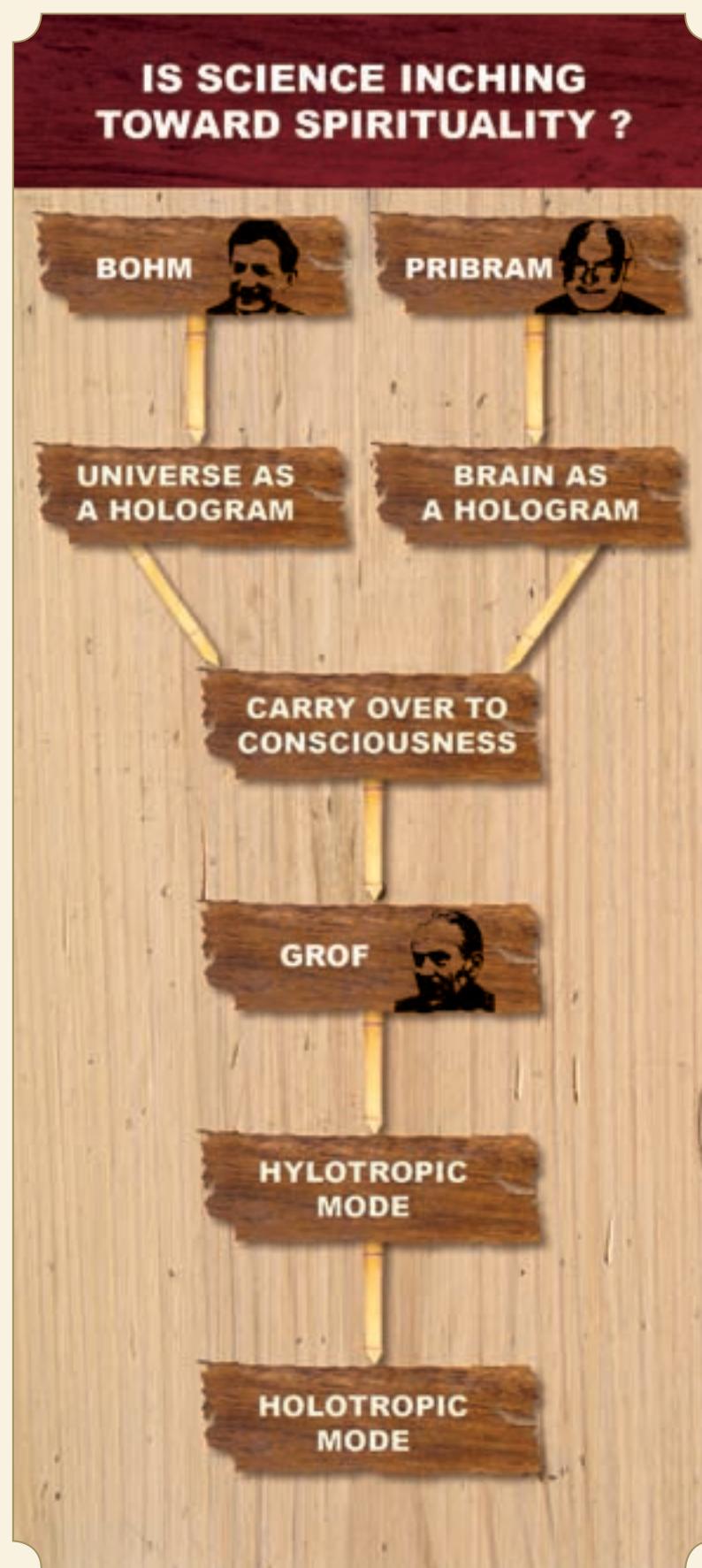
Baba now takes the discussion one step further. Since the Universe was born from Absolute/Pure Consciousness, Indian spirituality identifies Pure Consciousness with God in His ultimate and abstract aspect. Recall now the remarks made at the beginning of page 124. Since Pure Consciousness pervades the whole Universe and is immanent in every thing, including sentient beings (which obviously includes us humans also), it follows that every individual is born with a “Divine Gene,” or, “a Spark of the Divine” as Baba used to put it. This Spark of Divinity is thus latent in all without exception and constitutes one’s true nature. To what extent humans make evident in

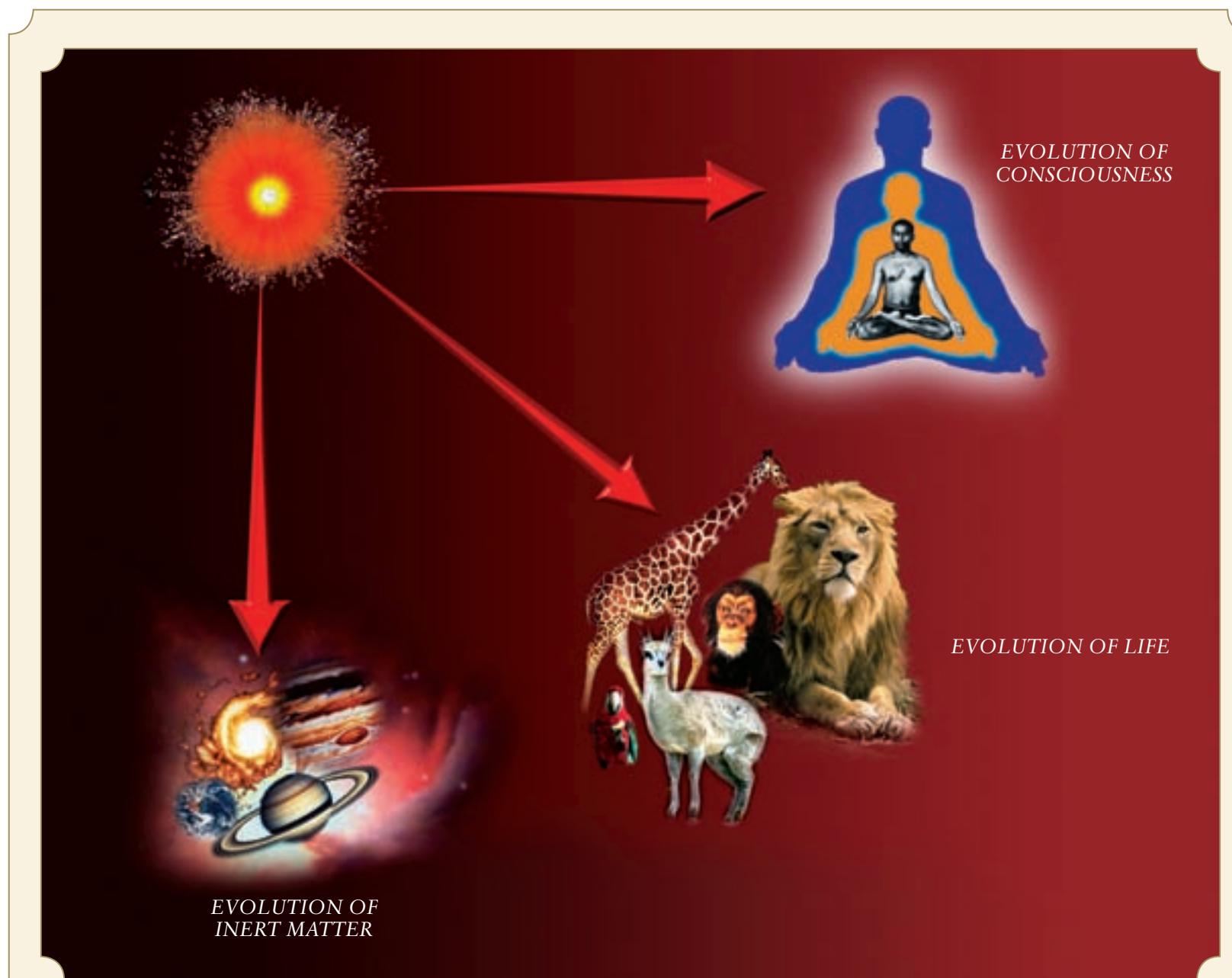
Offered here is a brief overview of how the questions raised by the pioneering experiments of Aspect (see earlier box) were handled subsequently. Prominent among these scientists was David Bohm (1917-1992), who was born in America but had to relocate to England during the McCarthy era. Dissatisfied with traditional quantum mechanics, Bohm tried to tweak it. But meanwhile, working with Dennis Gabor, who discovered the principle of holography (for which he later received the Nobel Prize), Bohm speculated that perhaps the Universe was like a hologram.

Bohm's thinking went as follows. A hologram of an object is made using a laser beam, which is really a beam of coherent light. If the film containing the hologram is viewed with normal light, one sees just a big collection of rings and swirls of light patches that hardly look like the original object. However, when viewed with a laser beam, one can see a 3-D image of the object. Based on this, Bohm boldly declared that the Universe is really a cosmic hologram and further that when we see it, either with our eyes or using instruments (which are mere extensions of our senses), we do not get a coherent picture. We therefore see only the bits and pieces. Behind these bits and pieces lies one totally connected Universe; that really was the message of Aspect's experiment. If we want to see one Universe, added Bohm, one needs to achieve a "coherent perception." Bohm did not clarify what that unified and coherent perception meant.

Karl Pribram picked up where Bohm left off. His in-depth studies on neural connectivity in the human brain led him to conclude that the mathematics was very similar to that of quantum mechanics. That being the case, speculated Pribram, humans would see only bits of the Universe, which was in full accord with what Bohm had conjectured earlier.

Enter now Stanislav Grof, a doctor trained in Czechoslovakia who turned to psychoanalysis after emigrating to the United States. He argued that perception goes beyond the brain to consciousness. If humans see diversity in a Universe that is in fact subtly connected, it is simply because consciousness is detuned or operating in hylotropic mode, as Grof called it. But, argued Grof, consciousness can be tuned and elevated, and if it is raised to the holotropic or the perfect coherent level, then unity would be perceived rather than diversity. The graphic alongside offers a summary of the above.





Structure and organization are the hallmarks of evolution. According to science, there are two clear strands of evolution. The first of these relates to the evolution of gross matter. From the initial cosmic "soup" of elementary particles that came into existence immediately after the Big Bang, there evolved in the course of time, nebulae, galaxies, stars, planets and finally inert matter as we know it in terms of rocks, minerals, precious stones, etc. Cosmology and basic physics deal with this aspect.

The second strand relates to the origin and the evolution of living species, a subject opened up by Charles Darwin that has since picked up enormously, after the discovery of the structure of DNA.

