

...Sing Hosanna to the King of Kings...

Dear Readers,

Sai Ram, today some of you may be reminiscing about the 'All-Night Bhajans' held by the National Youth Pilgrimage last night and awaiting to go and listen to Hari Subramanian in his workshops on the nine forms of devotion around UK, whilst many of you may also be spending time in reflection upon this special and significant day in the Christian calendar - Palm Sunday - the beginning of Holy Week. This is the week when the Son of God lived and died by his ideals of forgiveness... Can we do this? As Christ was being crucified, He said 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'... Here was a human being with nails being driven into His body and He was asking God to forgive those doing it - do we forgive our fellow human beings when we are faced with what I would call in comparison 'trivia'?

I pray that you all have a happy and Holy Easter and are able to spend time in contemplation whilst enjoying your Hot Cross Buns and Easter Eggs...

Love & Light

Shobhna Patel, UK Chair

Region 1 Awareness Abounds!

The regular monthly Regional activity of chanting 1008 Gayatri Mantras continues and is open for all devotees to participate in.

The Regional 'Service Awareness' programme has begun in two Centres and in two Groups. In this, the Regional Service team provides understanding of the service activities currently taking place in the Region and outlines those planned for the future and for individual Centre/Group devotees.

The first Regional Office Bearers' meeting for 2006 was held in March and was well attended by all Centres and Groups. Keith Sabesan, Chair Region 1

'If Music be the Food of Love'... Then Taste the Nectar!

It's available at the following exciting workshops by **Hari Subramanian**, inspiring musician from the USA. On the theme of 'Nine Forms of Devotion': To be held in Regions 1, 2 & 3 on Friday 14th April, Regions 4 & 5 on Saturday 15th April and Regions 6 & 7 on Sunday 16th April.

(Contact your Regional Chair for details.)

Editor's Reminder:

The surplus unanswered questions from the NOBC 'Q&A' session are laid out on a separate, additional, attached, page in this month's 'Love and Light'. The National Wing Co-ordinators and relevant Council members have provided the answers to them.

Region 2 Donation of 'Liquid Love'

On the 5th of March, the Youth in Region 2 joined together for a very special and worthwhile project. Keeping in line with the Regional Youth Wing Work Plan for 2006, and under the guidance of the Regional Youth Co-ordinator, Anila Kumar Modi, the youth joined forces to work with a committed approach and a

shared vision, to each donate two pints of their blood towards saving a life.

By joining the National Blood Service at a pre-arranged donation venue and working alongside the Regional Service Wing, each youth spent around 45 minutes of their time to help many in the UK, ensuring that their effort in this short span of time, would benefit at least one other special soul and perhaps thereby help in securing a life! To think that all it took was just 45 minutes and two pints of Blood to do something so amazing! Satesh Melwani, Chair Region 2

Region 3

Interfaith Harmony in Manor Park

In celebration of the 80th year of the advent of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Manor Park Centre hosted a seminar entitled 'Living in Love and Harmony'. The day allowed the Centre's many local - and some not so local friends to explore 'Living in Love and Harmony' at the global, local community and personal level. An additional motivation for organising the day was to celebrate and thank our many friends for the years of help, service, advice, friendship and fellowship they had facilitated in partnership with us. It was pleasing to see the many friends that participated in the day, these included attendance from St Michael's Church, St Stephen's Catholic Church, Newham Association of Faiths, The Interfaith Forum, Westminster Interfaith, Aston-Mansfield Charity, Richard House (a children's Hospice), The Church of Scientology, The Unification Church and many more individuals, making it a public event.

We began with an icebreaker that certainly helped to lighten the mood, where each (Cont'd on next page)

Please use your initiative to distribute this monthly newsletter as widely as possible to all devotees and interested parties.

participant was asked to select a fruit which best described them and say why. This brought forth an array of exhilarating spiritual responses and helped to endear people to each other. Following this, we had a wonderful explanation by the Centre Chair, Navin Raval, about the works undertaken by the Sri Sathya Sai regionally Organisation locally, internationally. Additionally, Bala Balaraman (former National Chair) explained how Manor Park Centre was established and how links had been forged with all the participants seated. He thanked them all and praised the fact that even today these bonds are strong, growing and moving forward for the betterment of individuals, the local community and the world at large.

