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SAI SANDESH

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Love All. Serve All.

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SWAMI'S BIRTHDAY SPECIAL ISSUE

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God's Actions are Mysterious, but Always Beneficial

By The Sai Sandesh Team

"Love my uncertainty," says Baba. These three profound words are a gospel to those who have understood and experienced their significance. Baba has a mysterious way of bringing out the best outcome from what appear to be life's most catastrophic and painful events.

Recently, when I was in Puttaparthi I heard the story of a woman who was desperately trying to give a letter to Baba. The letter was an outpouring of her deepest feelings, for she had sought relief from many troubling circumstances and had requested Baba to save her little daughter who was to undergo a dangerous heart operation. When Baba came her way, He took the letter from her outstretched hands, crumpled it, and threw it back at her without even looking at it.

The woman was very disappointed that Baba did not even read her letter but was consoled by others that she was at least fortunate enough to receive something that had touched Baba's divine hand. She was in for a surprise, though. When she visited the hospital after this incidence a strange miracle happened. The very doctors who had diagnosed her daughter's condition were discussing a mind-boggling miracle. A series of tests revealed that the child was absolutely normal. There was no need for surgery, since her heart ailment had been cured mysteriously, nay, miraculously. It was then that the mother realized why Baba had thrown away the letter. The outward act of throwing the letter was nothing but an indication that He had canceled the ailment that was troubling the little child. How merciful, how compassionate. Not only Baba, all saints act in this manner.

Once, two devotees, husband and wife, visited the ashram of Swami Nityananda. The two were unable to have children. Every time the wife would conceive, the pregnancy would terminate inexplicably. When the wife was carrying again, the couple decided to visit Swami Nityananda and seek His divine blessings. They dutifully made up a temporary home within the ashram's premises and would devotedly serve the Master every single day. Much to their dismay, however, the wife lost the baby again and the couple lost all hope.

Someone in the ashram said, "I wish this hadn't happened here." At this, the sage calmly replied, "You cannot understand divine mysteries. Due to karmic forces, the same soul was repeatedly being forced to manifest in the lady's womb. The soul was intent on deliverance (liberation) but was being dragged down due to previous bonds. His desire for liberation was so intense, he was trying to escape birth repeatedly. This time, I dragged them to my feet and as a result of my grace the soul was liberated easily. From hereon, the cou-

ple will be able to have children easily." What appeared to be a tragic event in the human realm was really a beneficial outcome for not one, but three individuals.

A brahmin devotee was a follower of Akkalkot Maharaj (an incarnation of Lord Dattatreya). At that time, the Maharaj used to live on a tree. The devotee would often visit the saint and offer food at the foot of the tree. For some time, the saint accepted these offerings but left to live at another place. The devotee continued submitting his daily offerings, however. Unbeknownst to the devotee, a demon was devouring these offerings daily. Pleased with his devoted service, Maharaj asked the devotee to seek a boon. The brahmin did not have children for a very long time and so he sought a child from the saint. Akkalkot Maharaj (Sri Samartha) said, "A child will come, but he will go away."

The brahmin's wife soon gave birth to a son. When the child grew up, the father took him to visit Sri Akkalkot Maharaj's temple. As soon as they reached within the precincts of the temple, the child became terrified and refused to go closer to the deity. The father persisted, however, and dragged the boy to the sanctum sanctorum, but much to his dismay, the boy died in the Swami's presence and the father was grief-stricken. Immediately, the saint appeared there and consoled the wailing devotee by reminding him of what he forewarned (A child will come, but he will go away). The Maharaj then explained that the son was really the demon who had partaken of the holy food. By bringing the son in the saint's holy presence, Akkalkot Maharaj had liberated him from his painful existence. The brahmin finally realized God's workings and sought blessings to have another child. Due to God's grace a son did take birth in a very short period of time and the entire family lived happily.

Such are God's workings. Always mysterious, but always beneficial.

The Guru Charitra narrates the wonderful account of a devotee whom the Lord Dattatreya visited in His physical form. The Lord appeared at the doorstep of the devotee in the form of a monk begging for food. The devotee was not at home and his wife attended to the needs of the Guru. On His way out, the Lord uprooted a vegetable plant that was the only source of meals for the family. When the wife discovered this, she was petrified and wailed inconsolably. The devotee returned to find his wife bemoaning the loss.