There is yet another strand of evolution that science does not recognize but exists nevertheless, and that is the strand related to self-awareness or Consciousness. Basically, self-awareness means that every living entity knows that it exists as an entity distinct from everything that is around it. As explained in this

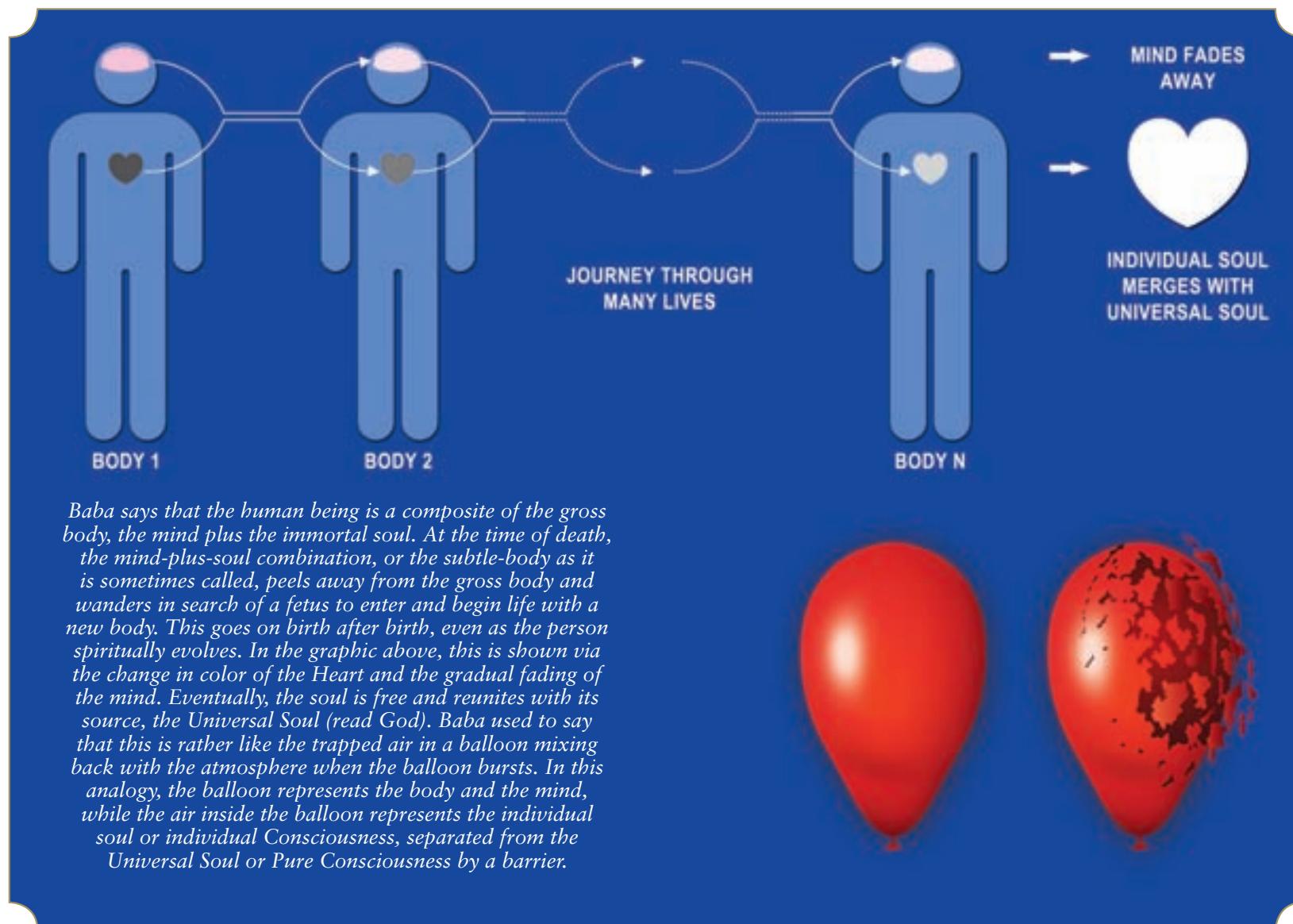
chapter, there are really two components to this awareness or consciousness. The first is related to cognition of entities external to the body of the living species concerned; this is the aspect most critical for self-preservation. All living species have this capability to varying extents. Humans have the extra ability to look "within" and know that which transcends the senses, i.e., they can look into their Hearts and recognize the presence of God as the Indweller.

Why have humans alone been given this special ability and blessing? So that they can realize that they are themselves the Spark of the Divine and live their lives accordingly, guided by basic values and responding to higher calls. Baba says that life in human form is given mainly for this purpose, namely, to become Self-aware as opposed to lower beings, which are only self-aware. This realization of the Higher Self within can be achieved only by rising to the highest level of Consciousness, i.e., Universal Consciousness, a process often referred to as attaining nirvana or liberation.

their lives what is inherent or latent in them is a different matter; in fact, it is the basic question relating to the purpose of life. Concerning this, Baba says that at the end of the day, all our actions must bear testimony to the Divine Spark within and nothing else. Interestingly, Shakespeare, too, makes a similar comment:

*This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

Extending the point, Baba adds that being false means being false in feeling, thought, word and action. Thus, says Baba, life must be lived in such a manner that it reflects the "Divine Spark" latent within. The actual fact is that most people do not live that way; if they did, we would have had heaven on Earth long ago. The question is why, and the answer lies in the never-ending struggle between the Head (read mind) and the Heart (read the individual soul or Divine Spark) referred to several times earlier.



THE GAMES THAT MIND CAN PLAY

It is time to bring the mind into the discussion, since it often obstructs a person from giving full expression to the latent Divinity. In brief, the soul has a natural inclination to commune with the source it came from, i.e., God, Pure Consciousness, call it what you will. The mind, on the other hand, has a great tendency to dwell in the external world because of the many attractions it has to offer. There is a good reason for this. In one sense, the mind is an outgrowth of the brain and thus has strong links to the physical world in which the individual lives. On the other hand, according to spiritual philosophy, the mind is born from the "Spark of the Divine" and hence has an exalted heritage of its own. The mind can thus "turn" both ways, i.e., toward the world as well as toward the soul, and this exactly is where all problems arise.

A simple example will illustrate the point. Imagine a company owned by a father-and-son pair. The father is old-fashioned and believes in traditional values like integrity, honesty, fair play, etc., while the son believes that making money is the most important objective of the company and that therefore all means fair and foul are permissible. The fate of the company thus gets pulled in two different and conflicting directions. Where a human being is concerned, life is the analog of the company, the soul or the Divine Spark within is the counterpart of the good father and the outward-looking mind that of the ambitious son. Life could thus look like a car that two people are constantly trying to steer in opposite directions! Obviously, that would be a disaster!

Baba says the solution is simple. If the son obediently bows to the decisions of the father, confident that the father would always do what is best for the company, then business could be transacted in a smooth manner; in the process customers would receive good service, which would make them happy. Translated to the issue of properly managing one's life, this implies that the mind would do well to always follow the Conscience. The job of the mind and the body then reduces to implementing the orders of the Conscience through appropriate thoughts, words and deeds. This way, adds Baba, there is "triple purity," meaning purity of thought, word and deed. In other words, a person says and does what he/she thinks, every bit of which is always good and noble. Could there be any better way of going through life?

RIGHTS VERSUS RESPONSIBILITY

The analogy of running a company in a proper manner highlights the fact that in life an individual is pulled by two opposite forces, namely, rights and responsibility. When a young boy reaches, say, the age of 18, he is supposed to become "free." Greatly thrilled, the young man immediately wants to do all the things that earlier his parents used to caution him against. He becomes so preoccupied with exercising his rights that he fails to realize that freedom also brings responsibility, and that by drawing "red lines" his parents were basically drawing attention to his non-negotiable moral obligations. There is a deep philosophical principle involved here, but before getting into that, it is pertinent to remind ourselves of the famous quote of President Kennedy who asked his people to choose responsibility to the country over claims regarding individual entitlements.

Currently, individual rights are regarded as paramount, trumping everything else. Such an attitude is characteristic of hyper-individualism, and people who proclaim that they are free to do as they please are in fact under the control of their mind. The question can be raised: "Why this distinction between the mind and the person?" And the answer is, as pointed out earlier, that it is the soul and not the mind that represents the real or the **intrinsic** nature of the person.

Baba explains this in a simple manner (paraphrase): "When a man says, 'my shirt,' it is clear that the person is differentiating himself from his shirt. Likewise people sometimes say, 'I have not yet made up my mind'; once again, this clearly means that the person is implicitly declaring that he/she is an entity different from the mind." Baba continues, "The individual is made up of the body, the mind and the Divine Spark. Are you the body? No, you are not the body. Are you the mind? You are not the mind either but are separate from it. You are not the body, nor are you the mind. In that case, who exactly are you?" This process of elimination, says Baba, clearly reveals that one is really the soul within. An individual who takes orders from an outward-looking mind (rather than his/her Conscience) is actually a slave of the mind. The outlook of a mind-driven individual is not only largely external but also tinged with a strong sense of exclusiveness. As a result, ego dominates and the person tends to be highly possessive, selfish and self-centered, sometimes in the extreme, which is why Baba repeatedly warned against being conquered by ego.



The following is an extract from a speech by David Cameron, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, made in Parliament shortly after the major disturbances and looting in London in August 2011. Interestingly, he referred to how rights begin to trump responsibility when there is a breakdown in society.

Responsibility for crime always lies with the criminal.

But crime has a context. And we must not shy away from it. I have said before that there is a major problem in our society with children growing up not knowing the difference between right and wrong.

This is not about poverty, it's about culture. A culture that glorifies violence, shows disrespect to authority, and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities. In too many cases, the parents of these children – if they are still around – don't care where their children are or who they are with; let alone what they are doing. The potential consequences of neglect and immorality on this scale have been clear for too long, without enough action being taken.

As I said yesterday, there is no one step that can be taken. But we need a benefit system that rewards work and that is on the side of families. We need more discipline in our schools. We need action to deal with the most disruptive families. And we need a criminal justice system that scores a clear and heavy line between right and wrong. In short, all the action necessary to help mend our broken society.

EGO AND THE OBSTACLES IT CREATES

The role that ego can play in impeding the spiritual evolution of a person is worth exploring a bit further. In spirituality the individual has the option of functioning at two different levels, usually referred to as "i" and "I," the former being the lower level. If the person's awareness or consciousness is at the "i" level, the individual's outlook becomes strongly external, making the person feel separate

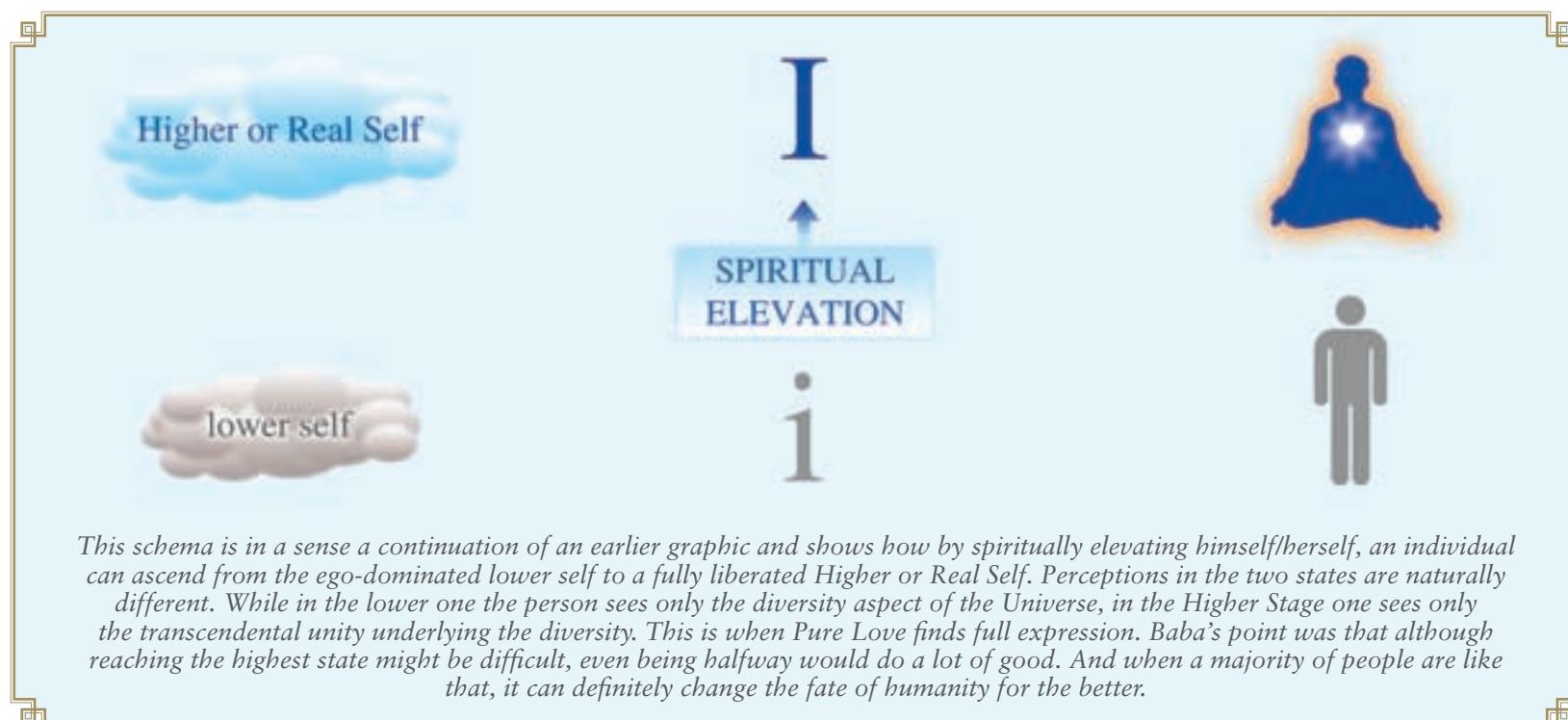
from everything else, which is tantamount to seeing diversity. On the other hand, if the individual breaks free from ego, the mind ceases to have control; consciousness is then able to ascend to the "I" or higher level where unity rather than diversity is perceived. (Recall in this context the findings of Stanislav Grof cited on page 130.) The two levels just mentioned are of more than academic interest. At the i-level the individual is chained to ego with the result that selfishness and self-interest strongly dominate. The higher or the I-level, on the other hand, represents total freedom from ego. While that state is obviously not easily attained, it helps enormously if every individual makes an effort to rise at least to some extent toward it so that the "I" component moderates the rough edges associated with the lower or the "i" level. Indeed, when selfishness gets substantially moderated in a sufficiently large number of people, there could even be a "critical mass" that tips the balance on the side of common good, a tipping that can make a huge difference to society.

