

# I AM

## A talk by Al Drucker

The occasion was the all-European Sai Conference held in Hamburg, Germany in the Spring of 1989. It was the Pentecost, the day in Christianity when the Holy Spirit descended into the disciples of Jesus, who had gathered together on that ancient Jewish holiday fifty days after Passover, to pray together in gratitude and remembrance of their lord. As the disciples recollected the miracle of Jesus' presence among them, they became radiant with the Spirit of Divinity and were transformed into the apostles of Christ. Now they were empowered by the Spirit within them to embark on a sacred mission of spreading the message of the Prince of Peace to all the peoples of the world.

On this particular Pentecostal holiday in Hamburg, two thousand years later, several thousand devotees from all over Europe came together in Sai Baba's name and invoked the spirit of Baba to come and be among them. There was not a picture of Baba or other spiritual decorations visible in the hall; only a simple jyothi, a flame burning on the stage to remind us of the miracle of Baba's presence on Earth and the light of Spirit within us that he has come to reveal to all mankind. I had been asked to speak on spirituality. I spoke spontaneously without notes, and found myself weaving together the spirit of the Pentecost with Baba's profound wisdom teachings and some of my own experiences from the eight years spent living in Sai Baba's ashram. Now, many years later, I still find myself deeply moved by the talk that emerged. I hope you, dear reader, will be able to savor the magic of Swami's presence that so powerfully permeated that hall in Hamburg and inspired these words:

### Invocation

May the Blessings of God rest upon you.

May His Peace abide with you.

May His Presence illuminate your heart.

Now and forever more.

### **Sai Ram dear Brothers and Sisters:**

I started off this morning feeling very peaceful and empty inside. Then I took a little walk and came across a plaza that's only a few steps from here. It's just a little grass area with a large rectangular rock in the middle of it. That rock, taller than I can touch with my hand outstretched, is obviously a quarried rock that's been put there; but it is rough and unworked and full of drill holes. It has the appearance of the walls of a dungeon. And there it sits in this little park with nothing else around it but the grass and the birds, and the tall modern buildings encompassing it. I felt a strange sensation being there, and then I noticed a little placard just to the side of the rock, with the inscription:

## LET US NEVER FORGET

During the Nazi time, thousands of our Hamburg citizens were herded together here, and sent to their death.

So, for these unfortunate ones, one night they were comfortable in their homes, secure with their families, and filled with some semblance of dignity and hope. Then the next morning, there were sirens and shouts and police dogs, and they were torn away from their families and packed off in cattle cars to their death.

Having woken up in a rather serene state, without anything particular on my mind, not even being too concerned about my talk here this morning, I was quite open to the impact of this memory, which is enshrined in that little park. It affected me very deeply and I carry that feeling with me even now. And so, I want to talk to you about a most important spiritual practice, which has to do with preparing oneself, moment to moment, to be ready for death. We always think of life, but Swami teaches us to always remember death. He gave us these three directions:

Remember God. Forget the World. Never fear Death.

### **One Hundred Percent**

One time Swami called in the students studying for their masters in Business Administration. He told them, "No shares. I want you to remember... no shares."

"Swami, we promise we won't play in the stock market and get involved with any share holdings," one of them replied.

"No, no, not that," Swami said, "No shares... no sharing... do not share God with anything or anyone. You must be one hundred percent with God... only with God."

And then he told a number of stories from the Indian epics, one of them of Draupadi who was the wife of the Pandavas. She was being forcibly dragged into the court and disgraced in front of all the elders. A villainous rogue who had grabbed her by the hair was now pulling her sari off. With one hand she tried to hold on to her sari and with the other she tried to fend off her attacker. She cried out to her husbands, the Pandavas, for help, but the husbands felt powerless to do anything. She cried out to the elders assembled there to come to their senses and stop this terrible thing, but no one lifted a finger to help her. In her distress she called out to Krishna for help. But even the Lord did not respond. Finally, in total resignation she let go of her sari and surrendered herself body and soul to the Lord, to do with as he pleased. Immediately, Krishna showered his grace on her. Her sari became longer and longer without end and her honor was preserved. In this story, Swami's message is:

Surrender fully to God. Turn towards him and he will turn towards you and take care of you totally. Rely on him one hundred per cent... no shares.

Now, we are spending three days in this conference, meeting together in Swami's name. Everywhere there are reminders of Sai, and perhaps by the time this conference is over we will be filled with his loving presence and gain a little of the feeling that he is everywhere, including inside of us.

But then we will go home to our worldly life, we will do our work, we will go about our own business. Perhaps we have been making a habit of spending a little time each day in spiritual practice and getting together to chant bhajans once a week. 'That', we say to ourselves, 'is God's time; the rest is our time.'

But this is not what Swami means by 'no shares'. He said, "There is no separate God-life and worldly-life. Do not separate your day into God's time and your time. You must make all your work God's work, all your time God's time. No shares. One hundred percent God, all day, every day and everywhere."