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He was a true devotee, however, and explained to her the importance of equanimity in the wake of pain and pleasure, both products of our own actions. After the explanation, he tried to replant the tree and in the process discovered a pot of gold that was buried there. Had the Lord not inflicted the momentary pain, could the family have discovered the buried treasure?

Lord Krishna gave a unique demonstration about this truth as well. A brahmin devotee once came to seek His blessings. On securing Krishna's blessings, the brahmin's cow (his only source of sustenance) died immediately. Arjuna was by Krishna's side when this happened and he did not lose the opportunity to question the strange occurrence.

The Divine One immediately explained that He wanted to grace the brahmin with divine blessings, a pre-requisite for which would be unconditional reliance on God. Reliance on one's own possessions would only hinder the divine blessings that were to fill the brahmin's life. In the worldly sense this event would be considered a tragedy, but in reality it served as blessing in disguise, for the brahmin's responsibility was being borne by none other than the merciful Lord Himself.

When we are surrounded by difficult circumstances, we often experience pain and disappointment, but it is only when we look back at the course of events that we realize that all did happen for a good reason, for our own good. Our vision is short-sighted but God has an aerial view of things and so He knows what is best for us and always does what is best for us in the long run.

DIVINE WISDOM

Love is Divine. To render an act fit to be offered to God and pure enough to win His Grace, it has to be a manifestation of love. Love is not affected or modified by considerations of caste, creed, or religion; it cannot be tarnished by envy, malice or hate. Preserve love from being poisoned by these evils; endeavour to cultivate a broad mind, uncontaminated by feelings of hatred and parochialism. The root of all religions, the substance of all scriptures, the destination of all paths, the inspiration of all individuals is the Principle of Prema (Love). It is the firmest foundation for man's mission of Life. It is the Light that ensures peace and prosperity in the world.

-- Baba

Significance of Diwali

India's most important festival, Diwali, the festival of lights, is recognized as the festival that leads us into truth and light. It symbolizes that age-old culture of a country that teaches us to vanquish ignorance that subdues humanity and to drive away darkness that engulfs the light of knowledge. The word "Diwali" is the corruption of the Sanskrit word "Deepavali" -- Deepa means light and Avali, a row. It means a row of lights. Diwali is very enthusiastically celebrated for five continuous days. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is also appeased during Diwali.

Light is significant in Hinduism because it signifies goodness. The significance of burning lamps during Diwali is to ward off darkness and evil. Diwali is generally celebrated on the last day of the last month of the lunar calendar. This week-long festival is a tradition in every household around the world. It is the beginning of a new year, a fresh start. The festival is celebrated for five days; each day having its own significance and ritual. Although each region celebrates Diwali differently, the general order for these five days is: Dhanteras, the first day; Narak Chaturdashi or Choti Diwali, the second; Diwali, the third; New Year, the fourth; and finally, Bhai Duj, the fifth.

Many legends and myths are also associated with each day, allowing every Indian region to add their own flavor and attach their own significance to this festive occasion. In Northern India, Diwali is dedicated to the worship of Rama, who had returned to His kingdom after fourteen years of exile on this very day. Whereas, in Bengal, Kali, the goddess of strength is worshipped.

Mother Lakshmi is also worshipped across the country as it is believed that She confers wealth and prosperity on all who worship Her during this time. Another practice during Diwali is "Bhai Dooj" or "Bhai Beej". On this auspicious day, women receive special gifts from brothers and in-turn pray for their brothers' welfare. Married women invite their brothers for meals.

Each of the five days in the festival of Diwali symbolizes a deep cultural significance and calls for worship to specific deities in all pomp and glory. A common thread through these days, however, is the prayer, symbolized by lights, requesting the Lord to guide us from darkness to light; from mortality, to immortality.

NEVER GIVE UP!

BY THE SAI SANDESH TEAM

While in school, a young boy, all of ten, and with no athletic background, once decided to participate in a marathon-like race. The competition was open to all ages but was considered the exclusive domain of only well-built, strong, and athletic, fifteen-year-olds. Undeterred by traditional rules and with a resolute determination, the young lad participated in preliminary selection rounds. They were challenging indeed. Seven boys were selected from hundreds, and he was the youngest in the school's history to ever participate at that level, and that too against athletes twice his size.

