

From Darkness towards Light

From the heart of devotees of
Bhagawan Swami Sri Prabhuddananda Saraswati
Maharaj
(Swami Sri Gopal Baba)

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Dedication

We dedicate this book completely to Swami Sri Prabudhananda Saraswati Maharaj (Sri Gopal Baba).

Only by His grace and divine energy, this book could be written. By His divine intervention we simultaneously received the idea of writing this book, while staying in Swami's guesthouse in Girinagar and when we shared our vision with each other, we decided to join hands in this heart-to-heart venture.

Sita en Linda



Acknowledgement

We feel grateful for...

...The Divine in all forms. And especially in the form of our spiritual guides Swami Sri Sathya Sai Baba en Swami Sri Gopal Baba.

...the devotees of Swami Gopal Baba who open-heartedly shared their intimate experiences and deepest feelings.

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...the beautiful cover design and lay-out from the hands of Prashanti.



Sri Sai Prabhuddananda Saraswathi Maharaj

Dear Embodiments of Love,

One receives this precious human birth after so many years and continuous efforts. So, one should never waste time but use it to walk towards the path of all pervasiveness, from the darkness of ignorance towards the light of Divine Knowledge.

What is this darkness? It's the feeling of I am the body, worldly attachment and excessive desires. One should give up this ignorance through perseverance and hard work, lead a life full of compassion and love to finally reach the Goal.

Lord Jesus was the greatest Avatar who showed the ignorant world, the Divine feeling of Love, Compassion and Supreme Sacrifice.

The Sai Avatar too showed us this Spirit. Sai Baba was none other than the Divine Mother. Sai Baba's life was His message.

I am not at all attached to this Ashram nor to the things around. My goal is Sai Baba. I am treading this path so I finally can merge into Him.

You all have to continue the service activity connected with this Ashram and fulfil the purpose of Life. My life itself is a message to you all.

God is one

One may practice different religions and follow different forms of God, but the ultimate goal should be towards peace and Universal Brotherhood.

The world should be at peace, this is possible only when you practice having peace within. Have compassion and love towards all beings not only humans. Feed the hungry souls, it may be a cat, a dog or any other being. You feel the joy within by seeing the result of your love and compassion towards the suffering soul.

Be happy and spread happiness.

I am very happy with the Divine effort that has flown from the heart of my dear children Sita and Linda by publishing this book. My blessings to them and you all.

Om Shanthihi Shanthihi Shanthihi

Sri Prabhuddananda Saraswati



Introduction

God

Such a small word. What it really means to us is not easily captured in words. This was also the case for all those whom we interviewed for this book.

Every time we asked: 'What does God mean to you?', they became silent for a while. And maybe this silence is a meaningful answer to this question. What God really is, can only be experienced and barely expressed in words. Nevertheless, we tried to bundle the experiences with 'That Which Is Beyond Words' from devotees of Swami Sri Gopal Baba.

We've tried to give words to their deepest feelings, and we are grateful for their willingness to share these with us. Our goal? To offer you a book full of encouragement and upliftment for those moments in our lives when we are unable to find the silence within where we can feel the Divine Presence. May these personal stories remind us of what is truly important in the journey of our lives and lead us back into the silence between words where His voice can be heard.

Sita and Linda



FROM HEART TO HEART

- By Linda -

Sybille Del Nero, the lovely wife of Marco Del Nero and mother of Luca, Diana and Sonia, lives in Germany and visited us during the last weekend of January 2015. She kindly consented to my request to interview her for this book. We went to the kitchen table with tea and freshly baked American cookies, leaving Marco, Maanish and Sonia in the living room. On my question, how she experienced her relationship with God, she answered with a beautiful survey of her life, that almost answered all my other possible questions.

She remembered with a gracious smile, how she would talk to a 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' picture, that was hanging on the wall in her bedroom. She shared that room with Thomas, her brother and she found it a little scary in that place, for it was an attic room that one could only reach by climbing a staircase and then passing a whole lot of junk that was stored away in the space in front of the children's room. Talking to Jesus helped to forget the creepiness of the place and she used to have a feeling of natural closeness to God. Her relationship to God was a devotional relationship straight from the innocent heart of a child. Her devotion was manifested by her helping in the church on Sundays, which was exclusively allowed for girls, due to a lack of male acolytes.

A little later in life, she started feeling some doubts about church and some depressing feelings crept in. She thought that life seemed useless. You wake up, go to sleep, work, etc. What's it all for? But somehow, she felt that there must be some deeper meaning to it. From the age of seventeen, she developed a seeking potential to find

answers to the meaning of life. Somehow, Sybille felt certain that she would find it. Her search started on a philosophical route. Marco Del Nero, a youth from school had a crush on her at the time, but she didn't fall for his charms until she saw a lot of philosophical books on a shelf in his room. He was interested in creative imagination and that made her realise that there was more in the boy than the womanizer that she thought he was. Their relationship started when she was about seventeen years old and today, they have been married for many years and have three gorgeous children. But let's not anticipate on the story. Both of them started meditation and they started looking for a deeper meaning in eastern philosophy. Sybille's relationship with God became more technical, more mental and more inside. No pictures to talk to, no forms of God.

At the age of twenty, however, she somehow got convinced that one must have a physical guru, a Paramahansa, with the emphasis on 'must.' She recognises this idea now as a pure mental concept. It didn't come from a deeper feeling or longing. Already, she had some oneness experiences. She read about karma and became convinced that we must have more than one life. She started to pursue and digest spirituality on an intellectual level.

Around the millennium, Marco and Sybille had made plans to visit a certain spiritual teacher and had almost booked a trip to Delhi to visit his ashram, when some strange things happened... And instead of going there, they found themselves in Puttaparthi in Sai Baba's Ashram. It was Renate, Marco's mother, who played an important part in this change of schedule.

After this trip to Puttaparthi, Sybille found that only in prayer did she get real answers. With Sathya Sai Baba's picture to pray to, she found a long-lost treasure back: her close heart-felt connection with God, like she had experienced while praying to the picture of Jesus in her childhood. To solve her problems, she made it a habit to pray intensely in front of Sai Baba's picture and she felt that this was the right thing to do. During one of these intense prayer sessions in a time of trouble, she saw to her immense astonishment Sai Baba's face changing into the face of Hanuman. She saw His face pulsating and becoming alive right in front of her. She received inner answers, renewed energy and elevating thoughts. *Hanuman can manage anything, so with the spirit of Hanuman in my heart I will be able to cope with all my problems*, she thought. This amazing experience felt like a great blessing. There was a clearly visible transformation from 'being devoted to a form on a picture' via 'a mental approach to divinity', towards her heart. God was closer now. Even more close than in her childhood, more inside herself. God ceased to be a form outside herself on a picture. Without this beautiful experience she couldn't have coped with all hardships of her challenging life. It left her with the feeling: *I will always get back my inner strength*.

Then life became even harsher on her. Her husband's dream to become a pilot for Lufthansa fell apart in 2014 and Sybille became overwhelmed by hopelessness and disappointment. Her certainty was gone and at one time, she was overcome by weariness. All the members of the family had worked so hard to achieve this goal; now Sybille's energy had reached an extreme low level. Steadily working towards a goal and knowing that she was supporting her husband by taking four jobs at the same time, had given her strength along the line, but now all she felt was loneliness and weakness. Her only way

out was again the way in - inside the clean room of her heart. There in the serenity of her heart, she knew for certain that there must be some sense in this situation, too. There must be a deeper meaning. Swami is the transmitter of things that should happen to us, she knew for sure. Acceptance made its glorious arrival, but she confessed that it had taken her months to get to that point. Luckily, today she experiences more ups than downs inside. Here she paused for a while and sighed softly:

‘It’s not easy to always go inside. Sometimes I must *pull myself by my bootstraps* to do so. It’s like another Sybille who’s doing that. It is as if a part of me has full understanding for the depressed Sybille but is able to lift her up at the same time.’

You have invited Swami Gopal Baba in your life. Why do you think He is in your life? I asked Sybille gently, after listening with great interest to her beautiful answer on my question about her relationship with God. We both felt that summarizing her life in this way, brought about an overview of her spiritual development, which she would have missed otherwise.

Her answer to my second question was as simple and as deep as her personality:

‘Marco was longing for a guru who was accessible, and I accompanied him. I am thankful to have Swami in our lives. He can give Love and that Love is like a wave that you can feel. In the end, Love is the essence. We will certainly die one day and what can we take with us? We will not take with us outer things, but only the happiness that you have when you truly love someone or something, the happiness that you have seen in those you helped which comes back to your heart.’ I could totally agree with Sybille.

What has been the influence of Swami in your life since you met Him?

‘I think that He is leading us in some way. I prayed before His picture as well. Swami came because Sai sent Him. This is one form through which Sai can speak to us, but I do pray to pictures of Jesus and Sai Baba as well. I have searched for a picture of ‘the Sacred Heart of Jesus’ since childhood, just like the one I had in my bedroom in the attic. But instead of a picture, we had an idol made in Italy. It was made by a wood carver in a region in the Italian Alps which is famous for its wood carving (the Grödner Tal), especially religious motives. It is in our prayer room ever since.’

What would you like to tell others about Swami?