Pulling all of the above together, it should be clear that the grip of ego can be loosened only if the mind is constantly persuaded not to rebel but to cooperate and act in a responsible manner. A different way of putting it would be to say that the individual must practice self-regulation and self-restraint. Self-discipline is common in many societies, as a result of which people are spontaneously polite, always maintain punctuality and are quite fussy about keeping their word. People accept self-regulation without a murmur when they see benefit in it. Thus it is that in many countries people stand in a line wherever there is some service being offered (e.g., at a ticketing counter), even though there may be no sign asking people to stand in a line. People do it spontaneously and voluntarily because they see merit in fair play. It might mean some inconvenience, but that is fine because it is all for common good and everyone benefits.

WHY SELF-REGULATION IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT

Some years ago, Jeffry Sachs of Columbia University identified three major problems facing humanity, namely, (1) the threat of terrorism, widespread conflict and even war, (2) climate change and (3) mass poverty. It does not take rocket science to understand that the human mind is the source of all these and similar problems.

War is born out of a combination of factors that range from a deep sense of insecurity to anger, hatred, ego and

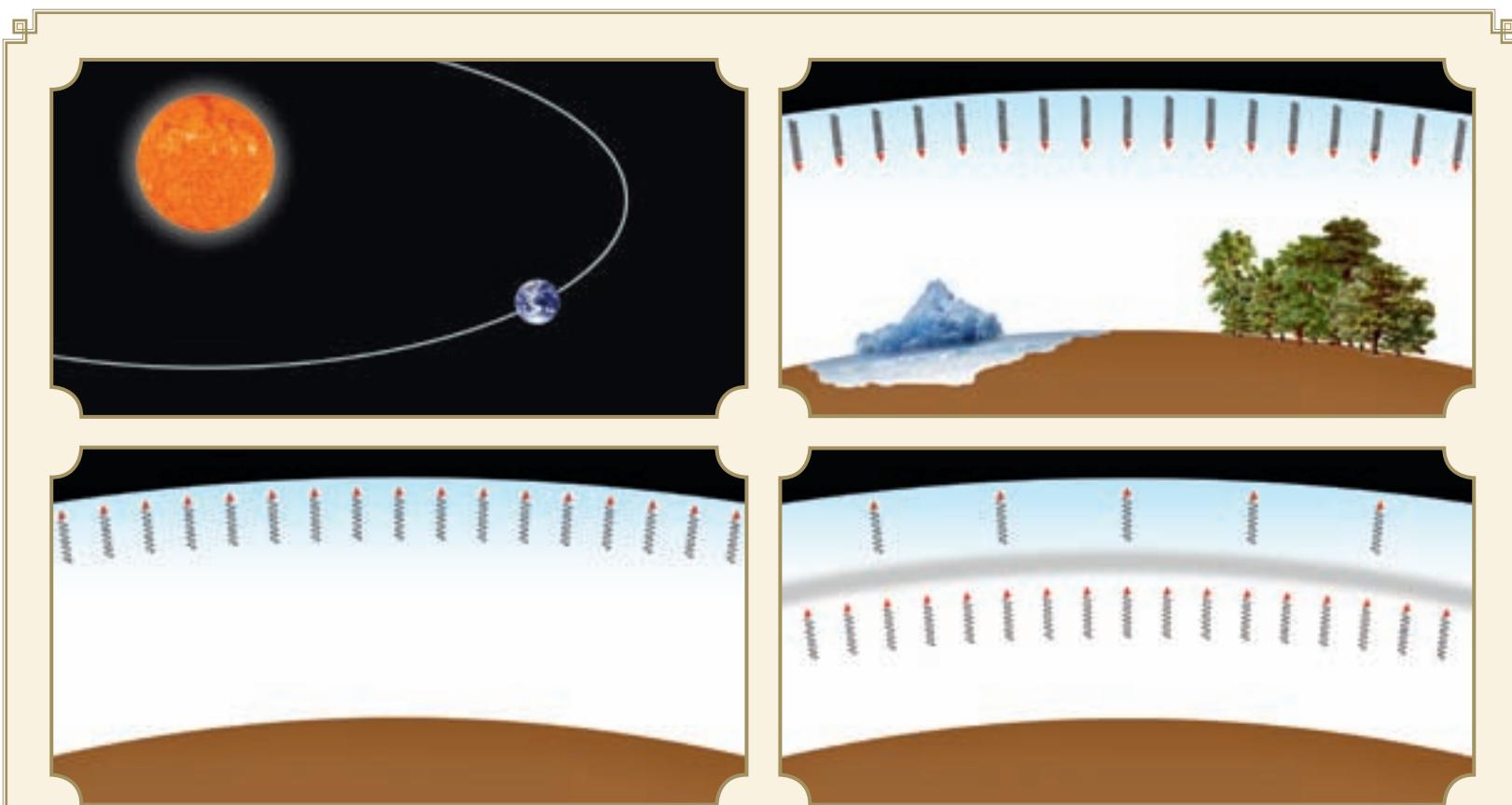


extreme possessiveness. As for climate change, at first sight it might not appear to have anything to do with the mind. But then why is so much carbon dioxide being dumped into the atmosphere when everyone knows it is dangerous? Because people have all sorts of desires and few want to do anything to control them. Everyone wants to travel freely, buy consumer goods as if there is no tomorrow and so on. All of this, however, would not be possible without heavy energy consumption, which in turn means adding to the carbon burden. Even the use of consumer goods calls for expenditure of energy. Just think of how many times the two billion plus cell phones now in use are being charged every single day and how much energy that requires. Since most of the energy we use comes ultimately by burning fossil fuels, our desires end up, one way or the other, as carbon burden on the atmosphere. Thus, like war, climate change, too, can be traced all the way to the unrestrained mind. As for poverty, it is largely a manifestation of the enormous inequity in today's society. Current social dynamics and market forces are such that they enhance the wealth gap rather than reducing it. Once again, deep down it all begins from the aberrations of the mind.

Some argue that problems such as those just mentioned are highly exaggerated. Are they? Consider, for example, the arguments presented by Chandran Nair in his recent book *Consumptionomics*. Discussing the aspirations of people in

Asia to attain the American standard of living, he says that if 1.5 billion people in China and India (which together have currently a population of about 2.8 billion) want to drive cars like they do in America (which has a population of only about 300 million plus, by comparison), then the amount of oil required would be far in excess of what planet Earth can provide. Clearly therefore, it is meaningless to entertain unrealizable ambitions. The message is simple: Limitless consumption in a finite world is totally out of the question. Nair then goes on to suggest that Asian leaders must be sanguine and guide their people to have limited aspirations as far as luxury is considered, instead of trying to emulate those in the advanced countries. This is good advice no doubt, but it amounts to asking people to accept or live with inequity of some kind, which the human mind will always resist.

This precisely is where Baba's message acquires great relevance and importance. Merely asking people to curb their desires will hardly ever work, unless the suggestion is coupled to spiritual motivation. That is why he asks people to develop at least a reasonable amount of I-ness, which then would translate as shared sacrifice for the larger and common good. That is to say, instead of some having it good while all the rest have to sacrifice, everyone must sacrifice in balanced proportion so that prosperity is more evenly distributed and abject poverty becomes a nightmare of the past. In practical terms, everyone must place a ceiling on desire, the wealthy



The radiation from the Sun is spread over many wavelengths. However, it is mostly concentrated in the short wavelength region. When the radiation falls on the Earth, some of it is absorbed while most of it is reflected as long wavelength, heat radiation. The absorbed part contributes to the global temperature. In recent years, too much carbon dioxide has been discharged into the atmosphere, creating a layer at the top. This layer traps much of the radiation reflected by the Earth, causing the global temperature to rise. It is this rise that is referred to as global warming or climate change.

more than others; and the sooner this is done the better.

It is wrong to assume that human behavior is hard-wired through evolution and incapable of change, as many tend to believe. Where there is a will and a clear perception of the futility of certain approaches, a massive change of attitude is possible. The most spectacular example in recent history is how Japan changed dramatically after the horrifying experience of the atom bomb to become a totally pacifist nation. What Baba says is that rather than being frightened into being good, it is far better to realize that being good and virtuous is the best way of giving expression to one's true and intrinsic nature. If God created man in His own image as all religions proclaim, then it clearly makes sense to be as true to that image as possible.

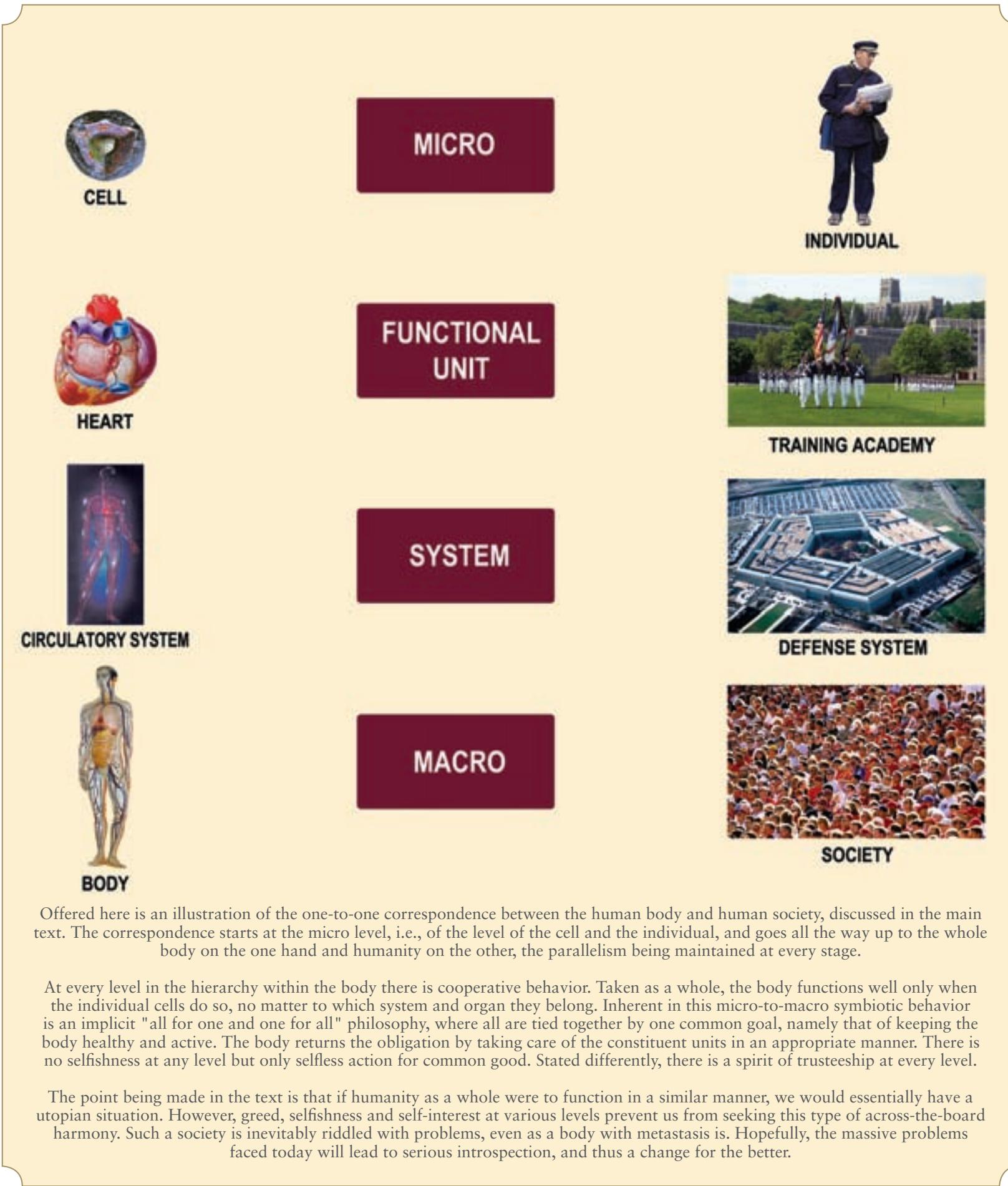
NATURE'S HINT

Baba gives a beautiful analogy that stresses the need for mass cooperation for the common good. As a preamble, he

begins with the urgency of preventing the mind from going wild. He says that by giving full freedom to the mind humans become a slave to it and create problems for themselves, some of which are almost intractable. The best way of preventing all this, is of course, to be careful right from the start.