The excitement of participating in a sports competition for the first time was too much for the boy to handle. Without an athletic background or a coach, he did not even consider preparing for the event. All that mattered was running the race. The annual sports meet finally arrived. He woke up early that morning, polished his best running shoes, and arrived at the stadium hours before the crowds.

Presided by a nationally-recognized sportsman, the proceedings commenced. It was soon time for the most-anticipated competition of the day, the very moment he had been waiting for. All seven open race participants gathered at the start line. The youngest was naturally excited but was soon overwhelmed by the sheer size of his opponents. He could barely reach the trunk of the remaining six runners. How was he to compete against such formidable foes?

As these thoughts were racing through his mind, the gunshot was fired. The race had commenced. He started off very well but was soon outpaced by his professionally-coached competitors. Of the six, three gave up mid-way and the remaining three went on to finish the race while this lad was still halfway. Blood gushed through his cheeks as his untrained body experienced intense fatigue and disappointment. That didn't matter, though. All that mattered was the intense desire to complete the race and finish what he had embarked on. Two rounds were over and he was dragging himself to finish the other two.

The crowd was amazed at the determination of the young athlete. The stadium was roaring in a thunderous applause and all he could hear was everyone screaming his name. Classmates, parents, teachers, everyone arose in standing ovation. He couldn't understand why the crowd was cheering and applauding someone who had apparently lost a race. It was beyond his powers of comprehension. The race continued, though. The last few laps were the hardest as his legs refused to cooperate. He was asked several times whether he would like to give up. Pat came the response, "No. I can do it. I will do it." At last, he crossed the finish line and collapsed. Ah, the ordeal was over. The stadium gates flung open and crowds came rushing to

congratulate him. The three winners were standing in one corner, completely ignored and forgotten, while someone who had supposedly lost had become an overnight hero. He ignored all the accolades thrown his way and rushed to his mother who was waiting for him in the stands. "Mom," he said, "I am sorry to have let you down. I couldn't win the race. I won't participate in one ever again." The kind mother hugged him and said, "You won, my son. I am very proud of you." He was puzzled. At first, he was being carried around by his peers and now his mother was congratulating him for some abstract victory. "Wait, didn't I just lose the race?" he thought. Like most of us, he was conditioned to the words "winner" and "loser."

As the prizes were being given out, the boy's name was called out and, much to his surprise, he was given an honorary gold medal. "Wow! A medal for finishing last," he thought, "What's wrong with everyone?" This was his first medal, though, and he treasured the coin around his neck with extreme excitement. The guest of honor delivered his concluding remarks and honored the boy as an example for others to follow. A new trend had now started in school. Runners were now encouraged to participate at a much younger age and compete with bigger and stronger opponents. What mattered was the spirit of participating. Everyone had realized that it was far more important to not give up against the most formidable of foes, even in the midst of the most difficult challenges.

In the race of life, the ones asking us to give up are the demons in the form of temptations, desires, and troubles. They will repeatedly ask us to give up but our answer must always be the same-NO! The cheering spectators are like well-meaning loved ones who can wish us well but cannot run the race for us. Only God is like the kind mother, who is constantly cheering, nurturing, and helping little ones like you and me. He knows that ones of great merit and superior qualities will finish the race and win medals of life. It is only little children like us who need His help.

All that is needed at our end is persistence on the spiritual path and the undefeatable desire to continue against all odds. Being little children in the eyes of God, we will naturally make mistakes and fail and fall repeatedly, but like the phoenix we must rise again and continue our march toward self realization. Sai Maa doesn't judge us based on our standards of winning and losing or sin and merit. Her unconditional love accepts even the smallest of attempts as great steps toward victory. And, of course, there is a special gold medal waiting for all of us in the form of His grace.

Brothers and sisters, don't ever give up in life. As Vivekananda would summarize: "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached."

Om Sai Mandir's Activities

DAILY ARATIS

Kakad Arati: 8.00 A.M.
Madhyana Arati: 12.00 P.M.
Dhoop Arati: 6.00 P.M.
Sheja Arati: 8.00 P.M.