Does that mean that we should neglect our worldly work? No, of course not. He says, "Do your duty in the world, engage yourself in your professions, take care of your family responsibilities, but perform all these activities in the name of God and for God's sake. Offer them all to God. That is the meaning of no shares." It is also what is meant by the great saying in the Bible... "Love God with *all* your heart, with *all* your strength and with *all* your mind." Subsume all your limited worldly loves in the one all-consuming love for God.

Now, why is all this so important? It is important because at the moment of death nothing must be allowed to distract us from a total absorption in God. At that moment of death it must not be one percent or five percent or ten percent, but one hundred percent God. All our spiritual practices have no other purpose but to prepare us for that last moment when we can end in joy. That, Swami says, is the real meaning of 'enjoy'. It is to make the end one of joy, no matter what the circumstances, even under the horrid conditions brought to mind by that memory preserved in the little park.

Nothing can disturb our equanimity when we are one hundred percent immersed in God. Nothing of world remains to disturb us. Fear no longer holds any meaning, for everything will have become God for us. Death will have lost its sting. We will be merged in the ocean of eternal bliss and these kinds of dark events will be just like bad dreams of the night which have no hold on us. That is the promise contained in that little phrase, 'no shares'.

## **Education in Human Values**

How do we start this practice? Swami says, "The only way to immortality is through the removal of immorality." The very act of purifying our lives evokes the Divinity to reveal itself in our lives, and not only we but the whole world benefits thereby. Then these kinds of bad dreams become less and less likely to happen again. That is why education in human values is so very important. Really the most important thing that we as devotees can do in the world today is to spread the message of love and peace and righteous living.

If there is to be unity and peace in the world it will happen when there is the removal of immorality, which means when human beings live like real, whole human beings not like fractional pseudo-human beings. Now, Swami tells us, human life is not filled with peace but is broken into little pieces. There is no unity anywhere. Swami tells a story of how to bring peace and wholeness back into human existence and unity into the world.

There is a little boy who found his way into his father's study. The little boy is not permitted in there normally because there are some very valuable papers inside, and the door is kept closed. But one day the door happened to be ajar and the window was also open a little, so that a bit of a breeze was blowing through the room. The boy saw the open door and went inside. And just then a very important paper was carried by the breeze off the desk and wafted down onto the floor. It was a very old and very rare map of the world, a very beautiful map with many colors, each representing a different country.

The boy saw this beautiful piece of paper. He picked it up and looked at it, then he bent it this way and that, making a little boat out of it and then a hat and then a house. Oh, it was so nice to play with! But the ancient map could not stand so much bending and soon it was in two pieces and then in four and then in eight and then in lots and lots of pieces comprising many different colors. The little boy was just delighted with this new turn of events... now he had more things to play with, and so in no time at all, the whole world was in pieces.

When the father came in, he saw that his boy had been playing with the world and that he had managed to tear the whole world into pieces. The father was very much disturbed. He said, "Son, look at what you've done. You've torn the world into pieces."

But, after all, it was his son and he was just a little boy and he was really quite innocent. He just happened to wander in there and start playing; so the father couldn't really be too angry with him. But, nevertheless, the world was now in pieces, and so the father decided to teach the boy an important lesson. He said, "Son, you shouldn't have torn the world into pieces. Here, I will give you some tape and you put it all back together again. When you paste it back together, daddy will feel better and you will also feel better."

Try as he would, the little boy didn't know how to put the world back together again. There were just too many pieces and he just couldn't understand how they were meant to fit together.

But then a small gust of wind came and one of the pieces happened to be blown onto its backside. There on the back of the paper he saw a human eye. Well, that was surprising. He turned another piece over and on its backside he found a hand. And then on another piece he saw a nose, and on another a foot, and then the top of a head, and a shoulder, and pretty soon he had all the pieces over on their back and saw all the different parts of a human being.

Well, even a little boy knows what a human being looks like. Now he had a puzzle that he could solve. When he used the tape to hold all the pieces together he found that he now had a beautiful image of a complete human being. Then, when he turned the pasted together pieces over, to his delight he discovered that the whole world was back together again.

So, the whole world is in pieces and no one knows how to put it back together again. But put the human being back together and the whole world comes together again automatically. That is really what human values education is all about. And that is something we must foster and spread in the world. Let each put himself together and

the world will come together. We don't have to go out and try to change the world, getting involved in all kinds of causes. Just allow the inner man to become whole again and one by one the message of unity will spread, and the whole world will come together again.

## **From the Human to the Divine**

I was scheduled to speak to you on spirituality, but as yet, I have not really defined what it is. Spirituality is very, very simple, according to Swami. Spirituality is nothing more than being established in your own true nature. It is being home in your true Self. And for that no spiritual practice is required. Sugar does not need to do any spiritual practice to be sweet. Sweetness is its unchanging nature. We always are who we are. We can never change being ourselves, which is the eternal sweetness of pure bliss. The only spiritual practice required is to remove the veil that keeps us from knowing who we really are.