Emphasizing the point, he would say (paraphrase), "The car is very useful for getting around. But does that mean one should drive recklessly and at very high speeds? Cars are provided with brakes, and they are meant to be used. Most people today are going through life without applying brakes on the mind, especially when it is dragging them to disaster. Do you seriously believe that the mind must be indulged to this extent, especially when it is capable of doing so much damage?"

Baba would then follow all this up by drawing attention to the compelling analogy between a living human body and a healthy society, a correspondence that holds at every level, from the micro to the macro. If the cell is the basic building block of the body, so is the individual in the case of society.



Packed between the micro and the macro in both cases are several layers of increasing complexity. One level above the cell are various organs like the heart, the liver, the kidney, etc. So it is in society, where there are institutions like the school, the hospital, the airport and so on. Just as the organs work properly only if the cells do, so also the hospital, school, etc., function efficiently only when their staff work in the right spirit. One step higher, the body has diverse systems like the circulatory system, the respiratory system, the muscular system, the skeletal system, etc. Society, too, has similar systems, like the educational system, the healthcare system, the banking system, the administrative system, the transportation system and the like. At the system level once again, functional integrity is a must both in the body and in society. Most important of all, like a living body, society, too, can be regarded as a living entity; indeed, we implicitly do so when we use adjectives like healthy and sick to describe the state of a particular society. There is one important difference though, which is that while the body has been created by God, society is a creation of humans. The analogy just made might seem obvious but is seldom noted.

At the operational level the analogy is quite pertinent for a number of important reasons. First, despite the enormous complexity of the body, every cell seems to know precisely what is expected of it and performs that function in harmony with trillions and trillions of other cells. The same happens at every level of the hierarchy in the body. Thus, for example, while the various systems like the respiratory system, the digestive system and so on are all autonomous, they nevertheless function in proper harmony to keep the body as a whole healthy.

This across-the-board synergy is no accident. It is entirely encoded in the human genome, a coding that might be called the “operating system” for the body. In the same manner, the Divine Spark in every individual is a kind of “spiritual gene,” embedded in which is the “operating system” for a healthy human society. In other words, if we want human society to function in a smooth and orderly fashion like a healthy human body does, then both the individual and society must pay more attention to the secrets of the “spiritual gene” as well as the “spiritual operating system” embedded in it.

Going back to the body for a moment, it functions rather like a huge symphony orchestra that performs complex

musical pieces without a conductor but relying on an “invisible operating system encoded into every member.” (A believer would no doubt argue that there is in fact an invisible conductor, namely, God!) That perfect harmony and synergy are needed at every level all the time becomes evident, for example, when a person is participating in a 100-meter dash. Even as the competitor is running fast, the skeletal system, the muscular system, the respiratory system, the circulatory system, etc., all act in a highly coordinated as well as synergetic manner so that the body as a whole performs at its best. Baba says that such synergy and coordination are solely the result of the efficient, well-structured and embedded “operating system,” to which a reference was made earlier. The philosophy underlying this “operating system” is that while the micro works mainly to sustain the macro and cater to its well-being, the latter regulates itself so as to nourish the micro across the board. There is thus a complex and delicately orchestrated “social contract” involving both “upward and downward” responsibilities and obligations; it is a two-way street at every level and **not** a “many-for-some” game – that really is the key point.

The recipe for a healthy society is thus no great secret. It is simple, and that it works is quite clear from a healthy body. Baba notes that humans do not lack the intelligence to copy the “operating system” of the healthy body; far from it. What gets in the way are *swaar�am*, or selfishness, and *swaprayojanam*, or self-interest, making individuals deliberately look away from their social as well as Cosmic connections and associated responsibilities.

Baba cautions that deliberate indifference to something that is of paramount importance is a dangerous mistake that can cause immense harm to humanity as a whole. Amplifying his point, Baba gives a simple example. Consider a man walking barefoot in a forest who steps on a thorn. Alerted by pain, the man sits on a rock and holds the affected foot steady with one hand, while pulling out the thorn with the other hand. All this might appear perfectly normal. However, says Baba, in the context of the parallel between the body and society, what merits attention is that while it is the foot that hurts, it is the hands, the eyes and the brain that come forward to help because the healthy body always functions as one whole. In other words, when one organ suffers pain, the body as a whole shares the agony. It is that selfless cooperation that is at the core of the “operating system”

referred to earlier. This example makes clear once more that the individual and society as a whole must have a mutual upward and downward responsibility based on selflessness at all levels, at least to the extent possible.

Unfortunately, the current ambience is such that people tend to be driven largely by personal interests, and that really is at the root of most problems. Many insist that it is human nature to be selfish and self-centered. This, says Baba, is based entirely on a limited view of human nature, which, as pointed out earlier, ignores the fact that humans have within a Spark of the Divine. Under the circumstances, it is the latent Divinity that must ultimately dictate human actions rather than the mind. It is certainly true that humans do show admirable generosity and rise to the occasion when there is a great disaster like a massive hurricane, a tsunami, an earthquake or, for that matter, a terrorist attack. Unfortunately, such a spirit of help, share and care soon wanes, and if disasters come one after another (as they sometimes do), “compassion fatigue” sets in. By contrast, the spirit of mutual support and share and care in a **healthy** human body does not easily flag, which is why the body stays healthy. It is also pertinent to note that when cells begin behaving in a random fashion, the body becomes sick; in the ultimate case there is metastasis, leading to death. Human societies do not die but end up as failures; and who can deny that there are today several examples of countries described as “failed societies,” with a few more on the verge of it?

So, what it all boils down to is that there are solutions for all man-made problems, whether the problem is climate change, inequity, terrorism or whatever. Reduced to basics, all that humans have to do is copy the operating system that the healthy human body follows. However, there is a price to pay, namely, humans must give up ego and hand over “control” to the Heart. Unfortunately, for many that price tag appears to be too high, even if the problems being faced are severe.

THE ROLE OF LOVE IN PROBLEM SOLVING

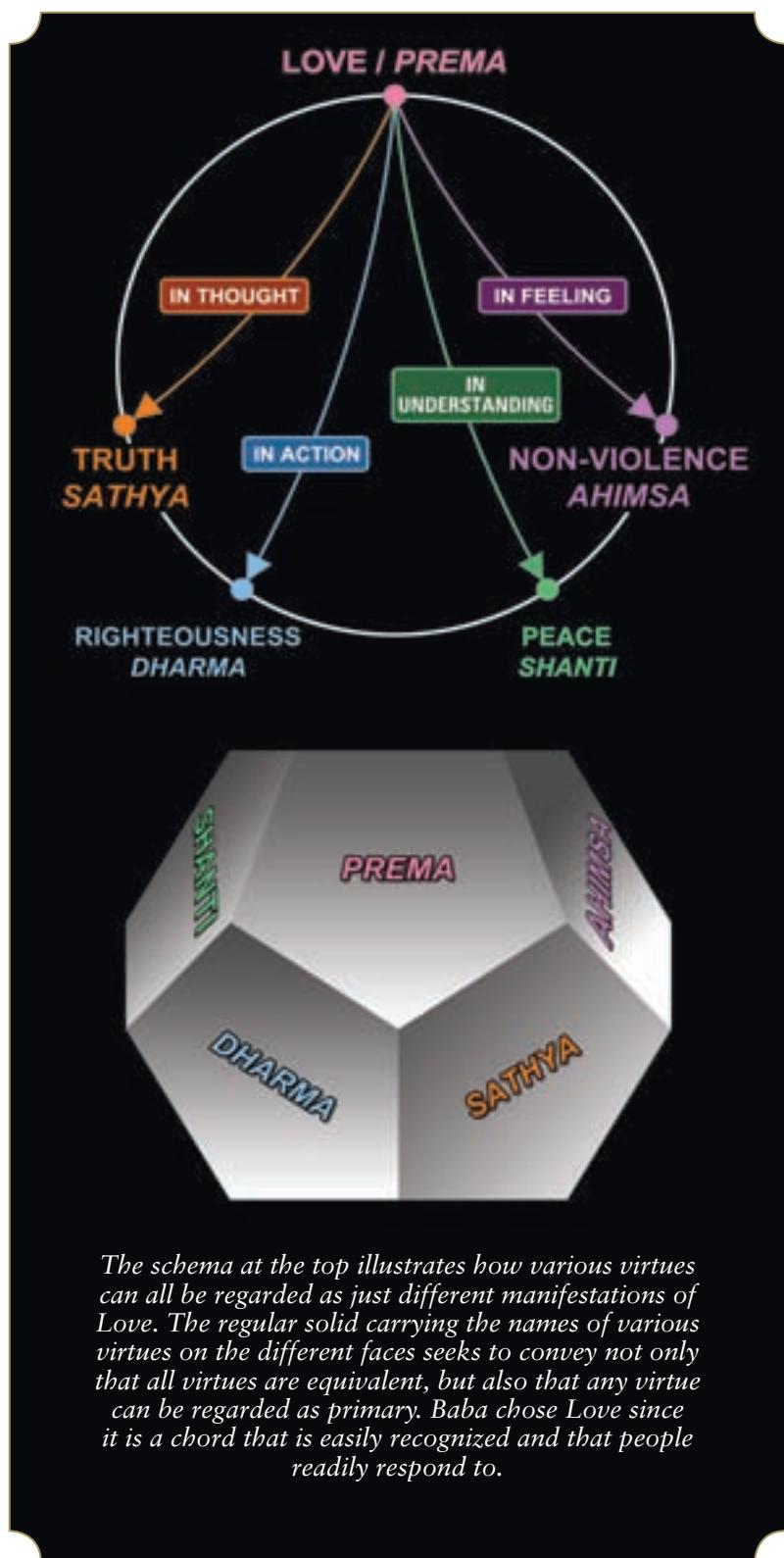
The time has come to explicitly connect Pure Love with most of what has been said thus far. Many feel that spirituality and day-to-day life have nothing in common and that humans are intrinsically imperfect. Greed and selfishness are therefore natural and have to be accepted as facts of life. Preaching virtue is therefore meaningless, and it is futile to try to change the world. If things are the way they are, it

is all part of natural evolution. This raises an important as well as a philosophical question, but we shall consider that later. Meanwhile, ignoring the above short-sighted view, let us proceed on the basis that while things might have taken a drastically wrong turn, they certainly must not be allowed to continue in the same vein as that would mean everyone going over the cliff.

It is important to reiterate at this point that Baba never asked people to become monks, wearing sackcloth and ashes. All he called for was a balance between desires and self-restraint, making sure that when it comes to helping someone in desperate need, it is far better to give than to hold back, which, of course, is also the lesson that comes to us via the parable of the Good Samaritan. Above all, stressed Baba, the end never justifies the means, and there are certain inviolable moral boundaries that must never be crossed. All this becomes automatic, stressed Baba, once the Pure Love latent in the Heart is activated. And that gets facilitated when one enlarges one’s vision to rise from the lower self or “*i*” to the level of the Real Self “*I*. ” That is when divisive barriers come tumbling down and cooperation for the larger cause of common good becomes automatic.