‘He wants to bring Love into our lives and supports our inner development. I have not finished my thoughts about it,’ she explains humbly. ‘He is interested in developing Love in our society and shows us how to do that. His aim is: one has to find his inner guru. Perhaps that’s why He is rather harsh at times.

My way home began with Sai Baba. And Sai has sent Swami as a person who was nearer than Sai could be. He adds to what Sai has started and plays the role to push me back to my heart. You cannot achieve detachment without seeing the muck first. There is no other way. My life went from my heart to my heart. ‘

We were both struck by the simplicity and truth of this simple summary. It was as if Sybille surprised herself by her own wise words.

How would you like to live your spiritual life?

‘When I was young, Marco and I had a bit of a flasher relationship. At one time I thought: OK, if I can’t have him, I don’t want anybody and will work as a children’s nurse or a nun in Africa. But God gave me children and a husband to learn about relationships. I want to live

in internal peace with my husband and hope that outer circumstances won't disturb us anymore. Being like a nun, but in a relationship. Doing the things without attachment. As long as I am in the world, problems will be part of it. But no attachment.'

Everywhere and in all circumstances: enjoy the fragrance

- Linda -



A WORK IN PROGRESS

- By Sita -

Pavan Kumar

Driving on the Mysore high road on our way from Bangalore to the plot of land in Mandya district where a new temple and ashram is being built, I feel restless. A lot has been going on lately and sometimes I feel being built all over again, complete with all the construction processes that the rising of a new building takes. Even before I started my flight to India last week. Old fears, of which I was convinced I had driven them out, appeared again and occupied my mind.

It is August 2015. We are travelling with a small group; me, my son, a fellow devotee, who lives in Finland and the young man who drives. We talk about the various ways in which we try to apply spirituality in our lives. Meanwhile different views pass by. The recent rain has given the area a new fresh green dress. Mountains pop out in the middle of fields, some of them having huge rocks seemingly balancing in an odd way on top. But in truth these rocks are quite stable and have been on top for ages. Am I a rock like that? Seemingly balancing but steady enough to hold on?

I see countless coconut palms, fields with fresh crops, beautiful old temples and crowded strip malls. What is it in India that touches my soul so deeply every time I am here? This ancient land so full of culture and age-old wisdom has stolen my heart.

We reach the ashram and I am amazed by the changes made, since I was here 7 months ago. People are working in every direction my eyes wander. The temple is still in the pillars, and decorating is in full swing. As always, I admire the amount of attention given to every detail of the decorations. At this stage, only a few parts are finished with paint,

and the vibrant colours are absolutely stunning. Deep orange, gold, ocean blue, bright red and sunflower yellow, with a background of green palms and blue sky will draw everybody's attention immediately to the future centre of this ashram. It is hot outside, at least for my Dutch standards. After having a look at the progress inside the temple, we walk to the pink guest house in the back-left corner of the ashram.

Here we find ourselves warmly invited by Pavan who remains in the ashram until the construction is finished. He lives in Hyderabad and his stay in the ashram was totally unexpected. While we sit down in the coolness of the guesthouse Pavan tells me how the company he had worked for had to lay off employees, to survive. However, Pavan and his family were positive he would find another job soon. And he did! A job with really good opportunities was offered to him. Only, just before he was supposed to start this new career it turned out mistakes were made by the person who hired him and, in the end, he found himself still unemployed.

Confused by the recent happenings Pavan went to see Swami. Somehow, he felt there must have been a reason behind all this. Swami asked him, whether he would be willing to stay for a month in the ashram to keep an eye on the work in progress. Pavan was delighted that he was given a chance to serve. His family supported this, and his wife and mother told him: 'Even when you can be just of little use in Swami's divine mission your life will have been worthwhile.'

Eagerly he travelled to the ashram, expecting he had to sleep in primitive circumstances. He was pleasantly surprised to see the guesthouse where his stay would be comfortable.

He tells me that the nights are quiet and lonely without all the distractions of this digital era. His mind becomes more peaceful and he realises now that this time out is a blessing he needed. Not getting

the job right away, was the best thing that could have happened to him.

I ask Pavan what God means to him, and after some thinking he carefully answers:

‘Baba....’

I raise my eyebrows and ask him, to specify his answer.

‘It all started with Shirdi Sai Baba. In the middle of the eighties I lived in Hyderabad in a house near a Shirdi Sai Baba temple and started to like Baba much. In 2004 when I was transferred to Bangalore, I was looking for a house to rent near my office. I worked nightshifts and every day after work I would go out on a friend’s bike who worked the day shift, to search for houses. I couldn’t find anything suitable for me and my family. I searched for weeks and viewed many places, but still couldn’t find something. My manager Mr. Srihari (with whom I had worked earlier in 1997) owned a few houses in Girinagar. He came to know about my search and asked why I didn’t go see his houses. I viewed a house, and from the open door I could see a Sai Baba mandir. Srihari told me that an enlightened person lived there. I liked the house I had just viewed, but my mind was thinking more into the direction of an apartment closer to the office. A few weeks later I found an apartment that seemed to be perfect. I called my wife but while I was speaking with her, I looked at a picture of Shirdi Sai Baba and heard a voice saying: *Where do you want to go? You only have to come here!*

I was surprised and in a humorous way, I told my wife about the voice I heard. Was I imagining things? Still my focus stayed on the apartment and when I went to meet the landlord (whom people had said was a nice reasonable person) strangely enough I ended up in a strong disagreement with him. Nothing was finalized. After a while, when one of my colleagues, Srinivas, rented a house in Girinagar for his family, I then decided to move to Girinagar as well and take the house near the Sai Baba Mandir.

One Sunday evening we went to the temple and I saw Gopal Baba the saint who lived in the temple briefly. He asked about my parents and told me to come to the ritual of Abishekam on Monday morning. I planned to go but overslept. Srinivas, however, went to the early Arathi (offering of light) and called me. He said Baba wanted me to come to the Abishekam (ritual washing of an object of worship). Out of sheer politeness I went. After the rituals Srinivas wanted to stay in the temple to ask Gopal Baba some personal questions. I also waited but just because he asked me to remain with him. When Baba asked us to come and sit before him, I suddenly found myself telling Baba the story of how I, while calling my wife, had heard a voice coming from Shirdi Baba's picture, telling me to come to Girinagar.

Gopal Baba simply said: 'Yes, I wanted you to come here and do my work.' Both Srinivas and I were curious to know more about Gopal Baba and hence we bought some books about Baba, which I immediately started to read in my small puja room. After a while I started to cry uncontrollable. The content of the book had touched me deeply and a feeling emerged that I had known Gopal Baba for a long time.

I did not understand what was happening and desperately wanted to talk to Srinivas but was feeling extremely awkward as I was crying like a kid. Srinivas who was in my living room came to the puja room and told me he heard a voice calling him, 'Did you call me, Pavan?'

Tears were still spilling out of my eyes. I just felt choked, who had called him? I certainly did not! I couldn't say a word. I could hardly breathe and then suddenly it was like a heavy load was lifted from my heart. Tears run over my cheeks again and I felt so embarrassed. After 5 minutes I calmed a bit and we joked a little about it, trying to make things a bit lighter to digest. Once I asked Gopal Baba, about this experience.

He put his arm around my shoulders and answered: 'Swami loves you and you love Swami too! You stay with me and I'll take care of you.'

Gopal Baba holds my hand and accompanies me on my life's journey. When I think of God I think of Gopal Baba.'

Pavan's eyes are radiant with love when he continues:

'I never thought about who God is, it just happened to me. Somehow Baba made me more aware of the divinity in all Gods forms, but when I am with Gopal Baba, I feel so comfortable with Him, I can tell Him everything that is in my heart. And even more, I can just be with Him, feeling it is also perfect not to tell Him, for He already knows. He acts casual, so I lower my guard. Still all His actions and words are subtle teachings, the wonderful thing is that He teaches even when we are not aware of being in the classroom with the divine.'

For some reason, we had stopped this conversation here, so I called Pavan recently to continue his story. It was just like picking up where we left it, years ago.

Pavan says:

'I will share an example of how Swami teaches.

I was with Him a few months ago, and Swami was so tired. He laid on the bed and I had been massaging His feet, I had to leave, to catch my bus. I told Swami, please keep laying down comfortably, I will see myself out.

He answered: 'No, no, you have come from such a far place. Can't I do just this much for you, can't I come with you to the door to see you off?'

In this way He shows me how to behave with my guests. See with how much love He acts; it is not just lip-service. He touches your heart so deeply and then you start to copy His loving actions. You want to share that feeling with those around you, and then when you see their reaction it makes you feel so good.

I practise this now also with business associates. They visit me in a hotel room and when they leave, I say: 'Come let me walk you to the parking place.' Doing this out of love and not out of duty makes a huge difference. Their eyes reflect how positively surprised they are.

You ask me how I've changed? Well, these subtle actions which He showed me, these small gestures done with great love, changed me so much. We may not be aware what He does for us, maybe we catch just half a percent, but these small bits make me already so happy.

Another teaching He recently gave was during a seemingly casual talk about food. In India we say, *Annam Parabrahma Swaroopam*.

He asked me the meaning of these words, and I simply translated them; *Food is a form of God*.