We have to give up this mistaken notion that we are limited individuals separate from God, experiencing pleasures and miseries in the world. That is a false notion, based on ignorance. First, Swami reminds us that we are human and not animal. We can control our impulses and channel our desires. We can live selfless and sacred lives. But then we discover an even higher truth. We are not really limited individuals. We are the Divinity itself, in all its splendor and glory. Our essential nature is divine. When the clouds of illusion are dispelled the truth shines forth. When we remove the false, what is true remains. To remove the false is all we ever need to do. It is all we can ever hope to do.

## **Karma**

As beings we have lived so many lives, and there are yet countless lives to come. It is like a huge warehouse which is filled with the consequences of our actions in previous lives; and all this karma is still waiting to fructify in future lives. We have only taken out one little push-cart-full from this huge warehouse, and that little cart-load is our present life. The warehouse remains full to the brim with future lives. Where they will be lived, in what circumstances, we do not know.

But now, we are oblivious to all that. We care only about this present life. We think that this life is so very important. But, in how many lives past have we had families, have we had possessions, name and fame, worldly achievements and ambitions? Where are they all now? How many more lives are necessary before we wake up to the futility of all these endless rounds of births and deaths? Swami says, "How often do you need to read the same newspaper over and over again? Today's newspaper is tomorrow's waste paper."

What is really important is not this life but that huge warehouse of future lives to come. We must find a way to burn down that warehouse. We must fry those seeds so that they can never sprout. We must make an all-out effort to live this life as if it is our last life. The *avatar* has come to show us the way home. He said that when Rama finished his career and walked into the river, the citizens of Ayodha followed him. When this *avatar*

finishes his career tens of thousands will be swept out with him. Have we booked our reservations for that final journey home?

All depends on our attitude. As we think so it is. Swami says, “Dust if you think, dust you are. God if you think, God you are. Think God! Be God!” We create the world with our own thoughts. If we think that we are separate individuals and limit the unbounded divinity which we truly are, by shutting it into a cage of narrow-minded selfishness, then our reality protests against this limitation with pain and suffering. In this life itself we must remove the cage of limitation which has manifested itself as this false ego and personality.

When Swami addresses us in his discourses he doesn't start his talks with 'Ladies and Gentlemen' or 'Citizens of Germany' or 'Middle-class Housewives'. When he addresses us, he calls us 'Embodiments of the One Immortal Self', 'Embodiments of Pure, Selfless Love', 'Embodiments of Eternal Bliss'. He knows better than we who we really are. He says we are the Divinity itself. If he says so, then it must be so. We may not feel that we are pure, selfless, divine love, that we are unmitigated joy, that we are the unbounded Self. Instead we may feel that we are small and limited and filled with bad qualities and misery. That may be our perception, but it is a false view of our essential nature. It is something artificial that has come onto our true nature and hidden it from our view. So, we must set aside these false views and go wholly on faith. We must trust in Swami. If he says our nature is joy and love, that we are divine, then so we are.

Now, the question is: Are we ready to make such a leap of faith? Are we ready to believe in him rather than in our false self-concepts? Are we ready to first jump in and then find out how to swim? Such one hundred percent faith is what he asks of us. If we follow him and let him drive our chariot then no matter what happens to this outer 'us', we will be heading on the godward path home. For this, faith is all important.

## **The Exodus from Egypt**

Today is the Pentecost, forty days after Easter, when, according to the Christian Bible, the Holy Spirit descended. In the Hebrew Bible this would be the time when the people were wandering in the desert, undergoing great difficulties, as the Lord gave them one trial after another to test their faith and their spiritual strength, until finally they were ready to receive the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Let us recall that story.

For 430 years they were slaves in Egypt. And then it was time for them to be freed. God sent Moses to bring them out of Egypt. But God said, “To reveal my glory, I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will not let the people go.” And so Egypt had to suffer all those plagues until finally the Pharaoh let the people go. They left so quickly that they didn't have time to take any food with them except for a few loaves of unleavened dough, and so for their provisions they were totally dependent on the bounty of the Lord.

They followed the angel of the Lord in the form of a column of smoke, who took them out into the desert and then to the banks of the Red Sea. Here they stopped, unable to go further. It was at this point that God again induced the Pharaoh to harden his heart. The Pharaoh marshalled his whole army of chariot warriors and decided to

pursue the Israelites into the desert and destroy them. One morning the people looked up towards the horizon and saw a huge army arrayed in full battle dress descending upon them from the west, like death itself. Trapped, the children of Israel were caught between the devil and the deep sea. They set up a howl and lamented to Moses, "Did you bring us out of Egypt so that we would die here?" Moses answered, "Why do you have so little faith? When the Lord has brought you this far, do you think he will abandon you now?"