Expanding on this theme, Baba says that when humans develop a deep adoration for God, it begins as a relationship between the Eternal and the transient. On the face of it, it might seem impossible to build a bridge connecting the two. However, says Baba, the way to build this bridge would be for every individual to anchor his/her end in the Heart, meaning that every individual must be in constant touch with Conscience. Such communion can and would change perception as well as priorities, adding not only stability but also meaning and purpose to life. Stability always requires a balanced mix of the short-term and the long-term goals. Indeed, even from a worldly point of view, corporations as well as governments need to balance growth and stability.

Compressing all of the above into a simple working rule, Baba says (paraphrase), “Having been born in the world, one necessarily has to not only live in it but also act in response to the situations that arise out of worldly factors. However, the **motivation** for actions should not be based on worldly/materialistic considerations alone; rather, they must be strongly and firmly rooted in eternal, moral values.” Making it even more explicit, Baba repeatedly declared with great



emphasis that no matter what, one must never compromise on *Sathya*, or Truth; *Dharma*, or Righteousness; *Shanti*, or Peace; *Prema*, or Love; and *Ahimsa*, or Nonviolence.

The question is sometimes raised as to which of these virtues is primary. This is rather like asking: Where does the circle begin? For many, Truth is the fountainhead; indeed it

makes sense to start from Truth as Gandhi invariably did; Baba also did so on many occasions. However, since Love is an easily experienced quality, especially when showered on others, Baba preferred to focus largely on *Prema*, or Pure Love, taking care to explain how Love, too, can be regarded as the fountainhead of all virtues. Love in thought, Baba pointed out, is *Sathya*, or Truth. When Love manifests as action, it reveals itself as *Dharma*, or Righteousness; and when Love suffuses understanding, it becomes evident as *Shanti*, or (inner) Peace. What about *Ahimsa*, or Nonviolence? That, Baba pointed out, was nothing but Love in feeling. In short, abstract Love manifesting through an individual has the ability to make evident Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Nonviolence, depending on whether the channel is thought, action, understanding or feeling.

Incidentally, the link between God/Pure Consciousness and Pure Love now becomes clear. From Pure Consciousness is born the Universe. At the same time, everything in the Universe is suffused with Consciousness or a Spark of the Divine. It is humans alone who have the ability to give expression to the latent Divinity. Flowering as Pure Love, this latent Divinity then manifests through feelings, thoughts, words and actions. Though virtues are described using various terms such as Truth, Nonviolence, etc., they are but the “different faces” of Love, different descriptors being used largely for convenience. Divinity is one but has different ways of expressing itself.

As already mentioned, Baba placed Love at the top because it is easily experienced and brings about a huge change when showered on others. God is Absolute Goodness, and having come from God, there is an element of that Divinity latent in all. In turn this implies that every single individual is intrinsically capable of giving expression to Love in its highest form, provided the person is willing to invest in the effort to overcome ego, which ties the individual to a lower or the i-level of perception and attitude. Liberation from the bondage of ego thus has to be high in the order of priorities. Ego that translates as being strongly self-centered (to the lower self that is) is what drives a person to anger, hatred, jealousy, greed, possessiveness and from there on to worse traits. All of these are unquestionably harmful to the individual and also to society in general, especially when the individual is able to command attention through power and demagoguery. Admittedly, all this might sound like evangelical rhetoric.

However, a careful examination of what was presented earlier ought to make clear that Love in action is a practical proposition, as Baba demonstrated nonstop for over eight decades.

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**IF A SERVICE PROJECT
IS NOT CHARGED
WITH LOVE,
SOMEWHERE ALONG
THE LINE TURF WARS,
BUREAUCRATIC
WRANGLING, FINGER-
POINTING, ETC.,
CREEP IN TO STALL
AND SOMETIMES
EVEN DERAIL
THE PROJECT. IF,
HOWEVER, LOVE
BECOMES A DRIVING
FORCE, THEN IT
FLATTENS THE
BARRIERS CREATED
BY THE MIND,
WHICH IN TURN
FACILITATES FINDING
AND IMPLEMENTING
SOLUTIONS MORE
EASILY. BASICALLY,
LOVE PROMOTES
FLEXIBILITY IN
CHANGING ONE'S
PERSPECTIVE AS
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Moving on, let us now address the basic question, which is, "How does all this help in solving the kind of huge problems mentioned earlier that so many countries and even UN bodies are grappling with?" The short answer is that all problem-solving exercises must keep humans as the focus, always. It is well known, for example, that if while treating a patient a doctor devotes part of his attention to dealing with the patient at the human level via smiles, friendly and supportive gestures, and kind as well as encouraging words, besides, of course, administering medical care, it helps in speeding up patient recovery. Paperwork, charts, mobilizing finance, computer programs, logistics planning, etc., are all important, especially when dealing with huge problems like sanitation, slum clearance, providing safe drinking water, etc. But if the human element is ignored, solutions have a way of getting lost and failing to improve the lot of those for whom they were intended. This has happened time and again all over the world, both in government-administered programs and those handled by NGOs. It is not that people of goodwill and dedication are lacking. Nevertheless, if the entire activity is not charged with Love, somewhere along the line turf wars, bureaucratic wrangling, finger-pointing, etc., creep in to stall and sometimes even derail the project. If, however, Love becomes a driving force, it flattens the barriers created by the mind, which in turn facilitates finding and implementing solutions more easily. Basically, it all boils down to flexibility in changing one's perspective as needed.

A simple analogy might help. As we are all aware, political maps always show borders that help us identify different countries. However, all borders are man-made, besides which they have also changed considerably in the course of history. Now suppose planet Earth is viewed from a satellite. Clearly no borders would be seen, which is obvious because God did not create planet Earth with borders. Nevertheless, borders are required for several operational reasons, just as property fences are required for working convenience. The point is that while at the spiritual level there is only unity and no diversity, at the working level there are empirical differences that need to be observed.

Baba would often explain this to his students in the following manner. The ancients of India, he would tell them, advised young men to regard all women other than their wives to be their mother if they were much older, and all the rest as their sister, elder or younger, depending on their age. If the woman was much younger, she was to be regarded as daughter or even granddaughter. In short, empirical realities do exist and cannot simply be wished away. That said, if empirical realities alone become the driving force of our lives, then they will hopelessly divide humanity into highly polarized groups or even warring communities; human society is far too tightly linked for that. Incidentally, this highlights the importance of the powerful analogy that Baba makes between society and a healthy human body. Stressing the Cosmic Oneness that unites us all, Baba would often remark, "Bulbs are many but current is one," meaning that while the bulbs in a lighting system might be many and varied, the same current flows through all of them.

Actually, human society is no stranger to global cooperation. Thanks to the international organizations related to weather, health, food, etc., all countries cooperate and do the

needful, especially when crisis situations relating to the above list arise. If, for example, an epidemic breaks out in one country, all countries join hands in trying to contain it and prevent a global spread. It is only when problems are linked strongly to the self-interest of various communities and even countries that such understanding and cooperation recedes to the background as, for example, in the case of climate change.

What it all boils down to is that while solutions do exist, vested interest groups (who also often have considerable leverage) are seldom prepared to sacrifice or even compromise. Almost invariably they insist on a solution with one set of rules for them and a different one for all the rest. The truth is that no solution based on inequity is ever sustainable in the long term; the sooner that is realized the better.

Whether we like it or not, a time has come in history when, thanks to the enormous increase in the population of the world on the one hand and tight interconnectivity on the other, economic and social problems can easily cross oceans and impact the whole world, just as epidemics can. There are no firewalls, and even huge oceans cease to provide the protection they once did. For example, the sudden market crash that occurred in September 2008 in the United States swept the world like a powerful tsunami, impacting many countries.

As we look ahead into the future, there are many major problems looming large on the horizon that few are bothered about. First is the alarmingly rapid rise in the price of food. Next is the rapid depletion of the water reserve that Nature gave us a long time ago. And third, there is the unreasonable rise in the cost of education. What is common to all these problems is that they cannot be solved unless the Heart is put in charge and Love allowed to flow. That alone can sweep the cobwebs currently cluttering human minds, permit wisdom to shine, and produce solutions that are fair, equitable, acceptable to all, and for the good of humanity as a whole. Yes, some sacrifices would be involved but with Love in action, everyone would be ready to make them willingly.

WILL ALL THIS WORK?

People being what they are, the question will still be asked, "How do we know that all this would work?" Years ago when Gandhi introduced the idea of *Sathyagraha*, or nonviolent civil disobedience to fight oppressive laws, few saw it as a workable proposition. Even after Gandhi

repeatedly demonstrated that the path of nonviolence was viable in countering power and oppressive authority, many would dismiss it with the curt comment, "This might work with policemen on the street but it would never work with a tyrant!" While there is some truth in that comment, it totally misses the point.

Take, for example, chain smoking. Everyone knows that smoking can and often does lead to lung cancer or serious cardiac problems. Yet, year after year, ignoring that dire warning, millions take to heavy smoking and end up with lung cancer. What is one to do at this stage? Clearly it does not make any sense to tell a dying man, "Stop smoking, and you will be OK." On the other hand, if good advice had been persistently given earlier and the addicted person helped to go to rehab, he might well have quit smoking and regained his health. The point about the spiritual path is to pay serious attention to warnings and get started on the correct path early enough so that dangerous situations do not develop later.

While deliberate indifference often drags people to a slippery slope, ignorance also can lead to the same result. The current situation might be pretty bad, but people in the comfort zone are often ignorant about the dangers of what lies ahead. From the days preceding the French Revolution to modern times, those in the comfort zone often tend to believe that problems that people talk about are exaggerated or even imaginary. Is that really true?

Consider, for example, an illiterate woman in a remote village who is delivering a baby. In such a place there would be absolutely no facilities and no trained person like a midwife to help. In such a situation complications can and often do arise, as a result of which a disturbingly large number of children die at birth. At times the child might survive while the mother dies. There are also occasions when both lose their lives.

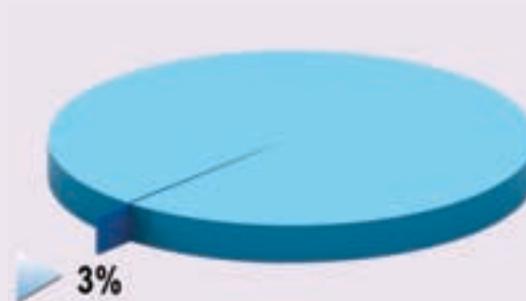
Suppose there is a safe delivery and both mother and child are alive. There still is the millstone of poverty that both have to carry. According to scientists, at the time of birth the brain is developed only to an extent of 60%, the remaining development taking place during the first five years of childhood. In practice that subsequent development is often severely hampered due to malnutrition. As a result, if by chance the child manages to go to a school, he/she has great



The total amount of water present on Earth is approximately 1,400 million cubic kilometers. However, most of it is in the oceans, and only 2.5% or 35 million cubic kilometers is available as fresh water.