Swami answered: 'Does it matter who serves it, does it matter what kind of food is served? Does it matter how it tastes? If you really believe that food is God's prasada, then no matter how it is served, no matter who serves it, no matter how it tastes, it is the gift of God. So, there can be no complaints.'

He makes you understand these things in conversations that appear to be just random, but they are not random at all.

Swami continued: 'Isn't compromise a way of life? Life is a continuous compromise. For example, there is a particular way of doing things, my own way in which I like to do them, whereas you do things in your own way. You don't know how I like to do these. There are so many people who come to Me. Don't I compromise constantly with all these things?' Then it struck me: all these small things I complain about, like there is no sugar in my coffee, there is too much salt in a dish, why didn't you do it this or that way. I complain about this small stuff without realizing the other person is doing things at the best of his ability.

Have I been able to practise this and stop complaining? Well not completely, I am still a work in progress.'

I ask Pavan what he would tell others about Gopal Baba?

‘When a seeker comes to me and asks me anything about Swami, I wouldn’t tell him much. When they see His picture in my house I simple answer: He is my Guru and God.

They must have their own experience. On top of that even the urge in a person to want to know more about Swami, comes from Swami.

But I talk with people about my experiences and then they can take from that whatever they can use. What else can we tell but our own experiences. We can never understand Him. Swami told me: “If you want to analyse Me you have to become One with God; only then can you understand Me.”

I have a very good friend who has known Swami since 2004. He knows my experiences and for years he wants to go and meet Swami, but it never worked out. It confused me, so I asked Swami about this. Why couldn’t my friend not just come with me to meet Swami? Why was there always something in the way?

Swami smiled and said: ‘What do you think, that he can come here on his own, without my permission?

Before everything else, my permission should be there.’

So many things have changed in me, He is so pure and being in His company changes your perception of things, like He once said: ‘When you look at a person, you see one percent divinity and ninety-nine percent human, when I look at you, I see ninety-nine percent divinity and one percent human.’

Time passed quickly while we talked, and I was happy with everything Pavan just shared. I realise once more how rich we are with Swami but also with our fellow devotees! We can share the blessings and, in this way, kindle the flame in our hearts to an even brighter light!

How much more beauty would we see and add to the world if we would become more aware, if we would allow Him to raise our consciousness, even if only just a few percent more.

*God is to be worshipped as the One Beloved;
dearer than everything in this and in the next life.*

- Swami Vivekananda -



A MOTHER'S LOVE

- By Sita -

Ramaa and Ganesh

We visit the Soma Sai Skanda ashram again one week before the opening. It is becoming such a beautiful place. But still like a beehive with workers everywhere to finish the construction in time. I am struck again by the abundant colours; it all looks so happy and joyous. We admire the temple and I simply love the red granite that is used for the walls around the altar. The centre of the altar is a striking statue of the Mother Goddess. She shines with a glow of eternal beauty and compassion.

I feel happy and blessed after months of struggling with fear and disease. Only surrendering to Swami has lifted my worries and healed my body. In August I was infected with Chikungunya in India. Back home I knew I should go to India for the Ashram opening in November but with my body so full of pain I was very scared to travel again. The fear paralyzed me and kept me in his grim claws for months. I just couldn't do it; I just couldn't go to India again...at least that is what my ego-mind told me. How could any loving Master expect me to do that? Surely Swami wanted me to stay home and get better.

That is what I thought... Obviously Swami had a different plan. Does He not turn every event in our life into an opportunity to grow, to come closer to God? I remember this saying: Do you want to make God laugh? Tell Him your plans.

I did!

I told Swami I planned to stay home. And Swami? Swami smiled and swept my plans aside and simply told me, *come, I will take care*. Did I surrender right away....? No, the fear was big and still holding me tightly. But when He says He will take care, He does. Soon I realised

the foolishness of my way of thinking. I asked myself, if I would have a terminal disease where else would I go to, but to Swami?

Now I have only this temporary disease and am too scared to go to my true home, isn't that complete foolishness? Fear is a bad advisor....

Luckily, He gave me this wisdom that started to dawn on me. We booked and from that day on my health improved step by step. By the time we had to travel I felt just fine. But see God still had a little trick up His sleeve. I had said so many times I will not fly to India, and words and thoughts do have power!

So just one day before we were supposed to fly, the airline we booked our flight with was on strike and all flights were cancelled. Indeed, we could not fly to India! It was now necessary to have a strong will and determination to find a new ticket on such a short term. We prayed and yes, we found another flight for the following day, the day we originally planned to fly. And with even better conditions!

Indeed, the three months before going to India had been like an emotional roller-coaster ride!

Back to the ashram...

My husband and I are on the dais of the almost finished temple when Swami approaches us and asks how we are. I answer: 'Fine, Swami!' On which He smiles and asks with a laugh in His voice: 'Are you fine?' And yes, I am! Right now, in the warmth of his smile I am feeling better than ever.

Then Swami says: 'You have lost Sitama.' People around think it was about body weight, but nothing has changed in that. I lost something else. I lost the battle of my ego-fear and the Divine had come out victorious. I smile, for yes, ego is no competition for Swami. He will always win! That is His blessing!

We spend some time with Swami in the temple. Not much is said but it feels like we are absorbing all the love and divine vibrations by just being there. Again, I admire the beauty of it all and notice how little

silver particles are shining everywhere in the red granite used in the altar. As if the red is a symbol of divine energy and every silver spark a creation in the universe of love. Each one a materialisation of divine will, a solar system, a planet, a star, or a soul like you and me. All creation, being carried in the stream of divine love, yet not aware that She who has created us is holding us all in divine embrace. A silent prayer wells up. *Mother let me never forget Who is carrying us all. Who is holding my soul and supporting this Universe, let me always remember...*

Filled to the brim we leave the temple and meet a lovely couple, Ramaa and Ganesh, who occupy the small guest house to take care of the temple, after Pavan left. They invite us for lunch and soon we are seated and emerge in a true sathsang, while we exchange our experiences with Gopal Baba. Real sathsang is such an inspiration. When we meet likeminded souls and speak about our deep thoughts and feelings, we experience divine joy.

I ask Ramaa what God means to her?

She answers that it is beyond words and not for her to answer that question. She is so modest, but I sense she has more to say. After a while of sharing with each other she says:

‘The relationship I have with God is a very intimate one. Not something you talk about but something I experience in the sacred space of my heart; His temple within me.

Swami tells me: He is our Grandmother.

Our journey with God became more intense when our second child, our little baby boy had severe skin problems. It was very hard to see him suffer so much; we were willing to do everything for him. We went to every doctor and tried every healing system available, travelling far and wide to doctors and healers. We prayed from the bottom of our hearts, but still the boy suffered and so did we.

Yet, our prayers were heard! We found encouragement in the devotion of Ganesh's mother to Sathya Sai Baba. It was her shining example that made me intensify my love to Sathya Sai. Or should we say Sathya Sai found His way to our hearts?

Despite comments from other people I took my son to Sathya Sai as often as possible and Baba was like a true mother; being in His presence brought healing to our hearts and to our son.'

Like Ramaa and Ganesh, when we feel the suffering for a dear one, we might start to understand a little, why divine souls like Baba, Jesus, Ramakrishna or Swami are born on this earth. Are they not like our divine Mother and will She not suffer when She sees her children suffer? Isn't the only way we can make our true Mother happy, to take Her hand and let Her lead us out of sorrow into bliss and out of fear into love?

Devotion to Baba became the light of their lives, their children attended Bal Vikas classes and developed into wonderful spiritual service minded jewels. The suffering of the young child brought also blessings to this small family.

Ramaa continues:

'Mother Sai brought me to Gopal Baba, and all the things we thought impossible became possible. I love to live here and serve Swami if needed. Even if you would have told me a few years ago that this kind of life was waiting for us, I wouldn't have believed you! It is a great opportunity that is offered to us and we are so grateful for that. While being here, so near Swami's form I try to find Him mostly in my heart, where His true Form resides. Of course, it is so tempting to run only after His outer Form, especially when He is so near! But I know the real challenge is to go beyond the outer Swami and find Him in me.'

Ganesh adds:

‘I never realised how restless my soul was, but now that I am here, far from the stress we had in Mumbai, I feel I start to understand Ramaa more. I never experienced the Divine like Ramaa does, but now in this ashram, my mind and heart open every day a bit more, it is as if a veil is lifted.’

I ask Ramaa what she would tell people if they ask her about Gopal Baba?

‘What can I tell them? It is like someone would ask me where they can buy sweets. I can point out to them in which direction they should go and give them the address of the shop. But they must go to the shop by themselves, and when they enter the shop it is up to the shopkeeper whether or not he wants to sell them sweets.’

And softly Ganesh adds: ‘Only people with the right intentions will experience the real gifts of Swami, His pure Love.’

And yes, I apprehend the truth in their words; many can enter the sweet shop, some will come out empty handed, some with only some chewing gum and others filled to the brim with all the Shopkeeper offers them.

Love is the true human quality. Consider love as your very life-breath.

One without love is no better than one without life.

Considering love as the basis of your life, follow the path of truth.