I think you know the rest of the story, of how the sea split to let them through and then closed in again and drowned the army that was pursuing them. And so they were saved. But then they had to wander in the desert without water or food, except what was provided by the Lord in the daily *manna* which came in with the morning dew, and the water which miraculously came out of rocks cleft by Moses with his sacred staff. For forty years they wandered, and they learned to become totally dependent for their survival and their spiritual food as well, on the bounty of the Lord. It required a total letting go to His grace... one hundred percent trust.

It is really a Swami story... an archetypal surrender to divine providence... a complete faith in God, without any shares. It is what he wants of us.

## **Lost In the Storm**

My airplane experience is of the same vein.

I was flying a small plane and suddenly found myself fighting for my life when I got caught in a very powerful winter storm. It was a foolish trip to begin with. I had no good reason for being there. My passenger was slumped in the corner, either unconscious or dead, I didn't know. During all those hours I was busy beyond the point of exhaustion just trying to keep the airplane flying and to stay alive in that awful turbulence. I called on the radio, "Mayday! Mayday! Please help. If anyone can hear me please help me!" But there was no answer.

We were over an uninhabited wilderness area in the mountains of Northern Nevada. There were no radio stations anywhere near. Finally the fuel gauge was bouncing on empty, the airplane itself was coming apart, and I had no energy left to fight. I just let go of the controls, knowing full well that in no time at all in such a maelstrom, the airplane might be flipped onto its back. For the first time in thirty-five years I turned to God for help.

When I was a little boy I thought very often of God, but then, when we came to America, science became my god, and I forgot all about God. But now, after all those years, I cried out to God, "O Lord! Please come and help me! I don't want to die!" But then I let go of even that hope and added, "Let thy will be done." It was a complete resignation to the divine will. Suddenly, this wonderful voice came over the radio, "Aircraft in distress, can you hear me?" And from that point on this angel of mercy guided me around the worst cells of the storm and brought me safely into an airport 50 miles away on the other side of the mountains.

The airport was open for only about 10 or 15 minutes. And during these few minutes a snow plough had cleared off the runway just in time for this little airplane to come

flying out of the clouds and land. After four hours of battling the elements, I was exhausted. Now, I thought, at last the danger was over. But then, almost immediately after we touched down the storm hit again in a swirl of snow. Suddenly I had my hands full again trying to keep us from crashing. A torrent of wind had picked up one wing and was about to flip us on our back. I quickly managed to get the power back on and turn the airplane into the wind so that it could ride out the storm. Just as it had gotten around... plop... plop... plop... the engine quit as the last drop of fuel was used up. But now we were safe. At that moment, the passenger woke up and said, "What happened?" I knew everything would be OK.

The control tower man told me, "I don't know how you got here, but you can thank God you're alive." "A ground controller guided me here," I replied. "He had a radar and saw me in trouble and vectored me here." And the tower-man said, "Are you kidding? That's an Indian reservation out there... a wilderness area. For two hundred miles there is nothing. No ground stations, no controllers, no radars."

That ended the conversation. The adventure was over... but a new one had been launched... undoubtedly, the greatest adventure of all... the adventure of waking up to the presence of God in your life.

## **The Play of Life and Death**

In this way, through the experiences he sends, we slowly begin to learn how he functions within us. It seems whenever there is a crisis he waits until the last moment to step in. He takes us to the precipice and even down into the depths. And then, at the last moment, he raises us up to the sky. And soon it's down the roller-coaster again. But then, just when we think we know a little bit about him and how he works, he dashes all our knowing and we are plunged back into confusion and wondering what's going on.

Like this he plays with us, and slowly but surely, all our expectations and hopes, all our concepts, all our knowings, all our self-importance, and with them, the ego that claims ownership of all these wisps of the mind, dissolve into nothingness, and just a sweet unpredictability and loving presence remains.

I've been close to death a number of times, but I must not have been ready to end in joy, for I am still standing here. The last time was just a few months ago. Swami had told me, "This is a very serious illness. You must go into the hospital and think only of Swami." And then he sent me back to America to get medical treatment. A Sai brother from America, Don Heath, whom I had known for many years and who happened to be visiting Prashanti Nilayam at that time, also got very sick and also ended up in the hospital. Lying there side-by-side we decided that if we had to die, how nice it would be if we could die in this holy place.

I've been the funeral director at Prashanti Nilayam eight or nine times when Westerners died there. It was my job to look after the last rites. I would arrange for twenty *rupees* of firewood and organize a procession of devotees to take the body down to the sand-banks of the Chitravarthi River. We would have a little service and then light the fire, and in a few minutes the body rejoined the five elements.



So, I said to Don, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could save twenty *rupees* between us, if we both go at the same time?" He said, "Let us see what the Lord wishes." A few days later he was dead, whereas this body, as you see, is still standing here, talking.