SPECIAL BHAJANS

Every Thursday: 7.00 P.M.-8.30 P.M.
Every Sunday: 2.00 P.M.-3.00 P.M.
SAHASRANAM, BABA'S 108 NAMES, ETC.: Daily
ANNADAN (FOOD SERVICE): Daily at the Mandir
ANNADAN (FOOD SERVICE) FOR HOMELESS
BROTHERS AND SISTERS: Every Saturday at 1 P.M. Call
718-461-0454

PUJA SPONSORSHIP

Archana: \$11
Abhishekam: \$51
Satyanarayana Vrata: \$81
Vahana Puja: \$15
Annadan: \$251
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UPCOMING EVENTS

November

Saturday, Nov. 08, 6pm to Sunday, Nov.09, 6pm: Akhanda
Bhajans for World Peace
Thursday, Nov. 13: Karthika Poornima
Sunday, Nov 16: Ladies' Day
**Sunday, Nov. 23: Sri Sathya Sai Baba's Birthday
Celebrations**

EKADASHA RUDRA ABHISHEKAM

Daily from 8.30 AM to 11.30 AM

Rudra Abhishekam - Daily

For the welfare of humanity, Ekadash Rudra Abhishekam is being performed daily (eleven times) from 8.00 AM to 11.30 AM. All are welcome to attend this historic event.

Surrender to Baba

In 2000, I was in the midst of making a life-changing decision. There were two [confusing] options and both would seriously impact my future forever. Not knowing the direction, I visited Puttaparthi to seek Swami's advice. Every single day, I would impatiently await Swami's arrival and as He would pass by me, I would hold out my request in the form of a letter. No response. One day, He did take the letter but walked away as if it meant nothing. As days were going by, the suspense was becoming unbearable, and I was getting seriously anxious about the course of action that had to be taken. The deadline was just a few days away and I was unable to make up my mind.

One afternoon, I felt impelled by a strange urge to walk to the ashram's bookstore. There were thousands of books across innumerable shelves. My hand, almost automatically, reached out to a certain book and opened a random page. Strange! There was the story of a woman who was facing the same predicament as me. She was to choose between two options, each with a serious impact on her life. She, too, tried to get an answer from Swami but Swami would just smile. One day, she just burst into tears and sought Swami's merciful intervention. "Chant the divine name," she heard.

She took the advice seriously and resorted to ceaseless chanting of Swami's name. Just the way butter melts at the slightest contact with heat, her confusion just melted away as if it never existed. I took the clue from the book and started chanting God's name ceaselessly. I soon realized that there was no confusion and all the apparent dilemmas were nothing but weaved by my own mind.

When you are in Puttaparthi, you stand in one of many lines. Just before darshan, each line is given a token number and those standing in that line would be seated in a row correspondence to that number. Up until then, I was choosing the darshan line to stand in-each day, expecting to be seated in the first row. That day, however, I had tears in my eyes and I said, "Swami, not this way, not that way, but your way. Thy will shall be done." I closed my eyes and told Swami to guide me to the line He wanted me to stand in. Surprise! I went and stood in a line that won token number one. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to sit so close to Swami.

As if that wasn't enough, Swami came straight to me that day and stood near me for a few seconds. He raised His blessing hand and assured me of His continued protection. As soon as I went back home, I was in for one more surprise. All the arrangements had been made and the decision I was so strongly fighting to make had already been taken and all the resources arranged accordingly.

WHO IS THE BEST AMONGST MEN?

A beautiful temple was the central hub in an ancient land and it was here that the citizens of the country would gather to offer their prayers. God was worshipped in myriad forms and all would gather in unison to offer homage to the Supreme Lord of the Universe. Some would sing praises of God, others would sing holy songs, while still others would chant mystic formulae, all in an attempt to win the favors of the Divine One.

As things were progressing in this fashion, one day a golden plate dropped from the heavens and with that was heard a divine voice that declared the following words: "He who is my true son and he whose heart is of gold shall glorify the luster of this plate by his mere touch." The priests were astonished to witness this miracle and soon the word spread all over the country.

The first to come were the rich and well-connected. Each amongst them touched the plate but, lo, the plate would just become dark beyond imagination at their mere touch. They were disappointed but soon realized that God's grace could not be won through wealth and power.

Then came those donning a holy garb and delivering discourses for a living. They were confident that the plate would shine at their touch but much to their misery the plate became darker still. They, too, realized that God could not be won by merely wearing holy robes and displaying their holiness.