*Then you will not only find fulfilment in life,
you will also attain purity and ultimately divinity.*

- Sathya Sai Baba -



INTENSE PRAYER

- By Linda -

Alida van Velzen, wife of Jan van Velzen (Kumbaya, as Swami Gopal Baba calls him affectionately), mother of six children, including Bas (Kannaiah), was in our India party in November 2015. We were there for the inauguration of the temple in the new ashram of Swami Gopal Baba and to celebrate the 89th birthday of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Before the celebrations, we spent some time in Bangalore in the guesthouse in Girinagar. I asked Alida for an interview, and although they had just arrived, she had enough energy left to grant me this opportunity. We were comfortably seated on Alida's bed.

This energetic and kind-hearted lady and her husband Jan have offered a part of their house in Onderdijk to serve as a GKS temple for Abishekam and sathsang for many, many years. When I lived in the North of Holland, I used to visit the temple as many times as possible with great pleasure and happiness. The enthusiasm and devotion there were - and still are - very contagious.

The question with which I started the interview with Alida was:

What does God mean to you?

'During the day I am conscious of God in everything and in everyone. That feels safe and familiar. I try to be conscious of God in myself, as myself.'

I asked what specifically she meant by that and Alida answered:

'My Higher Consciousness. I am That. For me, praying is, tuning in with my inner source. When I am praying, I mostly pray in the I Am form and that I Am is everything.'

For example:

I Am love
I Am harmony
I Am forgiveness
I Am peace
I Am reconciliation
I Am forbearance
I Am (God, Baba, Swami) in me; or like Jesus said:
I Am the way, the truth and life.

I practice this in order to become more aware of the unity between me and God. In this way I want to become more and more aware of my true nature. One cannot grasp it by logical reasoning. It is an inner knowing. It is absolutely not my desire to tell a goody goody story, but it is what it is. This knowing gets more and more intense. Every day starts with prayer during my early morning walk and is filled with prayer during the rest of the day.'

What is the role of Swami here?

'I often pray to Sai Baba. For me Swami is the same; the Divine Mother. There is this longing to become detached from the form. At the same time, I am really happy and grateful that His form came into my life to help me understand the abstract 'I Am' principle. The form helps me during all the trials and tribulations of life. Focussing on God in a form helps to gain in faith and equal mindedness.

I recently found a notebook dated twenty years ago. I was surprised reading all my notes and said to Jan: 'I worked so hard that time, with so much effort. Now I know, you don't have to work so hard.' I still have to learn that. Everything can be much simpler. But I also see,

comparing with what I read from twenty years ago, that a lot of things have changed for the better.'

You have invited or allowed Swami in your life. *Why do you think He is in your life?*

'Well, at first there was doubt. I had Sathya Sai Baba in my life. How would I see this new Swami? How could I integrate this Swami? I knew that all is one... I committed myself totally to sincere prayer about this question. *Baba let me see if it is good to be here with this swami. Please give me insight. If all is one, let me see this.* But that was twenty years ago when we met Swami for the first time, just before the Upanayana of Kannaiah. Many things have happened since that time.

I actually didn't invite Swami, but I allowed Swami in my life. It just happened to me, because Swami showed us who He was by remarks that left no room for doubt but left us in silent wonder instead. And I have a feeling that we are not able to realise how special it is to come to this place at this point (the official inauguration of the temple in the Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram). I have the strong feeling, but I don't know if it is true, that we are here with a purpose. Swami has got a mission and we are privileged to be here and to be able to serve in this mission. We are being called on our responsibility to help.'

Can you somehow experience Swami's presence in your daily life since you know Him?

'It doesn't matter anymore: Swami Gopal Baba or Sathya Sai Baba. It is the Source of everything; that is what it's all about. I try to live my life as consciously as possible. It is so good to really meet such a loving God in person.' Alida closes her eyes in emotion.

'Gratitude. So much gratitude is here, to be able to experience love in this wonderful way. There are answers to unspoken questions. It

really is a privilege to meet such a loving Swami personally. But He sends you back inside. And that brings you really back to what it is all about: Unity. The doubts that I had in the beginning...? Everything has melted in One, as One.'

What development do you see in your life since you met Swami Gopal Baba?

'In the beginning there were a lot of inner questions: Am I doing the right thing? Am I praying in the right way? Now there is no such thing as right or wrong. It is all about intention. I can deal with criticism a lot better.'

Did Swami help you with that?

'Yes, it is the question: *Who am I and who is the other person?* And the knowing that you are always guided. Life doesn't feel like an endless follow-up of obligations. There is a sense of 'beingness' in me. We don't have to rescue the world. We can enjoy more.'

What would you tell others about Swami?

'Whenever there really is a hunger for information, I feel delighted to tell everything I have experienced with Him.'

Alida, how would you like to conclude this interview?

What is really left to be said?

'Whatever happens: Don't worry, be happy. Every day I give all my worries away. And try not to take them back. Every day my most important duty is to love and to smile. So, I say my prayer, that welled up in me spontaneously one day, during my morning walk:

*Let me glow with Fire Divine
Let me radiate with Light Divine
Let me sparkle with Joy Divine*

*Let me be covered in Peace Divine
Let me be armed with patience, faith and surrender'*
- Alida -

Prayer is, to reinforce your intention
- Linda -



ACCEPTANCE

- By Linda -

Joke Morsch and I are sitting comfortably on the beautiful sofa of a guestroom in the Dispensary in Girinagar, Bangalore.

We are still impressed by the magnitude and splendour of the celebrations in the Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram in Maddur last weekend. It is Friday the 27th of November 2015, the day of our departure from India. Joke has kindly consented in an interview and feels a little shy about it. Will she have anything worthwhile to tell? Will she be able to find words? I try to encourage her to the best of my knowledge and as soon as Joke starts answering my questions, she forgets all about her doubts and I have to write in a real fast pace to keep up with her.

What does God mean to you?

'Well, I am not interested in the God of all the different religions. More in an Omnipresence. Male nor female. Swami Gopal Baba talks about the Divine Mother. That appeals to me. I like it. When I was young my mother used to say: 'They all pray to the same God.' My grandfather was a member of the Orthodox Protestants Church, but when he started dating my grandmother, he converted to Catholicism. That used to make me think. It broadened my view.

I realised that all the rules and regulations are made by people and have nothing to do with God. For example, a homosexual person is not supposed to share in the Holy Communion in the Christian Church. For me that is a loveless rule. Almost all religions have these kinds of loveless rules and I don't like that at all.'

I wholeheartedly agree with Joke's opinion.

What specifically does God mean to you?

'I feel calm, as if I am coming home. I especially feel this in places where prayers are being performed. In prayer rooms or halls where people turn to God for answers or for a feeling of nearness. For me, that energy is tangible in those places.'

What relationship do you have with God? How do you interact with God?

'I know that God isn't a projection of something, but I do talk with Swami Gopal Baba or Sathya Sai Baba. It feels good to have something to focus on. I bought a Krishna statue a few years ago. That statue has become my link with Swami. It has been kept for a while in Swami's house, before it could be carried to Holland and I love the idea of it. His energy is absolutely tangible in the statue. Swami said, *If you direct your energy towards this statue, then you connect directly with Me.* Especially for Nick, the statue became a pillar of strength. For him it felt so good to know that Swami knew all about his condition. That realization was enough for him to be able to bear everything. There is a picture that was taken before we knew about Nick having metastases. In the picture Swami has kept His hands on Nick's lungs. Swami knew already what we didn't know yet, that is for sure. This is so incredible...'

I could clearly feel strong emotions coming up for Joke at this point and we shared a moment of closeness here. When she was able to talk, she uttered:

'God who manifests through Swami...'

You have invited or allowed Swami in your life.

What do you think is the reason for His presence in your life?

'We had many interviews with Swami. In one of the interviews He mentioned that all of us, who are gathered there, were with Him in our past lives. That knowledge gave me a familiar feeling. The feeling that there is a vast continuum and that we all are a part of the mystery. I was actually a Sathya Sai Baba devotee but for me Baba was so elusively big. And I had some restraint towards the fights that people were involved in, in order to get close to Him. Swami Gopal Baba was so much closer and approachable. We were so lucky to have Kannaiah, for it was through his presence that even we were close to Swami. In earlier times, Swami prepared food for us and enjoyed it when Nick and Kannaiah were making fun of almost everything. Swami came to our house in Holland and had lunch with us. Nick had gathered the courage to ask Him and He graciously consented. Nick had called India and to his astonishment, it was Swami who picked up the phone! Swami is so enchanting. You cannot help but surrender to His Love. That broad smile and the tap on your head... They let you know: *I still do belong.*'

How do you experience Swami's presence and influence in your daily life since you know Him?

'A feeling of trust is born since He is in our life. The feeling is best explained as: everything is going to be alright. But what is right? That is the question. It is as if whatever happened was the right thing. Nick died and yet it was alright. It is not that the things turn out to be as we want, but we accept that it is all part of life and it is as it is. It is painful but it is right. It is OK. Swami helped us to have faith in that. I am not such a pious person. I have caught myself trying to be as pious as others in India. Everybody wants to belong... to be part of the 'family.' But it has to be real. For me, devotion is more inside. In Kannaiah, you can see it clearly manifests on the outside, in his eyes and movements.