Following this, we plunged into discussion groups concerning the theme, with much enthusiastic feedback arising from them. Such was the atmosphere of the day that all participants felt relaxed and wanted to stay for more, which they did, as the day ended with food – for not only the stomach but also the mind. While this was happening, many of our friends took the opportunity to take in the carefully crafted exhibition on Sathya Sai Baba and His inspiring works worldwide.

Though there were many very good comments on the evening, the comment of Patrick Handley, the advisor on interfaith matters to the Bishop of Brentwood, summed it all up when he said, "The hard work and careful organisation which has been put into the workshop session was obvious from the quality of the plenary feedback which we enjoyed towards the end of the afternoon. The joy, which we felt at the fruit game, epitomised the value of being actively engaged with people who are striving for goodness. The food was marvellous. May you all prosper as we share the same path to a wonderful destiny. The example you offer is all the more needed in today's world of materialism where the power factions, the news and the media are offering the opposite of what the Sai Baba organisation stands for."

Hatfield Centre Says 'No' to Drugs!

Suresh Nesaratnam gave a talk on 'Drug Awareness' at the Hatfield Sai Centre, on 11th March 2006. His presentation explored the murky world of drugs, including why people take them, and the harm they bring about, physically and mentally, to the user, and to society as a whole. A 'Drug Box' containing simulations of drugs (costing £543, paid for by the Home Office, through their Community Champions' Fund) was used to show the audience what the various drugs look like. Suresh also showed drug paraphernalia (such as improvised pipes, a drug dealer's scales, etc.) kindly loaned by the Drugs Intelligence Officer of the Milton Keynes Drug Squad. Suresh, who attends the Sai Centre Milton Keynes, included relevant teachings from

Swami and from Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in his presentation. Drugs are certainly not a new problem.

The talk covered the signs of drug use, and gave information on where to get help with treatment and rehabilitation. Steps to follow in an emergency (overdose) situation were also outlined.

Illegal drug use leads to immense misery for everyone associated with it, and awareness of the dangers of drugs can do much to pre-empt such situations. It is particularly important that parents be made drugaware, so that they can guide their children appropriately.

If any Group or Centre is interested in receiving Suresh's talk, please contact him at: s.ll esaratnam@open.ac.uk Kishor Kumar, Chair Region 3

Region 6 ROBC

R6 ROBC/Satsang was held in Reading on Maha Shivaratri, Sunday February 26th. It started with a short tuning in to our personal Shiva aspect. Then the NOBC PowerPoint presentation of Region 6's activities in 2005 was shown.

Prabodh Mistry gave us a talk and film about the Sathya Sai Schools, and many ideas were suggested about how best we can support them.

This was followed by the Wing presentations and a Service PowerPoint presentation on some of the 2005 projects undertaken was shown. Bharat Handa, the National Service Co-ordinator shared his vision of the various service activities to be encouraged and built upon in 2006.

The Southampton Group chanted Shivaratri Vedas, especially learned for the day, then devotional songs were sung by all and the meeting ended with a contemplative meditation to the sounds of Tibetan gongs and bowls inspiring us into putting our Beloved Swami's Teachings into action.

Philippa Malcomson, Chair Region 6

Youth

National Youth Pilgrimage 2006

For regularly unfolding information, go to: www.saiyouth.orq.uk

Diary Dates

UKCC / National Wing Meetings: Quarterly Region 1: 14th April: joint Regions 1, 2 & 3 'Bhajan Workshop' at Compton School, Summers Lane, Finchley, London N12 OQG at 1:00pm.

22nd April: 'Spiritual Awareness' day.

29th April: SSEHV Module 1 Training.

1st May: Regional 'Easwaramma Day' Celebration.

BISSE: 15th April: Values Alive Event, Margaret Harris, Shrewsbury,

17th – 20th April: SSEHV Crèche to support event in Leicester.