From priests to ordinary citizens, every one tried their luck but the plate would just not shine despite their best efforts. On seeing such a large galaxy of men, the poor and down-trodden of the country gathered outside the temple in the fond hope that they would be able to further their survival there. Many found the sight of lepers and physically challenged individuals to be disgusting and some vocally complained about this to temple authorities.

When every one was complaining about why the plate was not shining, a simple-looking man walked toward the temple. Though impoverished, he appeared calm and unruffled. It was as if external circumstances had no power over him. As he walked toward the temple, his eyes were filled with tears at the sight of so many suffering souls waiting outside the temple. He didn't have a lot of money, but with what little he had, he bought food for the hungry and gave away some clothes to those shivering with extreme cold.

He raised the elders to safe places and offered to carry some

on his shoulders. He washed the pus-filled bodies of the lepers and nursed their bleeding wounds. To those whom he could not help, he spoke sweet words and offered solace and comfort.

Despite doing all he could to alleviate their suffering, he was not satisfied. With a heavy heart and tear-filled eyes, he walked into the temple and fervently prayed to the deity to grant solace and happiness to all the suffering souls he had just met.

Though barely clad, the man displayed a strange aura, an aura that made him look like a prince in that august assembly. His peaceful countenance and kind demeanor stole the hearts of all. He smiled at even those who mocked and ridiculed him.

As he walked toward the sanctum sanctorum, the deity started shining in the brightest splendor the country had ever witnessed. The golden plate flew of its own accord toward this man and fell into his hands—the rightful and most deserving recipient at last.

Lo, it shone with double the splendor. It was as if the sun had assumed a miniature form in his hands. All rejoiced at the sight and it was then that they realized who was truly the best amongst men.

Swami's 83rd Birthday-- November 23, 2008!

Beloved Lord, We wish you a Very Happy Birthday! Our humble prostrations at your holy feet. Always keep us in your heart, dear Lord. This article was a special tribute to your holy teachings!

Gajendra Moksham

For those of you who have read the Srimad Bhagavat, you may have come across the story of Gajendra, the King of Elephants. This elephant was a mighty beast who was treated as the king of the entire jungle. From lions to ants, everyone respected him and held him in awe and respect.

As he was enjoying his royal power, he felt the uncontrollable urge to slake his thirst so visited a lake that was the center of all activity in the forest. No sooner had he enjoyed the cool and refreshing water for a few moments, he found his feet gripped very firmly. No matter what he tried, he was unable to shake off the grip. He then realized that a big crocodile (far more powerful than him) was feasting on his legs. Feeling completely helpless and on the brink of destruction, he fervently prayed to Lord Narayana and sought His protection and grace. He was ceaselessly chanting, "Narayana, Narayana, Narayana"

How could the compassionate Lord resist the call of true devotion? He immediately appeared at the scene and with the help of His discus, severed the crocodile into pieces. The elephant was free at last and garlanded the Lord as a token of gratitude.

The Bhagavat provides a detailed explanation about the antecedents of the two animals' past lives and also describes how they were cursed to assume those forms. The author, however, feels there is a much deeper significance to the story and interprets it as follows:

The elephant personifies our beastly desires (attachments, physical cravings, material desires, and the rest). The lake personifies the samsara sagara (the ocean of worldliness) that is surrounded by the forest (illusion and ignorance), and when a human being, overpowered by desires, attempts to satisfy worldly cravings either in the form of human relationships or material pursuits, he is quickly caught in the grip of attachments, karmic consequences, and the ensuing cycle of births and deaths (symbolized by the crocodile).

Gripped by suffering in this manner, he makes desperate attempts to release himself but fails miserably. It is then that he remembers the Lord and chants His name ceaselessly. Unable to bear His devotee's suffering, the Lord immediately comes to the rescue and with the help of time, knowledge, and His divine powers (symbolized by the discus), he severs worldly bonds, releases the devotee, and grants him eternal peace and happiness in the form of moksham (liberation). Thenceforth, the devotee clings to the Lord's heart for eternity (as symbolized by the white garland).

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Sai Sandesh welcomes literary contributions in the form of articles, devotees experiences, poems, feedback, suggestions, and other Sai-related material.

For details, please write to the editor's attention:

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