That touches me deeply. But when I would act the same, it wouldn't feel authentic. I would do it out of a feeling of duty instead of love. Although touching Swami's feet really comes from within. That is closeness in its purest form. What I have learned is to have a helicopter view. To have compassion for the one who hurts me and to have acceptance in life.'

I was really impressed by Joke's purity and honesty and told her so. With gratitude to her I write this interview.

*The truth is, there is only One,
and the secret lies in accepting that*

- Linda -



BEING INSTEAD OF DOING

- By Sita -

Dineke Koot (or Mandodari as Swami calls her) and I are sitting down together. It is June 2016. Our hearts are uplifted after the bhajans we just attended. The services in the small Sai mandir in Onderdijk are usually true celebrations. People sing with passion and enjoyment, and afterwards you feel like your spiritual batteries are charged again.

I have known Dineke and her husband Bas for more than 20 years and feel blessed with their friendship. They love Swami unconditionally and His love for them helped them through many rough situations in their lives.

It is always so good to be together and speak about our memories and experiences with Gopal Baba and to discover in which phase in our personal growth we are in that moment.

Talking about Gopal Baba Dineke says:

‘When Swami is doing puja I love to see with how much attention He performs each and every action. It is as if every gesture is a ritual on its own. I always get the feeling that the way He arranges flowers on the altar, so full of intention and tenderness, is how He takes care of His children too, with just the same love and intention. He will always place us exactly there where we should be in exactly that moment. This I admire a lot in Him, and I try to live like that with intention and love.

I love to be useful and to help others, especially when we have a celebration in the temple. Helping with our temple celebrations is my top favourite thing to do.

When Swami came to Holland in 2014, I was so worried. A few weeks before Swami's arrival I had a knee operation and my greatest fear was that I wouldn't be able to help in the mandir. For years we had been looking forward to having Swami with us again. I wanted to be part of it!

Helping, supporting, working together, that is what makes me happy. Maybe others like to just enjoy watching the program, but not me! Of course, I know, I cannot yet work with the same deep love as Swami, but He is my greatest example.

The miracle for me was that I could do it! I was able to help! I started carefully but there was no major pain and my gratitude was intense.'

I ask Dineke who or what God is for her? Immediately she says:

'Swami!'

Her prompt answer surprises me and curiously I ask her: *So, what does Jesus mean to you? You are a Christian, aren't you?*

'Yes, I used to like going to church, but somehow God and Jesus never felt really near. I had a lot of respect but could never experience the love of God with the intensity that I can do now through Gopal Baba. I think I really needed Swami to alight the flame of Divine love in me. I can feel more for Jesus too, for I can now imagine how loving Jesus must have been.

So much has changed in my life since I now Gopal Baba. I was always very extravert and busy trying to please people as much as possible. But when my body couldn't do that anymore, I had to change. I understand now that it is not about what I do but about what I am! I think that that is His greatest gift to me. He teaches me to be more quiet, to stop running around. He gives me a chance to discover myself and to find peace inside. I feel He is always with me. I can't express this

in words, it is a warm feeling in my heart... I see His picture and know... He knows me, He helps me, He guides me.'

We are both touched by what has just been said. We are talking about Swami and what He does for and with us, but can we really understand it?

Dineke continues:

'The recent years were full of physical challenges for me. There was a lot of pain and struggle within me because of all the things I couldn't do anymore. Swami helped me reach a point within to accept and be satisfied with my life just the way it is. When I stopped fighting against my physical condition, I felt much better and more at peace.

Now I understand more than ever that it is honestly all about who I really am; who I am deep inside. It is not about doing great things, no, it is about doing small things with love. Small actions done with love make me feel truly good and in tune with God and myself.'

I recognise Dineke's story. For during the past years, I am learning too that it is much more about being instead of doing. I remember a quote from Wayne Dyer saying: *There is a reason we are called human beings and not human doings*. If you feel happy and satisfied, that feeling in itself is a great contribution to a world filled with too much restlessness and fear. Fear which is constantly fed by a culture focussed on consuming and competition.

One hour later I am in the swimming pool watching our grandson and twentyfour other six-year-old kids swimming for a swimming test. In our country with so many water canals and lakes, parents are keen to teach the children to swim at a young age. It is remarkable that when I was at that age the greatest importance was given to teaching a child

to swim strongly and for at least ten minutes. Nowadays they teach the children also to float. They must be able to lay down in the water completely still and float, because whenever they would swim in the sea and a strong current carries them away from the shore, swimming would only exhaust them and will result in drowning. In certain situations, it is vital to know how to float. Just like Dineke discovered that simply not fighting the current but just floating on the love of God is sometimes all we need to go on.

There are no great things, only small things done with great love
- Mother Theresa -



YOU NEED A LIGHT TO WALK IN THE DARK

- By Sita -

Dinesh Rathod

It is July 2016 in the Netherlands and almost summer holiday time. Children finish their last weeks in school and the stress of exams is over. I love to spend these few weeks of summer as much as possible outdoors. Nature is now rich in greens and flowers bloom everywhere. The scent of freshly mowed grass brings me back to my childhood on the small lawn of my granny where I played as a four-year-old. Every season has its charm, but to me summer is the best.

It is almost Gurupoornima; this festival holds many fond memories for me. The first time I saw Sathya Sai Baba, was on Gurupoornima, and at that time I didn't even know what Gurupoornima was. The first time I visited our small Dutch Sai Mandir was again on Gurupoornima. For many years Swami allowed me to celebrate at His feet, but this year it is not meant to be. Even though I love to be with Him in India, the desire to be with Him in my heart grows stronger every day. I know that is what Swami wants for us as well, to find Him in our own hearts, so it seems perfect that He gives me a chance this year to celebrate Gurupoornima in His inner presence. And even when a part of me will miss this sweet celebration in India, deep inside I feel this is just what I need right now.

One of the devotees whom I always meet in July in India is Dinesh Rathod. Dinesh promised to share with me some of his experiences for this book and remembering him I asked, if this is the right time. He happily agrees and through the wonders of modern communication we have the following exchange of experiences:

Dinesh Rathod:

‘I was never much into religion, I never believed in anything. I ate non-vegetarian and only stopped eating meat after Swami told me. I am a Sikh and went to pujas, but it was just a habit. I didn’t really believe. When I came to Swami, He gave me some books and, in these books, I found many answers. Although I wasn’t religious, I was seeking truth. It is so wonderful that Swami gives every devotee just what he needs, and this is different for each of us. We all walk our own road towards God, and He will offer just the guidance you need for your own unique path. I love helping others, it gives such a deep joy when you can help someone.

Service to parents and guru is more important than puja. Baba says: *The hand that serves is more important than the one holding the rosary.* You must be earnest. Being earnest gives strength to a person. Once Swami tells you something, it is good if you follow it to the core.

The process of spirituality has its stages. The moment I met Swami, the miracles were like His visiting cards. They attract a person to his guru or spiritual path. As life unfolds you become spiritually more mature and it is not so much about miracles. You grow spiritually so that you become more independent from your guru. The guru is just with us to teach us how to walk in the dark, but ultimately, we will be able to walk in the dark with the pure inner light of the Guru in our heart. Right now, I think we are somewhere in the middle stage where we understand that Swami is beyond miracles. We know now, Swami can do anything. Even right now I can feel His presence around us...

Recently I had a sweet experience with this. Last year towards the end of October, Swami told us that He needed water from Gangotri - a sacred well in the higher Himalayas where the river Ganga originates -

for the inauguration of the new temple¹. It was just a few days before the mountain pass to Gangotri would close for winter. After that, it is impossible to go there. So, we went as soon as possible. We hired a taxi and stayed in Yamunotri near Gangotri. We had brought two large jerry cans to take thirty litres each and everything went well. When the cans were filled, they were very heavy and it was really hard to carry them from the river to our car, but out of the blue a porter appeared. We were very surprised by this; usually this time of the year, there were hardly any porters around. He helped us to carry the cans the distance to our car. The right help, at the right time, at the right place. This is how Swami is present around us!

That night in our hotel in Yamunotri, we had to get something from the car. We noticed that one of the jerry cans was leaking and that the precious water of mother Ganga was spilling away. It was a Monday night and all shops were closed. I was feeling frustrated because it meant we had to go back again, which is not an easy thing to do. It is so high in the mountains (3.048 meter). I get altitude sickness and then feel ill. Deep inside I had faith that Swami would somehow help us. I was searching the market, to see if I could find at least one small shop open, but everything was dark and closed. In the shadows, I saw one man and approached him to ask if he knew a shop that could help me. He took me to a closed shop where cans were sold and called the number of the shop owner on his mobile. The shop owner lived only two doors away and came over immediately. He took us to his house and there he had a strong can, just what I needed! Of course, I would have gone again the other day to collect new water, but I knew Swami would help us out, and so He did!

Another recent experience was, when we were in Badrinath one month ago. Badrinath is also a place in the higher mountains. I was

¹ The Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram

there with some elderly people. The weather was not good. With every step of our way we heard about landslides, cloud outbursts etc. Weather and nature can be very unfriendly this high in the mountains. But for us everything went as smooth as possible. We felt Swami's grace all along our journey which made it a wonderful uplifting experience for all of us.

It helps so much when you can have that faith and awareness that He is always with you and around you, wherever you may be or go. If you are going through problems or when you are experiencing a good time in your life, having the strong conviction and the awareness that He is always with you, will make miracles part of your life.