SPECIAL FEATURE:

Reflections upon Jesus Christ and the Resurrection at the Heart of the Easter Mystery Drawn from Swami's Discourses:

Jesus Christ:

'We are true Christians only when we live according to the teachings of Christ and practice them in daily life. Even if we follow two teachings of his, that would be enough. Christ said, "All life is one, my dear son! Be alike to everyone!" If we truly follow this, it would be enough to fulfill our destiny. When he was on the cross and overcome with agony, an unseen Voice said from Heaven, "Death is the dress of life". The body is the dress, which the Divine Spirit puts on. Therefore, we should not weep when the body is worn out or falls or is injured. Death is an event that is the very nature of the body...' SSS Vol. XI

'The Great Teachers belong to mankind. It is wrong to believe that Jesus belongs only to the Christians and that Christmas is a Holy Festival for the West only. To accept one of them (the Great Teachers) as one's own and discard the rest, as belonging to others, is a sign of pettiness. Christ, Rama, and Krishna – they are for all men everywhere.' SSS Vol. VIII

Jesus tried to teach everyone the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Tradition-minded and egoistic men considered Jesus a false prophet and they tried by every means to thwart his mission. Jesus however did not waver. Faced with opposition, he continued to be an example of living truth, and to purify society. Many disciples followed Jesus but throughout history, it has been the experience of Rama, Krishna, Jesus and Mohammed that disciples, however close, are seldom fully dedicated. Most are only parttime devotees. Jesus had twelve disciples, most of whom had faith in him and lived his teachings. But Judas yielded to greed. He betrayed his Master for a mere thirty coins. He could not find joy in life after this treachery. His mind gave him no peace. He had to seek refuge in suicide.' SSS Vol. XI

Resurrection:

'What is the resurrection, really? It is the revelation of the divinity inherent in man. That is the result of contact with God-head; that can come only after years of contrition, which serves to remove the evil from the heart of man.' SSS Vol. III

Swami was asked the following questions:

Q: 'Did the physical body of Jesus recover in the tomb!' A: 'No – the physical body. No spirit materialized body. The physical.'

Q: 'Then did he journey to the East, continuing his mission to Kashmir!'

A: 'Yes – and he also travelled to Calcutta and Malaysia.' Q: 'Then is it the body of Jesus which was buried in the Rozebal Shrine at Sringar in Kashmir!'

A: 'Yes.' The Embodiment of Love P. 40

People talk of the sacrifice of Christ as evidenced by his crucifixion... Let us pay attention to the sacrifice that Jesus made while free, out of his own volition. He sacrificed his happiness, prosperity, comfort, safety and position; he braved the enmity of the powerful. He refused to yield or compromise. He renounced the ego, which is the toughest thing to get rid of. Honour him for these. He willingly sacrificed the desires with which the body torments man; this is sacrifice greater than the sacrifice of the body under duress. SSS Vol. VIII

Happy Sikh New Year!

The 14th April each year is 'Baisakhi' – the Sikh New Year. Sikhism is a 'revealed' religion – the revelation being received by Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539 AD). In 1500 he mysteriously disappeared while washing in a river. Three days later he appeared saying, 'Since there is neither Hindu nor Muslim, whose path shall I follow? I will follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Muslim, the path I follow is God's.' Whilst missing for those three days, Guru Nanak had been transported to the Court of God where he was given Nectar, 'Amrit', to drink and was told: 'This is the cup of the adoration of God's name. Drink it. I am with you. I bless you and raise you up. Whoever remembers you will enjoy my favour. Go, rejoice in my name and teach others to do so also. Let this be your calling.'

Guru Nanak once visited an important Sufi centre at Multan in the Middle East and camped outside. To show that the town was already completely full of holy men, the Dervishes sent Guru Nanak a bowl absolutely brimful of milk. Guru Nanak floated a jasmine flower on the milk, which did not overflow!

The Sufis were subtly and politely saying there was no room for Guru Nanak. Yet he recognised their language and showed that he could be a beautiful and fragrant embellishment to their fullness without upsetting the situation at all!

Rosemary Perry, National Vice-Chair

NOBC 2006

Answers to the remaining unanswered questions from the afternoon 'Question & Answer' Session

SSE/BISSE/SATHYA SAI SCHOOLS

(Questions 1, 2, 3a, 4 & 6 answered by Sharmila Parikh, SE National Co-ordinator and Questions 3b and 5 answered by Ravi Manchanda, Sathya Sai Schools)

Q1:

Can we have a modified SSE that is more inclusive with fewer rules?