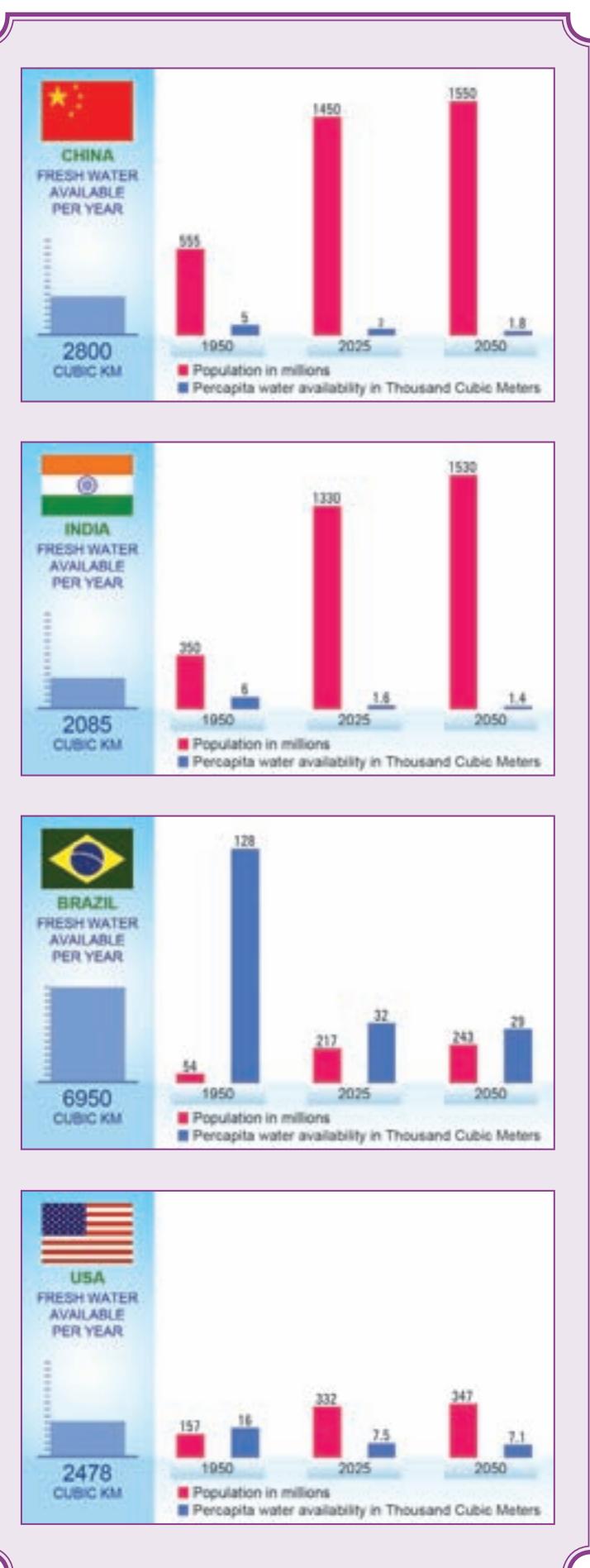
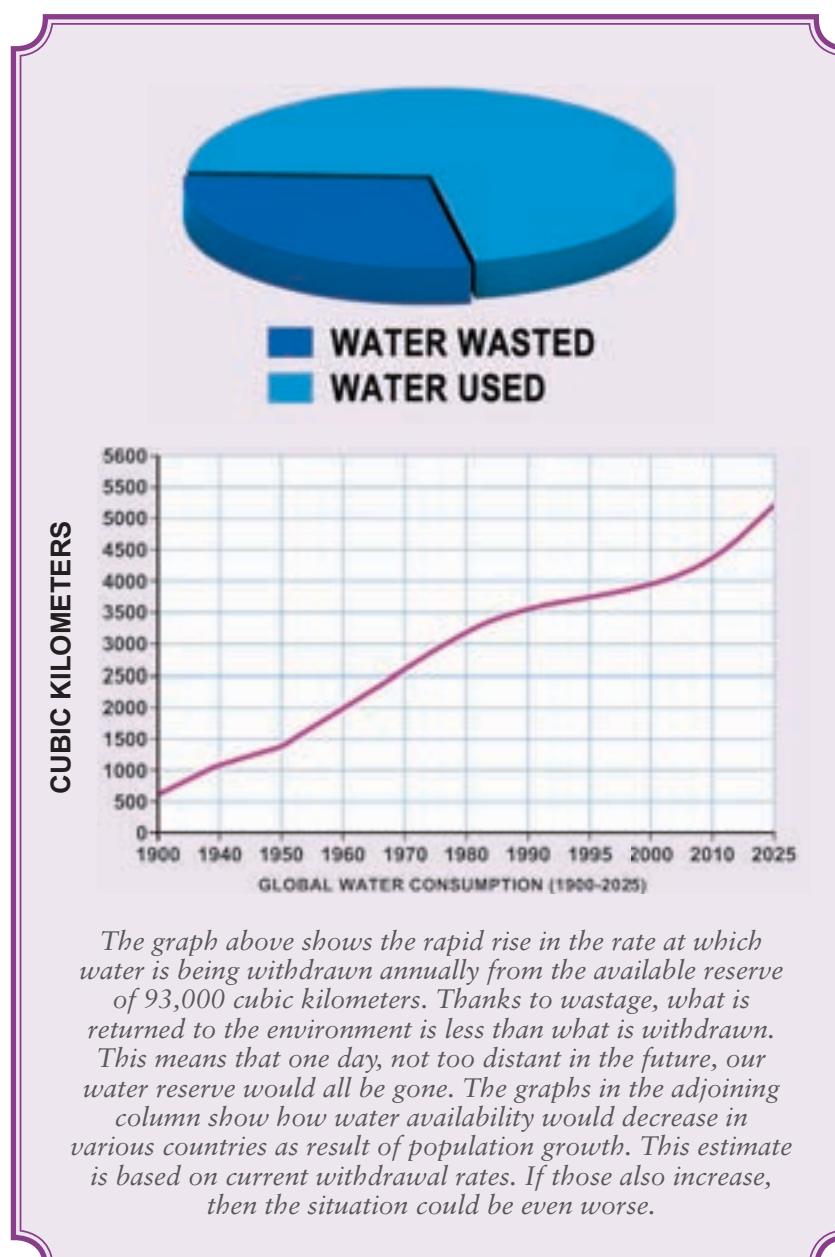
Most of the fresh water on Earth is locked up as ice in the Arctic and the Antarctic, and only about 3.5 million cubic kilometers is available as liquid water.



It turns out, however, that of the 3.5 million cubic kilometers, only about 93,000 cubic kilometers is readily accessible as water in lakes and rivers and as groundwater. This is a huge reduction from what one might think is available. In principle, this stock replenishes itself, provided there is no wastage.

difficulty in learning. Soon poverty plus learning disability leads to the child dropping out of school, and from then on there is mostly a dismal future for the young one. Incidentally, it should not come as a surprise that there is a strong correlation between crime and dropping out of school. People in the comfort zone may not see all this, but in the ultimate analysis, society cannot escape the cost of poverty.

It is often argued that there are too many problems in the world and too little money to fix them. Yes, issues like eradication of poverty do demand cash, but more important than lack of financial resources is the lack of compassion and the will to alleviate the pain and suffering of huge sections of humanity that have known nothing but the pangs of poverty for generations.



And that indifference is born in the poverty of Love. In principle there really is no shortage of Love since it is present in every Heart. The shortage referred to arises because the doors of most Hearts are shut – that really is the problem. It is ego that slams the door shut, which is why Baba gave so much importance to sidelining ego and rising to a higher plane where we see ourselves as parts of the same Cosmic Oneness from which we all have come.

Going back to the alleged shortage of funds, money appears to be lacking because much of it is used for sustaining wrong priorities. Consider, for example, the total annual defense budget of all countries put together; it adds up to a massive sum of \$1 trillion and does not include additional expenditures incurred in fighting wars or engaging in extended armed conflicts, not counting the cost of injuries and deaths. Add to that the hundreds of billions spent every year on security services the world over, and the amount misspent increases even further. All this expenditure is born out of fear, the fear of insecurity.

President Franklin Roosevelt famously said that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. Fear is born in the mind and, feeding upon itself can lead to a variety of complex manifestations such as anger, hatred, jealousy, etc. Left unchecked, fear can create dangerous situations such as those that prevailed during the Cold War when two super powers were in eyeball-to-eyeball nuclear confrontation for decades. Mercifully, all that has now become history, but while the confrontation existed, it also led to huge military expenditures.

Interestingly, no less a person than President Eisenhower, himself a distinguished and highly decorated veteran of World War II, sounded a clear warning that fear could be exploited for creating a flourishing military-industrial complex. His warning has proved prophetic, for now experts speak of many other such complexes, all of which are nothing but nexuses of various vested interests, each spending huge amounts to protect its turf, be it in the drug industry, the fast-food industry or other lucrative industries. In other words, there is enough money to deal with most problems but very little enthusiasm for dealing with them. That is the strength of the barrier built in human minds by selfishness, which is why Baba spoke out so often about making every effort possible to break free from that bondage; and for Baba, Love was the simplest and easiest way of smashing that chain.

No stranger to poverty, Baba understood in full its chemistry, including why it arises in the first place and why the haves put its elimination on the back burner, giving a much higher priority to other matters. And if by chance they do try to address it, they do so with bubble vision, which is why many well-intended solutions go awry. Here is an example. Many big cities with huge slums have made serious and expensive attempts to build good housing for the slum dwellers and move them into shining new areas. Surprisingly, in almost every case, no matter what the city is and in which continent it is located, the slum dwellers have resisted relocation. Why? Because in all cases, the planner overlooked one critical issue, namely employment. The slum dwellers invariably complained, “Yes we have had to live in horrible slums, but at least we could get some employment and some money to meet the basic necessities of life. What is the use of having great apartments in a place where there is no employment? Where do we get the money to travel to places where jobs are available? And how do we get to those places in any case, when there are no transportation facilities worth the name?”

Problem solving requires not only money but also proper understanding, which cannot come via a top-down approach, as emphasized in Chapter 3. Dealing with problems of humanity is not the same as dealing with a problem in a machine; nor is it to be regarded in cold clinical terms as a system problem. The problems represent deep injuries caused to human society because of neglect and indifference and cannot ever be solved unless the balm of Love is applied, at least to some extent. That is what Baba always did, whether the problem was small or big. To him, the size never mattered, only the suffering and pain. That certainly made him unique, for how many have made Love the starting point for every single activity the way he did?

There are skeptics who would argue that humankind is too far gone down the road of consumerism to turn back and make a transition to a system based on an entirely different philosophy of life. Yes, the transition would not be easy, but the question to be asked is would the game be worth the candle? If that question is asked of an alcoholic who successfully gave up addiction and returned to normal life, we know what the answer would be.

This is a moment in history when going along the current path is almost certain to take us over the cliff. One cannot

hide by dismissing that statement, or by arguing that the transition to a better path would be too expensive. The truth of the matter is that humankind simply has no choice. Yes, it takes a lot of effort to turn around an aircraft carrier, but if that effort is invested, it sure can be turned. In that context it is worth remembering that unlike the Titanic, which had some life boats, planet Earth has none!

Nearly two centuries ago, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

Every man cannot have his way in all things. If his opinion prevails at some times, he should acquiesce on seeing that of others preponderate at other times. Without this mutual disposition, we are disjointed individuals, but not a society.

Baba drew attention to precisely this dysfunction by comparing the human body to human society. Since it is selfishness that leads to such dysfunction, Baba, with much Love and great emphasis, called out to people to rise above their lower self and act in synergy, seeing unity in diversity. Again and again he told his students that they owed a lot to society and that their main concern ought to be how to discharge that obligation.

Interestingly, Bill Gates has on many occasions spoken strongly about the duty his company owed to American society. Decades earlier, men who had become wealthy through their own efforts, like Andrew Carnegie for example, believed that in America anyone could become what they wanted through hard work and dedication. And, as an expression of their belief, they generously gave away huge portions of their wealth in support of public causes. Sadly, those days are gone and, as poet T. S. Eliot lamented:

*The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from GOD and nearer to the Dust.*

Sadly, progress seems to be taking us further and further away from our Creator. As Baba once put it, man makes so much effort to travel hundreds of thousands of miles in order to land on the Moon but does precious little to travel even half an inch toward his Heart!

It is not as if man cannot do it. Created in the image of God and carrying within them the matchless gift of the Divine Gene, there is nothing that humans cannot do if they set their minds to it. More explicitly, the mind must plug into the Heart, thus tapping into the power of Love



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hidden therein. Sadly, trapped by ego, few are willing, after dropping the millstone of selfishness and self-interest, to walk the “last mile.” That, alas, is the great tragedy of our times.

Baba spent his entire life demonstrating that with Love, the impossible becomes achievable. However, he never asked anyone to copy him exactly. Instead he advised people to open their Hearts, allow Love to flow, come together in large enough numbers and do sustained work to solve problems. More than anything else, through their actions they should create confidence in society that Love is indeed a cost-effective way of solving problems.