The whole concept of spiritual living is about this faith. *Faith grows when you use it.* And not only having faith in *this* life but also having faith in the life beyond. To be able to trust that Swami will always be with you and even will be waiting for you when you die. That He will hold you and guide you always; that He will give you an immense feeling of inner peace. This will make your faith grow even more! Just realise that you must leave everything behind. Except for the fruits of your thoughts and actions, your karmas, everything has to be left behind, including your relationships, for you don't know how their journey will continue. But one relationship will always remain and that is the eternal relationship between a Satguru and His disciple.'

Again, as happened before while taking an interview, we both become silent. I feel touched by what Dinesh just said. In this silent moment we are both experiencing how divine love is the Light of life.

After some quite moments I ask Dinesh what he would tell others when they would like to know more about Gopal Baba.

‘Only discuss your guru with people with a genuine interest, otherwise it is just a waste of time, this is what Baba advises. After just meeting Swami you like to share your experiences with many. I stopped doing that, for people are not listening or will be just polite. But when they are really interested of course you will tell them they should go and meet a true guru like our Swami. I personally would tell them about Swami’s love, but in truth this is something the person must experience for himself. Swami’s unconditional love is a force that can open every heart.

And even when you go for the hundredth time to see Swami, His love will attract you again and again. When you share the miracles you experienced with Swami, it will attract people who seek help. In India we have experienced divine miracles for ages. Yogis, sadhus and Gurus gave blessings to people for healing from incurable diseases or giving childbirth to barren women. The miracles are divine grace but given with a higher purpose. Once the person is attracted by the Divine, God will start to work on them. When the person is ready to follow the lead, his life will never be the same again after this divine intervention in his existence. So, when we can be an instrument in leading a person to a divine Light like Gopal Baba, we should definitely tell him all our experiences with all the love we feel for Swami and the person before us. For we have to share the light that is guiding us and will guide all who are willing to see. In the dark we all need light!’

*I have come to light the lamp of love in your hearts,
to see that it shines day by day with added lustre.*

- Sathya Sai Baba -



INNER HEART

- By Linda -

V.K. Prabhu Kumar

Everybody who knows Swami, has seen Prabhu close to Him. In 2001, he was in Swami's party during His first visit to the Dutch devotees, and together with Swami, he visited our house and temple. He is a Civil Engineer and has built the Shirdi Temple in Girinagar and the Dispensary. When the construction of the Dispensary came to a close, a special opening ceremony was being performed. On that occasion Swami had materialized a bracelet for him.

Seated on the stairs of one of Swami's guesthouses in the Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram, Nidaghatta, Prabhu and I had the chance to have a conversation which resulted in this interview. It was one day before the celebration ceremonies of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's ninety-first birthday and many preparations must have been in full swing, but on the outside, it looked as peaceful as if nothing much was happening. Some people were hanging garlands of multi-coloured lights on buildings and railings that would change the whole ashram in a fairy-tale like environment. Inside and outside, Swami always worships God by decorating His divine dwelling place in a most creative and gorgeous way. The pleasant temperature, the cool breeze, the waving coconut trees, the singing and playing birds all seemed to contribute to the intensity of our conversation, in which not only I asked the questions, but Prabhu inquired after my feelings for God as well. That surprised me a lot, for as long as I had been interviewing devotees, no one had ever asked me anything, so far.

With his pleasant smile and peaceful appearance, Prabhu told me that his idea of who or what God was, was connected to the Inner Heart.

'Only you yourself will know.' he explained.
'Even you yourself can become God.'

He relates to God by posing questions to this Inner Heart.

'Answers will come in the mind. Without God we will not be. He will teach, guide and protect us. And we should follow this guidance. I do follow His instructions. Our own mistakes will be made but we should not blame God. The heart has no need of a passport and has no limits, it can reach anywhere.' Here he asked me about my own idea of and relationship with God.

We talked a while on the subject - I will come back to my experiences later in the book - and then I asked him what role Swami Gopala Krishna had played in his journey to God.

'Searching for a good teacher, Prabhu visited many temples. Together with his wife Sudha seated on their motorcycle, one day the couple passed by a sign, 'Way to Sai Mandir'. The words proved literally to be their signpost to Sai, for Sai Gopal, who they were about to meet, has shown them how they could get near God in the temple of their Inner Heart.'

Entering the Old Mandir, Swami was sitting there with Sri Anthasayana Rao. He looked up from his conversation and said in Telugu: 'Randi!', which means 'come.' Telugu was Prabhu's mother tongue! 'What is your name? Where are you staying?' Prabhu felt that special attraction as if there was a very old connection. He took padnamaskar and doing so, Swami slapped him on the back.

'It felt like I got an electrical shock!' Prabhu told me.

'The first day I saw the statue of Shirdi Sai Baba in the Old Mandir and thought it might be a Shirdi Temple. It was only after some time that I understood the relation between Sathya Sai Baba and the mandir and even I became a Sathya Sai devotee since then.'

After this first meeting with Swami, Prabhu realised that this was the teacher he had been searching and longing for. Swami guided them in every detail of their life and moreover, He was their living example. Prabhu started visiting the mandir every day and asked many, many spiritual questions until all his doubts were gone.

'Nowadays I have no questions left,' he added with a gracious smile. 'When you are following Swami, there shouldn't be room for doubts. We just have to follow Him. After a few months, Swami felt like my friend. He cleared all my doubts and I argued with Him like a mother with her child. He knows everything about us and attends to every need. He used to cook for us in those days. We sat with Him for hours till late at night.'

Can you experience the influence of Swami in your daily life?

'Swami is like a mother. After meeting Swami, I left non-vegetarian food. I used to feel His nearness from early morning till late at night, always was I thinking of Swami. Swami came five times to my native place in Andhra Pradesh. Even in Bangalore He came for an inauguration to my house and created vibhuti. Another time He had also come to my Bangalore home on which occasion He made candy for us.

Once my mother came from my native village to Bangalore and stayed with me for a few days. She went shopping with my sister's son and my brother's daughter. They were thirteen and eight years old respectively. At the Majestic Bus Stand they lost my mother but were smart enough to take the bus back home where they arrived one hour later. We waited and waited for my mother, but she didn't arrive. I couldn't sleep but I was praying incessantly.'

Naturally the whole family was in shock. In the meantime, Prabhu's mother had been searching frantically for the children and ended up at the police station. She didn't have an address where the police could bring her, nor did she speak Kannada, so she tried to explain her

dreadful situation in Telugu and spent the night at the station, although she couldn't sleep at all.

At home, Prabhu had finally fallen asleep. A short and restless nap. It was about five o'clock in the morning and Swami appeared in his dream and slapped him. 'Mother will come, don't worry.' Then he woke up and five minutes later the police came to bring his mother back home! She had remembered the Sai Mandir and told the police that the place where she was staying was close to the mandir. That was enough clue for them, and they could bring her home.'

Which development do you recognize in your life since you met Swami? I asked this kind and patient devotee.

'Without Swami, I couldn't have achieved so many divine and material things. A small example of a divine experience, I had visited Whitefield nine times without ever being graced by Sai Baba to take padnamaskar. Feeling discouraged I didn't want to go anymore. Swami simply said: "You go there." And He sent us to the ashram. I went with Ravi and Govinda Raj. Sathya Sai Baba came walking in our direction. While still approaching us he already looked at us. Having reached our place, He stood for minutes right before us and all of us were able to take padnamaskar. The letters that He had taken from devotees were in His hand and He slapped me with these letters on my head. On coming back to Girinagar, Swami Gopala Baba smiled and said: 'I told you.'

There is a link between Swami and Baba. You can see Baba in our Swami.'

What would you like to tell others about Swami?

'He is not regular like us. He is Divine. Baba and Swami are the same. There is no need for doubts and questions. If you have His blessing, nothing will happen to you. I have a heart problem and was in the ambulance. My wife was crying. I told her: "No worry, Swami is

there.” My friends told me: “What guts you have”... but I am happy and have no fear.

Even when you know, you will die? I asked Prabhu.

‘If I have to leave, my time has come. Why fear?’ Swami was in Andhra Pradesh at the time, for the statues for the new ashram in Nidaghatta, and my wife called Him on the phone for help. Swami consoled her by telling: ‘Don’t worry, nothing will happen. I am with him, always.’

We used to go to so many places with Swami. Those times have come to an end. Nowadays we only go to the Subramania Temple in Palani Tamil Nadu.

Swami has done so much seva. He has initiated medical camps and has fed the cats and dogs. He is so much against killing animals.’

After this interview, I was left in awe and wonder. I felt grateful to spend time with these ‘tigers of devotion’ around Swami. This is what sathsang is about. These devotees are steadfast in their faith in God and in their guru.

In this vast universe, ‘I’ am the only one safe. Rest in this ‘I’ principle.