A:

"The ideal of the Bal Vikas (Sai Spiritual Education) programme is to raise a generation of boys and girls who have a clean and clear conscience. The actual syllabus is not so important as the creation of an atmosphere where noble habits and ideals can grow and fructify." – Sai Baba (Bal Vikas Teachers Training Camp, 6/6/1978). The word Education comes from Latin root word "Educare" which means "to elicit" or "to draw out". Thus, the main aim of Sai Spiritual Education is to develop and nurture the spiritual and moral values in the child that help unfold its inherent "Divinity" and let it blossom in all directions to the best of its ability. As everything in life, there needs to be guidance provided. It is only when this guidance is adhered to that God U and I can DANCE (GUIDANCE) towards the discovery of our divinity within.

When we drive on the road, we need to follow the road signs, signals and have a discipline, there will not only be chaos but it cause potentially be dangerous. Similarly some rules (such as regular attendance, punctuality, life application etc) are provided for the benefit of our teachers, children and parents and once we comply and conform to these we can achieve maximum benefit for the outcome of the programme.

Q2:

It's very worrying to see people acting as teachers when they do not have elementary knowledge of child psychology.

A:

Every teacher would have had access to basic, intermediate and advanced training within UK. Whilst everyone is enabled and encouraged to attend the training provided it is the sole responsibility of the teachers and centre/group/regional office bearers to ensure that the opportunity is not lost. On the other hand many of our teachers are mothers...with this in mind they have first hand experience of 'children'. If a teacher is not working to the ethos and principles of Sai Baba and our Organisation at any time this needs to be brought to the attention of our senior office bearers.

Q3:

I want to set up a weekend school in my area. Who can help me do this?

- a) With sincere appreciation for your enthusiasm...please may we kindly suggest that the first step you take is to contact the National SSE Coordinator and/or your Regional SSE Coordinator we would both be delighted to hear from you very soon.
- b) There are set guidelines for setting up a Sathya Sai school (whether weekend or fulltime). These guidelines have been circulated to the Regional Chairs. If in doubt, contact me. (Answered by Ravi Manchanda, Sathya Sai Schools)

Q4:

'LOTUSS' – Is there any more information on this, other than what we received in July 2005?

A:

LOTUSS – standing for Life's Opportunity To Understanding Self & Spirituality provided the opportunity for all teachers and members of the youth to contribute towards an initial proposal. The proposal has been shared with all Regional SSE Coordinators and is available for viewing and comments. We are awaiting key feedback from UK chair in order to take into consideration National and International directives prior to enhancing the final outcome. At present this particular age group should be studying 'Summer Showers in Brindavan 1990' which is available from our Sathya Sai Bookshop. It is worth noting that LOTUSS has been based on the above text. We sincerely pray with Swami's infinite grace that we shall be in a position to share this prior to the next academic year.

Q5:

Why have 'Sathya Sai Schools' not been included in the Work Programme for 2006?

A:

They are included in the Service Wing section of the 2006 Work Programme. However they need to be separately mentioned.

Q6:

Can we please 'quickly' link some of the SSE side in the local neighbourhood so we have more dedicated and regular teachers operating from one bigger group rather than 3 – 5 regular ones trying to operate at each Centre.

These regular ones will enjoy working alongside other regular ones. All operating from one bigger 'linked' centre for SSE. Harrow west is ready to accept another SSE side and their regular teachers, making the Harrow West SSE side still more efficient with more pupils and at least two regular teachers per class. So we can aim to have each class with 'regular pupils and teachers only' – similar to non-SSE schools.

'Quality rather than quantity'

A:

Thank you for your idea provided above. This would definitely enable us to work towards Unity, Swami, I am sure, would be pleased and it would benefit a great number of children, our future torchbearers for the Organisation in UK. There are however, practical aspects which need to be taken into consideration, the venue, the number of students, teachers with varying backgrounds, knowledge, experience, methodology of working, finance, policies for admissions, Centre Chairs being enthused to work together to form what seems to be a Regional SSE School. I would be delighted to assist with this, kindly contact your Regional Chair & SSE Coordinator to enable this process. It is to be noted that this has happened successfully in the form of Regional SSE Schools in a couple of regions now.