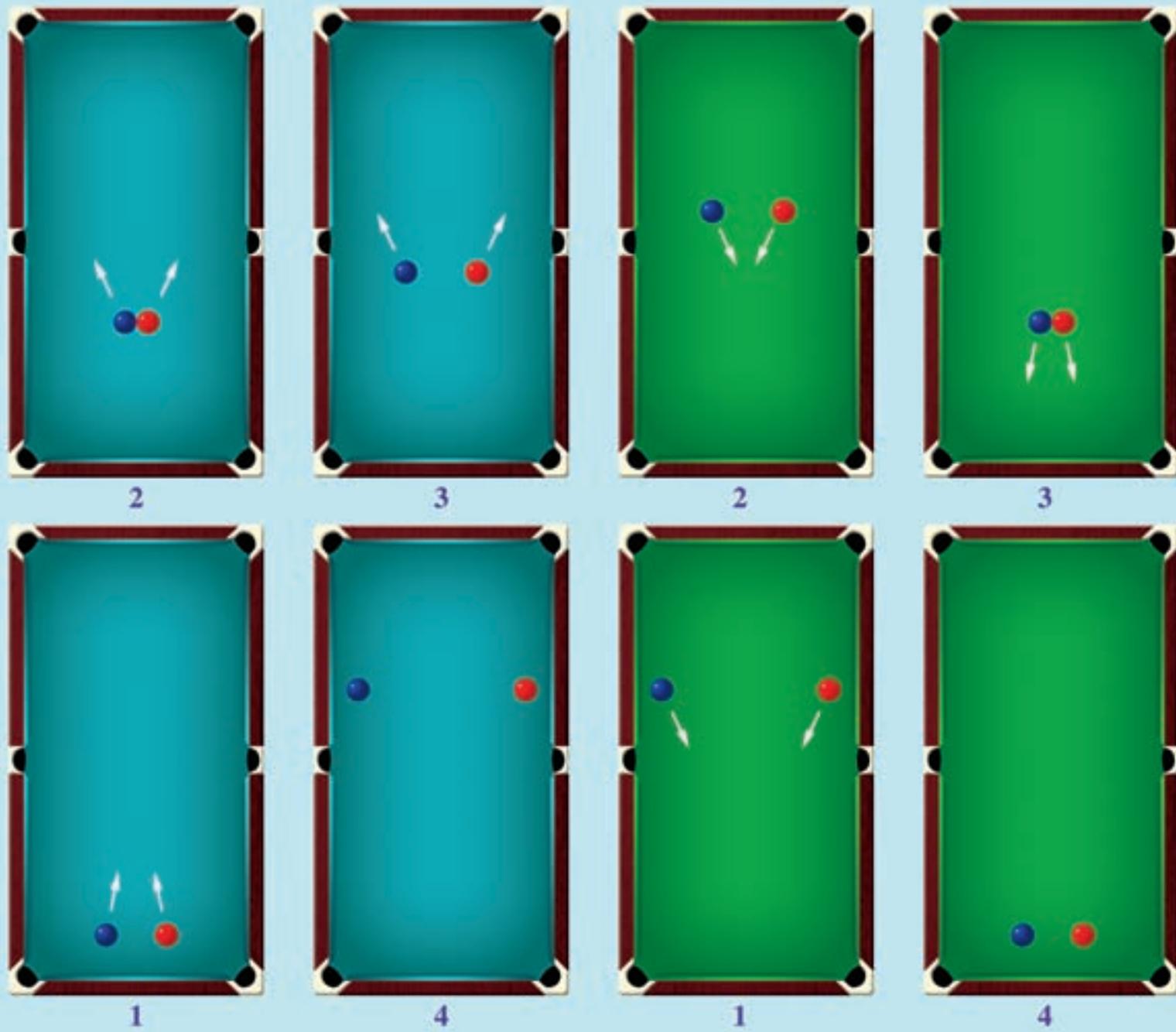
Two thousand years ago, Jesus pointed out that all those in need of help are one's neighbors. Extending the idea further, Baba declared: “All are one and so be alike to everyone.” Making it more explicit, he constantly advised: “Love all, serve all. Help ever, hurt never,” words that became the guiding light for all his followers. Can there be any simpler distillation of all the spiritual philosophies and the essence of all religions? Dr. Michael Nobel is the great-grandnephew of Alfred Nobel, who established the famous Nobel Prize. Dr. Nobel, who lives in Switzerland and was once the chairman of the Appeal of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Foundation, had this to say in a TV interview granted to Luigi Ferrante of Italy:

Sai Baba's teachings are very, very attractive for a man like myself. What we have seen after September 11th is this horrifying division between religions, and what I find particularly attractive about Sai Baba's teachings is that he doesn't care what religion you belong to. Instead he gives a simple Golden Rule: “Do what is good. Don't do what is bad. Love everyone.” To me this is absolutely wonderful especially in its simplicity... As far as I am concerned, it is not enough to make a lot of money. The world is still full, unfortunately, of people who are suffering and you must do something, as I have tried to in my own little way... I believe he (Sai Baba) is a very good man and the world would be a much better place if there were more like him.

In a sense, that says it all. There is an alternative to going over the edge like a bunch of lemmings. Sai Baba has not only explained what that alternative is but also shown how it could be made to work. The ball is now in humanity's court. Is it ready to pick it up? That really is the question before us and not the workability of the only alternative we have.

SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

We are almost at the end, and it is useful as well as interesting to consider in juxtaposition the evolution of the inanimate Universe on the one hand and that of living beings, particularly humans, on the other. The comparison is particularly interesting because the two evolutions are really in opposite directions!



The purpose of this schema is to illustrate time reversibility in the classical mechanics of Newton. On the left are shown four "snapshots" of two billiard balls colliding. Suppose a film is made of this collision and run backwards. Freezes from this reversed film would appear as on the right (where the billiard table is shown in a different color to stress that this corresponds to another scenario). Newton's Law says that both scenarios are permitted, i.e., if in both cases one starts with scenario (1) on either half of this page and allows the balls to move, they would end up as in (4). In short, where mechanics is concerned, both "forward" and "backward" scenarios are allowed, and this is what time reversibility means. The Universe, however, evolves only one way, i.e., forward in time.



This and the other illustrations below offer amplification of remarks made in the text about the differing natures of the evolution of the inert Universe on the one hand and living beings on the other. The inert Universe expands as required by the laws of gravitational physics. However, such expansion is purely mechanistic and ignores the subtleties of thermodynamics. When those are considered, expansion becomes related to entropy increase, which is an implied requirement of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.



Turning now to living beings, as explained in the text, they defy decay to thermodynamic equilibrium. They do this through functional order, the meaning of which is explained in the text. Functional order in living species increased during biological evolution and is highest in humans. The cheetah may run faster and the monkey may climb better. But no creature can do so many things with its fingers as humans do nor exhibit the body flexibility that a gymnast is able to.

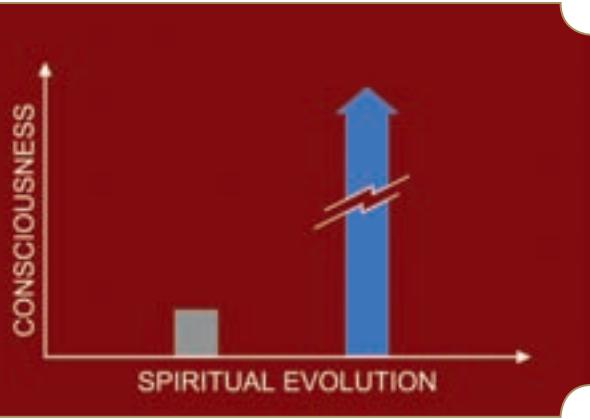
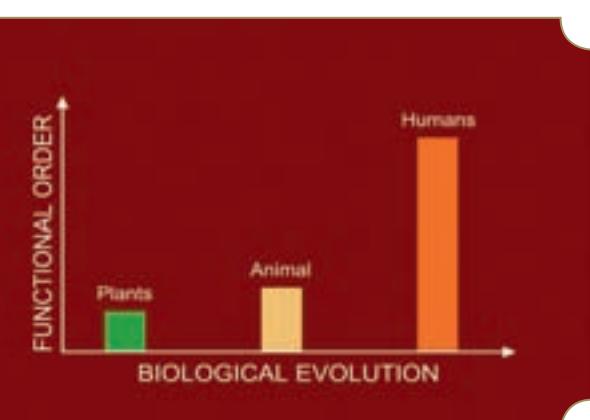
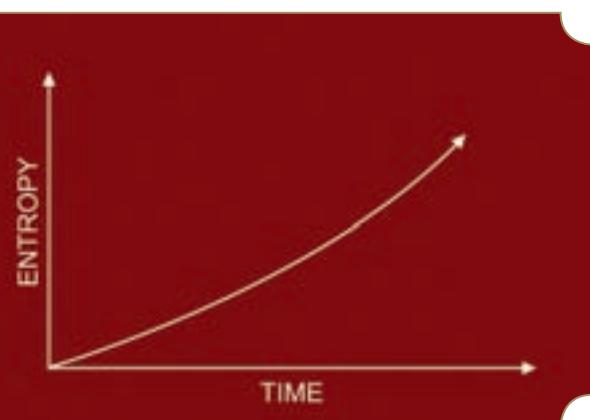


Humans are special not only in terms of functional order but also in terms of what they can understand. While a human being can be conscious of what is external, he/she can also look within. To start with, this looking within leads to the blossoming of the spirit of exploration, invention and creativity. But it does not end there, for humans can with effort realize who exactly they are, that is to say, understand that their ancestry goes all the way back to Pure Consciousness. Indeed, when humans are able to spiritually rise in this manner, they can separate from the Universe to return directly to their source.



If humans have an “escape hatch,” it would appear that even the Universe has such escape tunnels. Called traversable wormholes, their possible existence was first pointed out by cosmologist Kip Thorne. Thorne’s wormholes would allow travel from one Universe to another! It must be stressed that this is only an idea and that as yet there is no experimental evidence for it.





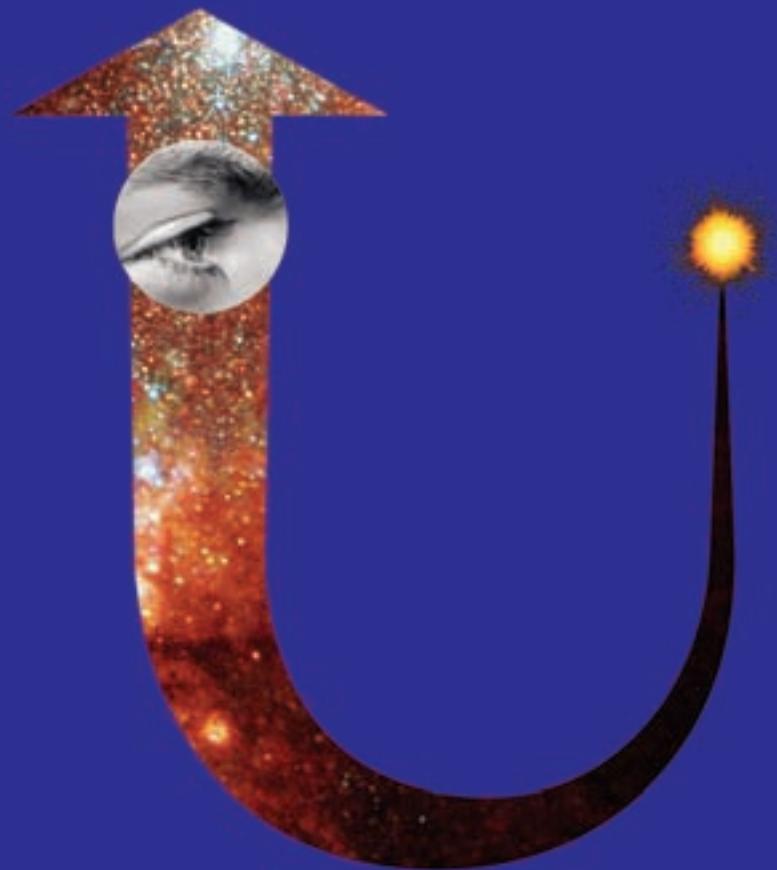
Let us begin with the evolution of the physical Universe, which, it is now accepted, was born in a remarkable event referred to as the Big Bang. The use of the term Big Bang to describe the birth of the Universe is most unfortunate because there was nothing like an explosion followed by chaos and debris when the Universe came into existence. Rather, the primordial entity from which emerged not only space and time but also all the forces and fields needed to create matter, represented a stage of very high order. As space expanded and time "flowed," more and more "elbow room" became available for matter to occupy, offering many choices for occupancy. That multiplicity of choices is, roughly speaking, what is called disorder in physics and what we would refer to as diversity (in a broad sense).