- Linda -



GOD AND GARLANDS

- By Linda -

In November 2016, Prashanti and I boarded the plane to Bengaluru. We couldn't travel together with **Keteesh**, Archana and Yvonne, but we knew that we would reach the dispensary at about the same time as they would, although their plane would arrive a little later at the airport. After arrival we had planned to wait some time before taking a taxi, so that we wouldn't disturb anyone before dawn. We entered our plane and while searching for our seats, we heard somebody calling our names. I looked around and saw a bright smile on the face of Keteeshwary Thayaparan and Archana, and a few places behind her I noticed Yvonne. They were in the same plane! All the time Keteesh had been thinking that they would be departing two hours later than we would and she had communicated this information to us. So, we were all taken by surprise to see that we were on the same flight. Actually, I didn't know Keteesh very well, apart from the few times I had seen her in Onderdijk. I remember that she had taught us patiently how to make a beautiful garland of flowers, just the way I had always wished to make one. And I knew that she was one of those devotees who skilfully decorated the statues in the Mandir every week. That was all I knew about this remarkably kind and humble lady. During our stay at the dispensary in Bangalore where we spent the first few days together and in our mutual hotel in Maddur, I discovered what an extraordinary kind and devotional lady she was. That made me curious about her life story and so I invited her for an interview. She agreed with one of her bright smiles.

What does God mean to you?

'God is everything!' was her immediate and straightforward answer.

What kind of relationship do you have with God?

'It is more like a friendship now. With God in the forms of Devi and Krishna, I didn't have this feeling of friendship, but I do feel it with the guru: with both Shirdi and Gopala Baba. I also fight with them, for if you really love someone, there is also room for a fight.'

And what specifically is Swami's role here, compared to the role of Shirdi Sai Baba?

'Sometimes I feel a lot of respect. He is not only a friend, but He is father, mother, friend and teacher. A spiritual teacher. For me Shirdi Baba is the stern or strict master. Swami doesn't give any rules. If Swami wants to give me rules, He does that in the form of Shirdi. He sends me messages in the form of Shirdi.'

Could you explain to me what you mean by these messages?

'In the form of those thoughts of the day. Last year, at home I was in tears. I felt all alone. I opened the website of Shirdi Sai Baba, and the message of that day was: *Why these tears? You have so many dreams. You are not alone. I am here for you.* I receive many messages through words. One of these messages was that I had to keep quiet when people gossip about me. I said to myself: *Why do I have to keep quiet?* There was a lot of gossip going on about me at the time. For three days I had stopped doing puja, for I wanted Swami to help me in this situation. I felt unworthy of worshipping because of the gossip. I wanted to simply donate the money which I normally spent on flowers, instead of making the malas. Then I got this message through the Shirdi Sai website; *This is an exam for you. You have to make it yourself. I cannot write your exam, so I cannot help you here. Give all your problems to Me. You just need some rest.*

Kannaiah sensed that something was going on inside of me and he explained that these things are part of the spiritual journey. Then I got the message: *I never stop halfway.* I concluded that even I couldn't stop halfway. So, I resumed my task.

The first time I met Swami was in 2014, when He came to Holland. I fell silent when He said in my native tongue: "Oh, devotees from Sri Lanka!"

While I was grating coconut, Swami called me and said that the world was an illusion and I should focus on Lord Shiva. Back in the car, I could only cry like a baby and I didn't know why. I thought that maybe I was a bad person, because I cried so much. But Kannaiah explained that I was simply touched in the heart.'

You somehow invited or allowed Swami in your life. Why do you think He is there?

'Swami entered my life spontaneously. I didn't know anything about gurus. We were visitors of the temple in Onderdijk because of Shiva. I really love puja.'

Can you experience Swami's influence in your life since He is there?

'Everything has changed. I don't watch television series anymore. I don't even feel like it. Not that Swami has said anything about that. I make malas every Thursday. No one asked me to do that. It was my wish. I sing songs all day long, starting with Suprabatam in the morning till 'sleep well Swami' in the evening. My complete lifestyle and character have changed. I am quieter, read more. I like the search. Thank you, Swami.'

Your pure heart is my home

- Linda -





SINGING MY WAY TO GOD

- By Linda -

Anjali Hoskote, her sisters Jyoti and Ranjana and I were sitting on their beds in their hotel room in Maddur. That morning I had an interview date with Anjali while we were visiting the Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram for the 91st birthday celebration of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. What started as an interview with Anjali, turned out to be a beautiful sathsang with three sisters; a lot of sharing, understanding and laughter. Although our topics were serious and tears were welcome, we were able to view things from a greater perspective and had a heartily laugh now and then. After a couple of hours thus spent in unity and understanding, there were still questions left to be answered and we had to make a new appointment in the evening. Even then, we had so much left to talk about that I had to contact Anjali when I was back in Holland.

For Anjali it was difficult to find words to express what God meant for her. She explained that it was something that changed over the years and was still in process.

'I still have not found God,' she said sadly. 'There was Sathya Sai Baba since childhood. Then Gopala Baba entered her life. Tears used to come automatically by the mere glance at Sathya Sai or Gopala Baba.

But then, something unexpected happened. Dr. Kutar, who was one of the members of the Bombay GKS family, turned out to be a wise spiritual teacher himself. People started to follow his teachings. That resulted in some confusion for Anjali. In the ten years she had visited him, Dr. Kutar gave her the many answers she had been looking for. He spoke about Advaita and cleared many doubts. But Anjali felt torn

between Dr. Kutar and Swami Gopal Baba. Following two different paths was confusing. In this struggle, Dr. Kutar set her free, telling her that what had to be given was already given and that nobody could really give to her what she was searching for.

Dr. Kutar said: "You have touched everybody's feet, but you have to be able to touch your own feet. So, you don't need to come here."

Anjali heaved a big sigh when she said:

'We try to find answers outside. We keep on running till we get tired,' and she continued after a short pause: 'Maybe I am not yet tired enough. I don't understand where I am, and I even don't know why I am here. I come here (in the ashram) to keep myself going. To stay on the right track. But I am so critical about myself. I lack focus and I used to be so much focused. I am so sick of the mind that I use the television to relax.'

Gourang, Anjali's husband and a spiritually very developed being, said: 'Have faith. He has chosen you. He is not a fool. You might be a fool, but He is not.'

'Everybody has a vacuum inside. This has to be opened with a slap. So intense that the ego never comes back, maybe we don't want that. Dr. Kutar's advice was: "Take your time. You have to be able to put your neck on the line." It is not easy to get that. You keep going until you get tired. We have to pay a price, you know, because we are asking for the highest.'

So, Anjali kept going. Trying to follow her own spiritual path. Singing used to give her so much bliss and raised her energy.

But she searched in herself for vanity:

'I even stopped singing to test myself if there was ego involved. But I felt OK even when I didn't sing, so I concluded that at least I had no ego issue here. This was somewhat of a relief. But even singing in front of Swami seemed to have lost its charm.'

The four of us discussed how we were first driven by all the spiritual desires we had. We wanted Swami's special attention, we wanted divine dreams, sari's, front rows, etc. Now that Swami had fulfilled all our dreams, we felt like being in a vacuum between the first puppy love and the seemingly far state of self-realization.

I could recognize myself in all these feelings of hopelessness, self-criticism and restlessness. I am often in a similar hopeless mindset. Swami Gopala Krishna once said: 'Just before the water is cooked, it dances in the vessel.' I guess this applies also here.

Anjali continued:

'Gourang helps me a lot. His energy frequency is higher than mine.' 'Then there is nothing much you have to do in order to reach what you want. For energy is contagious. So, just being in His energy will raise your energy level,' I suggested.

'Even Dr. Kutar said: "Just sit with Gourang and the light in him will jump on you." I even asked Gourang: "What should I ask Swami this visit?" Gourang replied: "Just faith and focus are necessary. In the silence you'll get the answer." So this is the advice I try to follow.'

What is helpful for you to get back your focus?

'Dr. Kutar told me to simply sit for half an hour. Just sit. One time I sat, and I felt extremely sleepy. When I got up, forty-five minutes had passed. I had not even heard the bell of the baker beneath the window where I was sitting. Normally I would never miss that. I really can't explain this, for it was not a normal deep sleep. It was as if I had not slept at all, therefore I couldn't believe that forty-five minutes had passed until others told me that I had missed that bell. Gourang used to try to explain to me about this kind of special yogi sleep and he would say: "I sleep and wake up." But I would protest: "Everybody sleeps and wakes up!" But now I know what he meant. This is a

different kind of sleep. It is like you didn't sleep at all and you simply got up.'

This was an unforgettable divine experience for Anjali. We discussed how others might not understand or appreciate our experiences, but no one can take them away from us.

What else is helpful for you?

'Nowadays I say to myself, it is OK. I pamper my mind and say that I am a good person. I remember counting my blessings.'

So, Anjali was following all the ways that will lead to the sea of Universal Spirit as subscribed by Sathya Sai. She was in good company; she was engaged in work that elevates the soul and she was singing Gods name. Still she felt unfulfilled about not having reached her destination. Dr. Kutar said: 'It is like a seed under the soil. It is already growing but not yet visible.'