A few months after returning to America, I visited Esalen Institute, the beautiful center on the Big sur coast in California where I had previously taught and lived for fourteen years. Everyone there was so very loving to me. They asked me to come back and stay for a while and get healed there. And so I returned and lived there for a couple of months. One day, when I was coming into the lodge, I recognized a man whom I had last seen in Prashanti Nilayam, a doctor from Australia. He was talking to someone, and I went over to him and said, "Graham, what are you doing here?"

He turned to look at me and his face turned ashen. Overwhelmed with astonishment, he said, "Wow, is that really you AI? Are you alive?"

"Well, I don't think I'm a ghost," I replied.

Without saying another word he ran up to his car to get his camera and immediately came back to take a picture of me. For a moment I was wondering if he had lost his mind, but then he explained, "Just last month I attended your memorial service in Sydney. So many people came and there was beautiful singing. The mother of the Australian boy you looked after at Prashanti Nilyam gave a heart-warming talk and several others spoke in memory of you. We made a video to circulate to the other centers. I will send you a copy."

So it looks like they got me mixed up with Don. Now, I'll have to disappoint all those nice people. You see it was all just a play of Swami's. I think no one enjoys the Lord's plays as much as he does. We should be happy knowing that with all these little dramas and play-lives that we take so seriously, we are giving some enjoyment to the Lord.

## **The Birth of the Human Being, the Death of the Lord**

My favorite book of Swami's is the *Bhagavata Vahini*. It is a marvellous storybook. It is filled with the play of the Lord, relating the wonderful happenings in the life of Krishna. In this book, Swami has rewritten the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the great Indian scripture. He presents it somewhat differently from the original.

In Swami's book, it starts out with the birth of a child. That child is Parikshith, the only heir to the Pandava throne. The Pandavas, as you know, of whom the most well-known was Arjuna, represent the side of good, whereas their cousins, the Kauravas, represent the side of evil. These two sides fought a war of total annihilation, which is the *Mahabharata*, immortalized in the great Indian epic of that name.

Swami said that the *Mahabharata* represents the inner war being waged between the forces of good and evil inside our own hearts. We cannot win this war on our own. We must turn towards the Lord. Then he will come and take hold of the reins of our chariot, just as he did for Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*. That is our only hope of winning this inner war.

In the story, at the end of the war, the Pandavas were victorious, but the war exacted a terrible price. In a dastardly deed on the last night of the war, one of the last surviving fighters on the Kaurava side broke into the Pandava camp at night and

killed all the Pandava children while they were sleeping. The Pandavas were devastated. Their only hope for continuing the royal succession was the child that was growing in the womb of the widowed wife of Arjuna's son. But the same warrior who killed the other children resolved to destroy this last vestige of the Pandava line, by sending an arrow into the womb of the helpless woman.

The royal foetus in the womb, saw that terrible missile coming towards it, spitting sparks of fury and destruction. But then he saw a beautiful blue boy with a lovely smile on his face, whirling a discus and hurling it at the arrow. The lethal missile broke into a thousand pieces. The babe in the womb was saved. Immediately afterwards the beautiful blue boy disappeared.

After the child was born, all he could think of was that lovely blue boy who had saved his life, and he sought for him everywhere to see that beautiful face again. "Who was he?" he asked himself. "Why did he come to save me?" In every face he saw he wondered, "Is this him?" Because he was always searching for something so intensely, they called him, Parikshith, which means the one who seeks.

There also, close to the beginning of the book, we find an account of the death of Krishna. The Lord had finished his work on earth and left his body. So, the beginning of the book, as Swami tells the story, has the birth of a human child and the departure of the Lord. Then the whole book is filled with the wonderful stories of the life of Krishna, mostly the wonderful play of the young Krishna. These stories are related by a great sage to Parikshith, after Parikshith had become the emperor of the realm. They are told under unusual circumstances. The Lord had left the earth and the Kali Yuga, the age of materialism and unrighteousness had begun. That dark age took hold of everyone, including even King Parikshith.

One day the king was hunting in the forest and got himself separated from his party. He was very thirsty and saw a little hut nearby, in which a sage was sitting in meditation. Parikshith did not realize that this was a sage immersed in trance; he thought the man was just asleep. Parikshith tried to awaken him but he could not bring the sage out of his trance. Parikshith was desperate for some water but he could not find any and he could not get this sleeping person to tell him where it was. So in frustration he left, but before leaving, he picked up the dead skin of a snake and draped it around the sage's neck as a parting gesture of disgust.

The sage's young son discovered his father sitting with this snake skin on his shoulders. The lad became so furious seeing this insult to his father, that he cursed the man who had perpetrated this outrage to die seven days later from a snake-bite. When the father came out of his trance and heard what the son had done, he said, "Son, you shouldn't have done that. He didn't mean any harm. I cannot now set aside your curse, but you made a great mistake. He is a good king and he doesn't deserve this ignoble end. Go and tell him what happened. Let him prepare himself and turn this curse into a blessing, by using the chance to elevate himself spiritually."