SERVICE

(All questions answered by Bharat Handa, the National Service Co-ordinator)
Q1:

Are there any plans for UK Medical Camps? (Not all who wish to help have the ability to go abroad!)

What arrangements are made for follow-ups on patients who are treated in Medical Camps abroad?

A:

We cannot hold Medical Camps in the UK in the same way as those being held abroad. As part of the Service Wing work programme, each region is encouraged to hold regular FREE WALK-IN HEALTH AWARENESS CLINICS. The aim of these clinics is to raise early awareness of conditions such as High Blood Pressure, Diabetes, and Glaucoma and educate about Healthy Eating & Living via having a healthy Heart, Oral Hygiene etc. The SSSSO UK has also been actively working in conjunction with The Anthony Nolan Trust since February 2000 in promoting the need for Bone Marrow Donors from all communities.

<u>Resource Register</u>: Whether you are a healthcare professional or possess other allied skills, we need you to come on board. You can obtain more information from your local Centre Chair or Centre Service Co-ordinator or Regional Chair or Regional Service Co-ordinator, and add your name to the Resource Register.

All overseas medical camps organised by the SSSSO UK are conducted at the request of the SSSSO of that country which then makes arrangements with a local team of doctors or hospitals to carry out any follow-ups that are required. The team in the UK maintains regular contact with the host country after the camp.

Q2:

As a 'Nation-Building Project' when is the service Organisation going to support the Sai Schools at a practical level not just by raising awareness? Just mentioning them and their achievements alone will not sustain the projects.

A:

Each one of us can support the Sathya Sai Schools in a variety of ways and as part of the Service Wing programme 2006, we have proposed as follows:

- Collecting old mobile phones and used printer cartridges whereby a recycling company will pay monies to the schools;
- Each family to collect school vouchers issued by supermarkets such as J.Sainsbury and Tesco, which can be redeemed, by the schools for equipment.

In addition, each region with the support of devotees can assist in the purchase of items from a Resource list and also by sponsoring a place for a child to be educated at a school. More details can be obtained from the Sathya Sai Schools Coordinator.

Q3:

The 'Eye to Sai Project' - We would appreciate more details please.

A:

This is a very worthy project based on Swami's directions for all of us to practice 'Ceiling on Desires' and make a difference to someone's life by (in this case) restoring the gift of sight. Initially, Swami blessed this project for a 2 years' duration but Swami has since asked us to continue with this project. Some 2000 cataract operations have already been done as of November 2005.

A revised leaflet is currently being produced and it will be distributed in the next 4/5 weeks via the Centres in each region.

SPIRITUAL

(Answers by Kiran Patel, National Spiritual Co-ordinator)

O1

Is segregation at meetings like NOBC a tradition or a spiritual requirement of the organisation? If so, how does it square with the 8th World Conference vision of respect for other religions and societies?

A

Response given by Sri Sathya Sai Baba to this question:

"Some members from Western countries do not seem to favour the rule of the Sathya Sai Organisation, which lays down that, at Bhajans and at other meetings, men devotees should sit apart from women devotees. The rule should be applicable to all members – whether they are Indians or non-Indians, in India or elsewhere. It is part of the spiritual discipline that is necessary for devotees". (Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 11, Page 46)

Q2:

Please could we have further clarification of what is meant by 'Sai Oriented Centres'?

The essence of Sai Oriented Centres – is 'Sai'. The aim is to open Centres/Groups to the wider community (both those who know Sai and newcomers) so that everyone can feel comfortable when attending centres/groups and thus benefit from the Mission of Sai. This doesn't mean that we should be going out and advertising Sathya Sai Baba to the wider community.

As Baba has said "In order to bring Bhagawan's message to the public, poetry and literary gimmicks are not necessary. But your practice of Swami's teachings in your life will be the best message for the public." (Sai Baba's discourse to American devotees – 27th July 2003)

The 'Sai Oriented Centres' initiative reminds everyone that the basis of the organisation is spiritual. It is meant to present a consistent image across all Centres and Groups.