Now one highly significant fact that is hardly noticed is that the Universe always progresses from the present to the future. There is, in other words, an arrow of time that points to the future and not to the past. This is so much a matter of common experience for all of us that we cannot appreciate why physicists regard this as highly significant. The point is important because the question arises as to whether there exists any law of physics that requires an arrow of time. If one considers only motion as Newton did, the laws he famously formulated do not make any distinction between the future and the past. That statement might sound quite confusing, but a reference to the figure on colliding billiard balls on page 151 would remove the mystery. That said, in the world we live in, there is no reversibility of time. If, for example, a glass full of water placed on a table were to be knocked down, we know what would happen; the tumbler would fall on the floor, shatter to pieces and water would spread all over. There is no way we can ever expect the shattered glass and spilled water to all come back together to make a glass full of water and get back to the top of the table, even if we wait millions of years.

While we might wonder what exactly is the problem, for physicists the question was: "Why on earth does Nature do this?" Thanks to the work of many, the answer is now clear. Nature, it seems, has ordained that evolution would happen only one way. Now Nature's laws always have a basis; that being the case, what was the basis for the Universe to move from the present to the future? The Second Law of Thermodynamics and the epoch-making work of Ludwig Boltzmann done toward the end of the nineteenth century made that clear. The Universe evolved the way it did in order



EXPANDING UNIVERSE



The illustration here is based on a sketch made originally by Professor Wheeler of Princeton University to convey the idea that our Universe has been specially tuned to facilitate the emergence of life and conscious beings – this is the idea behind the anthropic principle referred to in the main chapter.

According to classical physics, physical reality exists on its own. However, when it came to the world of the atom, classical physics broke down completely, which was when quantum mechanics came into being. The new mechanics worked beautifully but seemed to suggest that unless actually observed, a physical system would be a state that is a mixture of many possibilities. Clearly, this was counterintuitive.

Einstein tried to prove that quantum mechanics was inadequate, but the experiment of Aspect showed that Einstein was incorrect. The signals were that the Universe is actually one whole, but our perception is fragmented! The anthropic principle does not address this issue, but Bohm and others did, as explained earlier.

to maximize disorder; that meant expansion of the Universe, which naturally happened with the passage of time. Boltzmann not only connected the Second Law of Thermodynamics to “disorder” but also introduced a quantity called entropy that could be used to measure it. Based on this, cosmologists declared that the Universe expands because that enables entropy to increase, which is what Nature always prefers.

All that is fine, but what has that got to do with the evolution of living beings? That question was first addressed in 1944 by Nobel Prize winner Erwin Schrödinger of Austria, then in Ireland as a refugee from the Nazi regime. Schrödinger explained in detail how a living being defies Nature’s normal rule and tries to remain ordered. The moment life becomes extinguished, the body begins disintegrating, following which the lifeless entity joins the rest of the Universe in contributing to the growth of entropy. The uniqueness of life, said Schrödinger, lies in its ability to defy decay, and as long as it does so, it does not fall in step with the evolution that goes on in the Universe.

The type of order that Schrödinger considered in a living entity is restricted to what might be called functional order, i.e., processes associated with movement of the living entity and various associated biological activities like breathing, nerve conduction, blood circulation, etc. There is, however, another type of order that exists in living beings that is connected with consciousness and awareness. Schrödinger recognized the existence of this type of order and noted that it was not only distinctly superior to functional order but also beyond description in terms of physics. That, of course, should not come as a surprise, since consciousness is transcendental in origin. Reference is being made to it here because humans can, by rising to the highest level of Consciousness, literally cut loose from the expanding Universe and reconnect to the primordial source from which the Universe originally came, namely, Pure Consciousness. In other words, though a part

of the physical Universe, the human form seems to have been Divinely ordained as an “escape hatch” via which the individual soul could escape to reconnect with its origin.

Cosmologists note that the physical nature of the Universe is determined by the numerical values of certain basic parameters referred to as fundamental constants. In principle, these parameters could have values different from those they have in our Universe, all of which, by the way, have been measured with great precision. Universes in which these parameters have different values would be very different from ours and might not support life. It has also been suggested that the values the fundamental constants have in our Universe appear to have been “tailored” to facilitate the emergence of biomolecules and life itself. This concept, referred to as the anthropic principle, is widely accepted by physicists.

We thus have a rather amazing picture. While according to science the birth of the Universe has no spiritual significance whatsoever, it is noteworthy that our Universe had the right combination of physical parameters to support the appearance and the subsequent evolution of life as well as consciousness. For physicists, this consciousness pertained mainly to cognition of the external world. Baba, however, constantly stressed its higher significance and the fact that life must be made into a journey of consciousness back to source, even as the salmon after spending its life in the ocean goes back to the stream where it was born. Here is how he expressed this idea on one occasion:

Space is one, but it appears to be held in diverse containers like the home, the pot, the building and the canvas. There is no truth in this divided existence. Rather, it is the one space that exists in all these “receptacles” which are varied shapes and forms, with distinct names attached to them, and different modes of behavior and use. So too, individual beings have different names and forms, peculiarities, specialties and behavior. But like the string that holds the beads, passing in and through each one, the Super Consciousness in all individuals is ONE. That is the Real Self. However, because of ignorance the Real Self is confused with the lower self which is nothing but the ego. It is only when this truth is realized that humans can release themselves from the hold of this transient world.

The Real Self or Super Consciousness (for which we have



The salmon is one of many living species that follow an amazing life cycle where life's journey ends where it starts. Found in the rivers of North America, salmon are born from eggs laid upstream in one of these rivers. The newborn fish lives where it was born for about a year, until one spring day thousands of salmon begin a journey down the river. Upon arriving in the Pacific Ocean, the salmon undergoes a remarkable change, thanks to genetic encoding that enables the fish to switch from being a freshwater fish to a saltwater fish. This transformation is required because, having arrived in the ocean, the salmon will now spend the next three to four years there.

Leaving the American coast, the salmon travels along a long arc that first takes it past the coast of Alaska and then toward Japan. When the time comes, the salmon begins its return journey, retracing the path it had traversed earlier. It is believed that the salmon has a remarkable magnetic navigating system that guides it on both the forward and return journey.

Arriving at the mouth of the river that was its original home, the salmon now makes an epic and heroic journey upstream, facing many obstacles on the way. At times, it even jumps as much as 6 feet (approximately 2 meters) to go over small waterfalls. Many salmon fail to reach their destination, but those that manage to return to the stream where they were born lay eggs to create the next generation and then die. The journey of the salmon, especially its return to the very place where it was born, is one of the great wonders of Nature.

used the term Pure/Absolute Consciousness) is abstract. However, in humans aspects of that Super Consciousness stand revealed when the person stays in communion with it. And the aspect most visible in Baba was that of Pure Love.

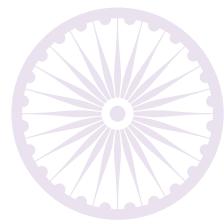
Acting like a powerful magnet, Baba’s Love drew large numbers from all over the world. Those who came might not have understood all that he said, but they seldom failed to be touched by his *Prema*. Once touched, they became his enthusiastic torchbearers. Charged and united in Love, they

have in numbers large and small, and for decades, been active in spreading his Love through selfless service in many parts of the world. Borrowing from Churchill, one could say that never before have so many been united in Love to do so much for so many.

There is no better way I can end this book than by offering a quote from Professor Grof that I find rather gratifying, since he, quite independently and both crisply as well as most eloquently, says almost exactly what Baba taught and strongly advocated. Here is the quote from Grof:

At a time when a combination of unbridled greed, malignant aggression, and existence of weapons of mass destruction threatens the survival of humanity and possibly life on this planet, we should seriously consider any avenue that offers some hope... A radical inner transformation and rise to a new level of consciousness might be the only real hope we have in the current global crisis brought on by the dominance of the Western mechanistic paradigm.

Now, isn't that amazing!



The picture above shows Baba with a small group of devotees on the river sand; that was back in the mid-1940s. On the right is a picture of the crowd that gathered from all over the world to greet Baba on his seventieth birthday in 1995. That is an example of the drawing power of Baba's Love. Incidentally, behind the hill can be seen the river where it all started.





Acknowledgment

Although I am the author of this book, it should be obvious that I would not have been able to write it without the active support generously extended by many in diverse ways. I must necessarily start with Gary Belz. During a long conversation I had with him shortly after Sai Baba left us, he not only strongly urged me to write the book but also offered, without a moment of hesitation, to take the responsibility for its design and publication. At this end, K. Chakravarthi, my good friend of many years (who also happens to be a member of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust), was equally enthusiastic about the great need for a book on Sri Sathya Sai Baba that took his message to the world at large. It was these encouragements that induced me to embark on what was clearly a challenging but most satisfying task.

Baba's life was a rich tapestry, and although I was familiar with aspects of it, the project entailed much research and gathering of resource material. More than anything else, I needed archival photographs spanning about 60 years, which was not easy because there is currently no official archive devoted to Sathya Sai Baba. Fortunately, the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, which is in the process of establishing such an archive, allowed me full access to pictures in its substantial collection. This greatly simplified my work, and I am deeply grateful to the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust for this monumental support. In addition, several people, in particular R. Padmanabhan, Keki Mistry, Berzis Pithawala and Janet Bicker, readily came forward to share rare pictures from their personal collections. In the context of resource material, I must make a special mention of R. Kondal Rao, who helped me obtain the statistics relating to the decline of skeletal fluorosis and rheumatic arthritis following Baba's drinking water project in Anantapur District in the mid-1990s. Thanks are also due to N. Ramani, who arranged access to a collection of pictures relating to the British period (the copyrights for which have all expired). The pictures relating to the Gujarat earthquake and the tsunami of 2004 are a part of the collection associated with disaster relief that Baba provided. *The Week*, a magazine published by the Malayala Manorama group of companies, generously shared from its collection a few valuable photographs relating to the crowds that came to pay homage to Baba when he was lying in state. Several copyrighted pictures have also been used, which are acknowledged separately. In addition, we

have also used a few pictures from the public domain under the fair use category.

Where artwork was involved, I inevitably leaned on Kamlesh, who has helped me in this area with many of my books. Kamlesh not only offered several creative ideas and contributed a beautiful sketch of the village where Sai Baba was born but also was instrumental in arranging for Suri Ramanna to paint illustrations of the early life of Baba and for B. Gujarappa to create many of the theme illustrations that precede every chapter and the Preface. Gujarappa also provided a nice sketch of the proverbial five blind men exploring an elephant.

Behind every book there is an invisible editor. In this respect, I have been most fortunate to have the assistance of Vijay Desai, who helped to chisel the raw text into elegant prose so that it flows smoothly.

Three others need special mention, namely, Sai Prakash, Prasanna Kumar and Ajish T. Mohan, all of whom have worked with me on so many of my projects. In this particular case, Sai Prakash helped me collect pictures from various sources, did the theme pictures for the Preface, Chapters 2 and 3 and, with the assistance of Vinod Chakravarthi, also produced the DVD that accompanies this book. As for Prasanna and Ajish, they together conceptualized the layout while Ajish tirelessly prepared all the graphics appearing in the book. The theme picture for Chapter 6 was initiated by Prasanna and completed by Ajish. In addition, they meticulously did all the checking that had to be performed in the pre-press stage. There are, as always happens in big projects, many others not mentioned who worked constantly and silently behind the scenes taking care of numerous details. Without them, the book would not have become a reality.

At the production end, it was a pleasure working with Impress Communications, who provided the detailed book design and page layout. Particular thanks go to Michelle Franks for not only patiently tolerating the slightly chaotic sequence in which I sent material for design and layout but also for offering many elegant ideas for enhancing artistic appeal. Pragati Offset not only carried out the printing with great efficiency but was also most cooperative in helping us meet a critical deadline.

G. Venkataraman.

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