And so, Parikshith finds out that he is under a sentence of death, to die in seven days. But for him this news is a tremendous relief. His burden of worldly life has now been taken from him. He takes off his crown and his royal robes and goes down to the banks of the Ganges to immerse himself in contemplation on the Lord. Sages

come and sit with him and then the great God-realized saint, Suka, comes and tells the king the stories of the divine play of the Lord. And that is what fills the *Bhagavata*, the inspiring stories of the Lord related to a man who is under a sentence of death.

## **Making This Life Our Last Life**

Swami says that we are all under a sentence of death. How are we spending these last days that we have left? Do we know when that last day will be? Those thousands who were herded together just a few steps from here, did they have any idea the day before, that they would be sent off to their death the next morning? When I went flying for the joy of it, did I have any idea that within minutes I would be in mortal danger? Are we ready this very second to end this life joyfully, if the god of death comes calling?

If we are immersed in the Lord, one hundred percent, body and soul, then it makes no difference when death chooses to come. Then we are always ready, and we don't have to be concerned about that huge warehouse filled with future lives. It will be reduced to ashes.

Swami once came up to me on the verandah at the temple and asked me, "Do you think that I'm fat?" Swami has a little belly. I replied to him, "No, Swamiji, I think you are beautiful." "But what about this pumpkin?" he said, patting his belly. I replied, "Swami, it's just the folds of your gown." He said, "Not gown, pumpkin!" And then he whispered in my ear, "It is Prema Sai. He is growing inside." We know that Swami is coming in another incarnation. In the same way, we are also pregnant with our next incarnation, which even now, is growing within us.

Whether we consider ourselves as males or females, Swami says that in the spiritual context we are all females. And we are all heavy with our next birth. Swami once said that the whole world can be compared to a play put on in a girl's college. On stage they will play the part of gents or ladies, of young or old, of saints or sinners, of beggars or kings. The dress will be different, the make-up will be different, the bodies will look different, but all these varied parts are just being played by the same class of girl students. There is one man. He is the director of the play. All the rest are ladies.

And so it is with the one Lord who is the director of this world play, The feminine principle is this whole creation, and like the dream world and its characters, it can but do the bidding of the dreamer. As long as we are caught up in the illusion we are players in the Lord's play. That great drama features the wheel of birth and death and rebirth.

So, where will our next birth be? Will it be with Prema Sai, the final incarnation of the Sai avatar, who will usher in the golden age? It may not be. We may be reborn in another era. Or we may be reborn in the ghettos of Calcutta or in a world ravaged by destruction. We don't know. Therefore, we must make every effort to evoke the Lord's grace, and make this birth the last birth, this life the last life. We must live with the conviction that when we finish this time, we will be finished for good.

The way to do that is to be established one-hundred percent in Sai at the last moment. And we get there by being established one-hundred percent in Sai at this moment. And

at every moment from now on. It is constantly reaffirming Swami's prescription: "Let go of the world, hold on to God and never fear death."

"My grace comes like a flash," he says. "When you least expect I act. You must always be ready."

## **Let Go, Let God**

Once I complained to Swami, "Swamiji, the spiritual path is so difficult."

"No," he said, "it is very easy, easier than anything else in the world." He took his handkerchief and grasped it in his hand very tightly.

He said, "You see, this is difficult. But spiritual path is not this. Spiritual path is very easy." He just opened his hand and the handkerchief fell down to the ground. "You see how easy it is. Letting go is easy. That is all there is to it."

So when we reach the point when we want nothing else but God and to fill ourselves only with God, then we are on the spiritual path. And that is not really so difficult. All we have to do is just let go of everything else.

One time he came up to me on the verandah and asked, "Drunker, what do you want?" I laughed at his twist of my name and I answered his question, "Swamiji, I'm very content. I'm satisfied."

"You mean you want nothing?" he asked, with some astonishment in his voice.

I said, "Swamiji, all I want is God!"

"That's not NOTHING," he said quite forcefully, "That's EVERYTHING... that's health, wealth, freedom, liberation, bliss..." And he continued on with a long list of good things. Then he added, "Nothing is there!" pointing to the world outside the ashram, "Everything is here! Everything!" and he pointed to my heart.

So, it is all already here within us, one hundred percent; nothing more needs to be given. Only the veil of ignorance must be removed. The room may have been dark for thousands of years, but the sunlight will always be waiting. Pull away the curtain and instantly the darkness will be replaced by a dazzling flood of light.

## **The Death of the Human Being, the Birth of the Lord**

Now, let us get back to Swami's *Bhagavata Vahini*:

When the book is almost finished, on the very last pages, Suka tells the story of the birth of Krishna. So, this book starts with the birth of a human child who seeks everywhere to find his savior. He cannot forget the powerful vision he had of that beautiful boy who saved his life.

After the royal child is born he discovers that the remarkable uterine brother who had come and saved him in the womb was none other than Lord Krishna. But soon thereafter the Lord left the earth. The child became a man, a king, involved in the affairs of the world. With the onset of Kali, his spiritual roots become more and more dried up. Only his name, Parikshith, remained to remind him of his indefatigable quest as an infant to find the Lord, who was so close to him in the womb.