O3:

'Study Circles' – How can we inspire more devotees to participate in 'Study Circle'? (As only a few are interested.)

We need to ensure topics chosen for study circles are interesting, preferably chosen so that they benefit daily living. The attendance will be small if complex philosophical topics are chosen for discussion. Participation could be maximised further if part of the normal GDS (Group Devotional Singing) session is used as a study circle to include all the devotees – a detailed session could be held separately after this session for those interested; this way, everyone present can take away a useful message. Participation could also be improved if different people are asked to lead a topic rather than restricting this to the same individuals every time.

YOUTH

(The one remaining question on this subject is answered by Shitu Chudasama, National Youth Co-ordinator)

0.

What do you mean by members of the opposite sex not 'mixing'? I am unclear myself and find it difficult to explain to others as well. Should we have separate Study Circles etc? Where should one draw the line?

A:

Swami has for several years stressed that boys and girls should not mix at Sai Organisation events. Youth should always bear in mind that they are members of a spiritual and not a social organisation. The aim of the Organisation is to "help man recognise the inherent divinity within him".

Therefore youth should be disciplined enough not to use Sai gatherings as a meeting place for their future partner, but a place to learn and grow spiritually. Due to numbers and geography it is not always possible to conduct separate study circles, discretion and discipline should be exercised if youth are carrying out mixed gender study circles. Youth should always bear in mind Swami's omnipresence and conduct themselves accordingly.

"These gatherings have to be taken seriously and a sincere desire to know

more must enthuse your every moment. They are not to be used for promoting personal contacts and social mixing." - Sathya Sai Baba, May 1979

"Swami does not like boys mixing with girls." - Sathya Sai Baba, Nov 2001

"In today's world, it is important that young people understand the nature of love. Many mix with members of the opposite sex, calling them boy friend and girlfriend. If you really love each other you must get married and not continue living as friends. Young people should learn what is truth, what is love, what is God, and what is the relationship between the mind and the world. Fear sin and uphold morality in society. Radiate human values and ensure unity in thought, word and deed." - Sathya Sai Baba, 17th July 1997

OTHER (Q1 & 2b answered by Rosemary Perry and Q2a answered by Satesh Melwani, Chair R2) Q1:

When will the guidelines from the 8th World conference, which are being put together by Dr Goldstein, be available? OR is the summary given by Ishver Patel what we can now make available to the Region? If so, can this be distributed as a Power Point summary?

A:

As the Questioner may know by now, the transcripts of the 8th World Conference talks were sent to Regional Chairs for circulation throughout their Regions by Shobhna Patel our UK Chair, on March 21st 2006.

Q2:

How can one Region exchange skills and ideas to help promote activities in another Region? E.g. are speakers, master of ceremonies, plays and groups etc. willing to travel?

A:

- a) Regions have only been set up for administrative purposes and all activities are undertaken in unison as Sathya Sai Service Organisation without any distinction. Similarly skills and resources in one part of UK are available for use by other parts regardless of distance. Swami's mission is not constrained by boundaries; therefore each region must share the skills and resources with other regions. Having said this, we should be willing to travel any part of UK to serve Swami.
- b) In Region 6, about 10 years ago, we developed a rather unique way of solving the problem that a vast and disparate Region presents. We developed 'Inter Group Forums'. The purpose was to bring nearby Centres and Groups together, hosted by one of them, in order to learn new Devotional Songs, share Service Activity ideas, explore significant themes through workshops and Study Circles, and not least of all to get to know each other better! Eventually, we managed to create steppingstones that circled around the Region twice! Each time we brought together about 5 reasonably local Centres/Groups. An adaptation of this idea, straddling Regional 'boundaries', would work well in the spirit of the question, I think.

NB: See Editor's note on next page:

EDITOR'S NOTE: I hope you have enjoyed reading these questions and answers. If you would like further clarification on any of the questions in this supplement, by all means please feel free to contact the Council Members who have answered these questions via your Centre/Group Chair to your Regional Chair.