But then the king came under a sentence of death. Now, after all these years, he returns to his quest. Again he looks for the Lord, but this time he must find Him inside. So, he fills his heart with the sweet stories of the miracles and play of the Lord. And finally, at the end of the book, Swami tells the story of the birth of the Lord in human form as Krishna.

Krishna was born in a dungeon cell, the eighth child of Devaki and Vasudeva. The mother and father were chained to the wall of this dark dungeon cell. It had been prophesied that their eighth child would kill the evil king, Kamsa. Kamsa threw them into the dungeon so that each child as it was born could be taken by him and destroyed.

You can almost get a sense of what those poor souls must have felt like, with each of their children and all their hopes shattered, if you go out to that rock a little distance from here and see those holes in it, which could have held the chains that shackled Krishna's parents to the dungeon wall.

Suddenly, their candle went out; they were plunged into darkness. Then this beautiful golden light filled their cell and they made out the image of Narayana, the Lord, with his four hands, one hand raised in blessing. The Lord said to them, "In a moment I will be born as your child. Do not have any fear. There is no force on the earth or in the whole cosmos that can harm me in any way. The mission for which I have come will succeed."

### **Sai Baba's Declaration**

These are also the very words that Swami spoke in a very special talk that he gave at the end of the summer course at Ooty, in 1976. When the summer course was over, Swami had left, and therefore, everyone else had also pretty much left. Only the college boys were still there, waiting for their buses, and a few of us were still around. Suddenly, Swami came back. He told us to gather in very close around him. It was a very secretive and hush-hush thing; he had the loudspeakers and outside lights turned off. Then for two hours he told us many wonderful stories of himself as a young boy. They were every bit as magical as the stories of the young Krishna that fill the pages of the Bhagavatham.

Towards the end of his talk, Swami related how one day he had thrown down his school books and walked out of the school assembly to commence his *avataric* mission. When he related this episode it was a very dramatic moment in the hall at Ooty. Before there had been much good humor and familiarity, but now he became very stern and serious. We had been sitting very close all around him for two hours, but suddenly Swami stepped back and felt very distant. It looked like he was poised to walk out on us also. We all caught our breaths.

Just at that moment, Swami waved his hand and created a most powerful object. It had a round black onyx base and on it was a silver map of India. Surrounding the map were eighteen jewels that all glistened in the dark, apparently from some mysterious inner light. He told us that on this map of India were inscribed 100 Sanskrit verses giving the whole history of this *avatar* from the time it had taken birth to the time when it

leaves its body. It was the first time he had ever announced when he was going to leave his body.

He said, "All the great works that will be accomplished by this *avatar* and all the leaders who have already been chosen from among my students are recorded here in these verses." Now there was a big hubbub in the room. Everyone wanted to see this object more closely and read the writing on it.

Baba took it around for all to see and touch. Spiritually it was a very powerful object and aesthetically it was very beautiful, but the writing was too small for anyone to decipher. So Swami was asked if he would read what it said, and he answered. "I will not tell the future. Be patient. Everything will be revealed to you in due time."

Then he said, "Why do you hanker after this object when you have its creator?" And he took that thing and threw it into the corner of a table, where it landed among some garlands. Then he said, "You have me and I have you. You are all sacred souls and you all have your roles to play in the mission for which this avatar has come. Know that there is no force on earth or in the cosmos which can delay this mission by even one instant. What I have willed will take place. In the years to come I will appear in many manifestations of my form. Wherever you are, there I will be."

Of course, Swami was not just speaking to those students. He was speaking to all of us... we who are the fortunate souls whom he has gathered in. You know, it continues to be a great wonder to me how after so many years since Swami announced his *avataric* mission, and so many years since the Sai phenomenon has become widely-known in the world, that not only is Swami still quite easily accessible, but there are so very few who have actually made the commitment to become devotees and live his teachings.

## **Who Is a Devotee?**

Swami said that his devotees are very, very rare. He said that among ten people you can find one truly good person. And among ten good people you will find one who has some deep feelings for God. We all know lots of good people, but how many of them have a love for God? Not just going to church on Sunday but a real yearning for the transcendental... for going beyond? And he says that among those who love God one out of ten will yearn for a direct experience, a deep communion with God. And of ten who have such a deep yearning, one will be ready to let go totally, to renounce everything he previously held dear and surrender himself completely to God, filling himself with God alone. "That is my devotee, and he is very dear to me," Swami said.

As yet, there are not very many such committed souls, but Swami will see to it that we all reach that blessed state. One time, in the Poornachandra auditorium on a festival day, when there were fifteen to twenty thousand inside, and tens of thousands outside, Swami looked around and said, "I cannot see even one devotee here. Not one!"

He told us, "When Swami comes around you all have your hands folded, looking very sacred. But, this is just like the lions and tigers and leopards in the circus ring when the ringmaster comes in with his whip. Then everyone sits on their haunches and displays their best behavior. But, as soon as the ringmaster leaves, they start growling and snarling at each other."

“I am not interested in such so-called devotees,” he said. “I have not come to gather in devotees of this Sai Baba form. I want you to be devotees of Sai’s teachings,” he said. “Even if out of all these Sathya Sai educational institutions only a small handful of real devotees comes forth, I will be able to complete my mission. Just a few genuine devotees is enough. I’m always interested only in quality, never in quantity.” And then he explained what he meant by a devotee.

A devotee is one who sees God wherever he looks. Not just when he turns towards this Sai Baba form, but wherever the devotee looks he sees only Sai and fills himself with that omnipresent Sai. That is the true devotee he is looking for and that is where he will surely take us, if we follow him implicitly.

Swami has told the story a number of times of Jesus walking with his disciples on a road in the Galilee.

As Jesus and his followers walked along, Peter was up ahead. He came upon the remains of a dead dog. It had been lying there on the road for some time, decomposing in the hot sun. Now even the vultures and crows had left it, and all that remained was a rotting mass of sinews and bones and decomposed flesh. Peter went back and tried to guide Jesus’ party around it by taking a detour across a field, so that the master would not have to see this unpleasant sight.

But Jesus went straight to the carcass, looked down at it and said, “Look at those beautiful white teeth. How perfect they are. How much love and care this animal must have received during its life in order to have teeth like that.”

So Jesus saw the one thing, in that otherwise revolting scene, that was beautiful, that was a reflection of love. That is how we must be, Swami says. There will always be something good and something beautiful even in the worst situation. Even when there is a horrible stench, love will waft its subtle fragrance and can be recognized by those who are attuned to it. Seeing good everywhere is seeing God everywhere. We must live like that in the world. We must fill ourselves with that goodness. Then by themselves, the chains will fall off us and we will be free.

## **Letting Go of the Illusion of Separation**

Close to the end of the *Bhagavata Vahini*, Baba tells the story of the birth of Krishna.

The divine child emerged from the womb in a halo of light. Immediately, it turned to the father and said, “Now, quickly take me to the home of Yashoda across the river. There a little girl has just been born. Bring that little girl baby here and put her in the cradle in my place.” At that moment, the shackles fell off the parents, the prison doors opened, the guards outside fell into a deep sleep, and the father stepped out of the prison into the dark of the night, to take the little divine child across the river.

Swami beautifully describes all the auspicious signs and portents that Vasudeva encounters along the way. It was as if all of nature had received the good news that the Lord of the universe had been born and it put on its finest dress to welcome him. Vasudeva exchanged Krishna with the little girl in Yashoda’s sleeping arms, and brought her back to the dungeon cell. Then he became overwhelmed with emotions and he broke down in tears.

There is more about this little girl in the traditional *Bhagavata*, relating what happened to her when the wicked Kamsa discovers that the eighth child has been born. But Swami pays no further attention to her in his book. All the stories he relates have only to do with the Lord. In the final chapter Swami writes only of the baby Krishna. Then who was that little girl? That was the yoga maya, the illusory power of the Lord. Whenever the Lord is born, this power of illusion is born with him. But Swami teaches us to focus totally on the Lord and pay no attention to the illusion.

So it was with King Parikshith.

As he heard this story being told of the divine birth, Parikshith cried out, "Krishna! Krishna! Krishna!" A snake had just bitten him on the toe and was seen slithering away. Then Suka, the great saint, said to all the sages gathered there, "The king has reached the Lord. May all humanity be immersed in eternal bliss."

So, the book ends with the death of the human being and the birth of the Lord. The human is just a transitional stage. Parikshith's long quest and human journey were over. The Lord had been born and the human shackles had fallen off. Parikshith became one with Krishna.

This is not just a story from the Indian scriptures. This is our own story. We are born, we seek the Lord but he is nowhere to be found. We seek the happiness that we know is our birthright, but we look for it in the world and it eludes us. Then, one blessed day, he reveals himself to us. But soon, he takes us out into the desert and we wander about, lost.

We become totally dependent on him for everything, for our food, for our shelter, for our work, for our health, for our direction, for our very lives. He gives us what we need to sustain these bodies and minds, he grants us experiences to develop our faith, and he gives us teachings and stories to develop our love. Then finally, he fills us with himself. We become 100% immersed in the Lord. No shares. Then we end in joy. We drop off this skin and reach home.

That is spirituality. It is nothing more than removing what is unreal and unnatural... letting go of the illusion of a separate self and being established in pure love. At that point we are home, we are one with the Lord, we are one with the blessed Self.

### **Dear Brothers and Sisters:**

Let us be thankful and celebrate. The *avatar* has come. He is here so that we may awaken and realize who we truly are. And who are we? Let us never forget. We are divine love. Love, love, love is our unchanging reality.

**Om Tat Sat**