Arriving at this point in our interview/sathsang, we had to go back to the ashram. Keeping in mind that Anjali was wondering why she had come to Swami this time, I pondered the situation. Somehow, even her singing had been blocked this day, for the microphone at the lady's side had failed. It felt like she was a bit depressed and uncomfortable and the outer situation reflected the inner state of mind. This is a common thing for devotees to experience in the presence of the Guru. Everything that obscures the bright light of the soul will come up to be brushed clean in Swami's divine washing machine. What kind of detergent will be used is always a surprise. I had the feeling that after this evening's program, Anjali wouldn't be the same. I don't know where this feeling came from. A very special and dramatic ceremony was being performed that night at the kurda in the ashram. It was the completion of a great yagna, held earlier in that year. We were standing around the water of the kurda, watching and enjoying the abundant amount of little jyotis that were lit by the boys. Swami was

performing the puja and looked at Anjali on his left, who was standing a few metres away from Him. Swami called her to assist Him, but she didn't hear it. He called a second time and then she heard it and hurried towards Him. Out of so many people, He selected only her to help Him perform the puja! She was surprised but felt elated. After this beautiful happening we continued our conversation in the hotel. Her face glowing with radiance she was a completely different Anjali indeed.

What does your relationship with Swami look like?

'I am still fighting Him', she had to admit. But it was nothing compared to a few years ago in Bangalore when she was in a real emotional and fighting mood. Even Swami said jokingly, *She is mad*. Nowadays Anjali doesn't ask any questions anymore, confident that Swami knows what is going on in her mind.

Why do you think that Swami Gopal Baba came into your life? Was there an inner invitation or maybe a desire for a personal guru?

'When I was eight years old, I used to be very close to Sathya Sai. I had so many expectations. I wanted to be a lead singer and I wanted vibhuti from Him. I wanted to have a proof of my devotion and these outer things seemed like an acknowledgement. One day I asked Swami Gopala Baba about why people get vibhuti and then still misbehave themselves. This seemed strange to me.

Swami said: "Prapti", which means destiny.

Then He said: "Do you also want vibhuti?"

But He didn't give me any that time.

Later He came to our house in 1998. We took Him in the room, and He materialized vibhuti for me and said: "Eat it." Herewith my wish was fulfilled. Now this time, I don't have an agenda with questions or desires. I feel that I am doing at least something to stay on the right track.'

We had to pause our interview again because it had become very late. I said goodbye to the three beautiful sisters and promised to call or write to Anjali, because the time had come that they had to leave for Bombay.

After coming back in Holland, I came across this text:

Come out of the well of ego into the sea of Universal Spirit, of which you are a part. Force your mind to breathe the grander atmosphere of the Eternal, by reminding it of God and His Glory, every second, with every breath, when you repeat any of His many names. Or engage yourself in some work, which will take you out of your narrow self into the vaster magnificence, where you dedicate the fruit of your actions (karma) to God, where you devote your time and energy to share your joy, skill or knowledge with your fellow-beings. Or keep yourself surrounded always by persons devoted to the higher life - those who will encourage you to move forward towards the goal. Through these means, attain Chitta Suddhi (purity of mind) and then the Truth will be reflected clearly therein.

Divine Discourse, 27 Mar 1966

Under this text, the following words of Sai Baba were written:

Doubt, despondency, and vanity are for the spiritual aspirant like the harmful planetary influences of Rahu and Kethu

These words impressed and helped me a lot because even I was in a phase of life that many doubts and feelings of despondency attacked me. Many questions and negative thoughts arose like: am I able to reach my goal? I don't think so. I haven't got what it takes to reach it. What will the future bring me? Will everything be only bad and worse hereafter? I see so much suffering around me and people who fall sick without being able to reach a positive mindset. We are getting older

too. Will our bodies and minds also get worse, unable to get the inner peace we are looking for in our spiritual journey?

Lucky for me, the days with Swami in November 2016 had given me much of my previously acquired peace back and this text helped me to transform my negative mindset back into a feeling of carefree trust. There is no better way to come out of doubts and hopelessness than to simply come out of it. To decide that it is another illusion and then open in the vastness of our true identity which is God.

The interview with Anjali had helped me to shine more light on my moods and thought patterns, because she had been honest enough to admit that she was going through many doubts about herself and her relationship with Swami.

Since I had not been able to conclude the interview in India due to a lack of time, I sent her a message in January 2017 with my last questions and asked her how she felt after her visit to Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram.

Can you recognize Swami's influence in your life, since you have known Him?

Anjali wrote back: 'I know Swami since childhood because my parents were devotees. If you ask me about His influence in my life: I kept learning things from Him in the beginning. As a child, I was fascinated by His miracles. I had the feeling that Swami meant miracles. But slowly I learned that there was more to it and the greatest miracle was Love. Unconditional Love. If you ask me whether I know Swami, I must say that it is difficult to answer that. It is like the blindfolded people who try to fathom the elephant and all of them give a different description. Till today I would say that I still cannot understand Him because God cannot be defined. Each one believes according to his own experiences. Even after so many years I have not fully understood Him, because I think that I am still blindfolded. We can talk about Him only when we know ourselves.'

What development do you see in your life since you have known Him?

'My belief system has kept changing over the years and I am still in the mode of *neti neti*.'

Can you give me an example of how your belief system has changed?

'Yes, I actually believed that I would find my answers outside but now I know that the answers to my questions lie within.'

What specifically did you learn during this visit to Swami?

'That is exactly what I learned during my last visit. That the answers lie within and that it is not to look for any gain but just to enjoy the Presence and if possible, to carry it along with you.'

What would you like to tell others about Swami?

On my own initiative, I don't talk to others about Swami. If somebody asks me about Him, I can only say that no matter how many things I tell about Him, you have to experience Him to find out what cannot be spoken.'

I thanked Anjali from the bottom of my heart and thanked even the mobile phones that make it so easy nowadays to communicate from this immense distance. It is like finding God in the heart: all distances fall away.

That which has not been achieved is reached

- Linda -



SERVICE TO THE DIVINE

- By Linda -

B. R. Sri Hari and I have known each other for many years. He was seventy-eight years old when I took this interview. He is married to Srimati Lakshmi, a kind and loving lady, and they have two sons, Rishikesh and Kumar. Sri Hari has a degree in Industrial Engineering, he worked in Jet Air manufacturing and came to the UK. He was head of the department of Industrial Engineering since 1956 and left in 1990. He is teaching management nowadays but interrupts this activity often to serve Swami although his students ask him to come back to Bangalore. To serve at the 91st birthday celebration of Sri Satya Sai Baba in Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram, he temporarily locked his house in Bangalore.

Sri Hari, his wife and one of their sons occupied the room next to Prashanti's and mine in the Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram in Nidaghatta. When he passed by our door, I asked him if he would be willing to grant me an interview. During our little casual chat outside our room, he gave me so much information already, I could hardly remember it all. Not having my voice-recorder at hand, I tried hard to listen carefully, for I didn't want to ask him later to repeat everything. A few days later, we met in front of the Mandir and the same thing happened. So, here is what I have remembered.

Sri Hari met Swami Poornananda Thirtha when he was twenty-one years old and became His disciple. This Swami got enlightenment by spending ten years of his life in the Himalayas. He taught him so much wisdom. One day he talked about how it is to die and explained the process in detail.

'Not many People showed up that day,' Sri Hari said smilingly. And the ones who were there cried when they heard these truths about dying where the normal mind doesn't want to think about it in advance. People would rather avoid it. But Sri Hari understood the teachings. He sees that people pray for a peaceful death. But he realises that we cannot place an order because karma is involved. The only thing that we can try is to live a dharmic life and follow the advises of the great ones.

Being completely occupied by his job, he didn't have much time to think about anything else. His wife Lakshmi took care of his parents and everything else, like the household, the education of the children, etc.

‘Without her I would have been begging on the street.’ he said, and he meant it.

Unfortunately, his guru who guided him so wisely, passed away at an early age. Grace decided that Sri Hari came in contact with Sri Satguru Sai Shankar; a living Saint who once was a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. This saint had His ashram in Ponnampet where spiritual activities like bhajans, sathsangs and personal guidance of devotees were going on, alongside Seva projects for the community in and around the village. Sai Shankar initiated another project in Sriramanahalli, supporting eight villages with food, vocational training, free schooling and spiritual education. Even medical camps were organized. With this the People's Trust was founded, and Sai Shankar was the inspiration and guide of the managing trustee. The People's Trust had its office in Bangalore where Sri Hari offered his assistance. It is there where I met him in 1991, being myself associated with the People's Trust in those days. Together we have roamed around Bangalore to buy silk and yarn for the small trust that I had founded in Holland to support the People's Trust India.

In later years, when People's Trust activities were not necessary anymore in the same form, because a lot of them were taken over by the government, we met in Girinagar where Sri Hari had picked up several tasks in support of the work of Swami Sri Gopal Baba. Having had the guidance of two great masters already, being with Swami Gopal Baba was a means to simply continue his spiritual journey, rather than getting teachings upon teachings.

'There is a time that teachings come to an end but practicing them shouldn't come to a close until the goal is reached,' he explained. Therefore, Sri Hari lives as close as possible to the One who can inspire him to stay on the right track. 'It is all about lifelong teaching. If you learn how to drive a car, you don't stop when you are forty. It is lifelong.



People might change with one blow. I know a man; he was my wife's cousin and he was a big shot. Big job, big attitude, big money. His father was an internationally renowned poet. He never used to look at me when he saw me. He just ignored me. One day me and my wife saw a man and I asked her; *Isn't that your uncle's son?* We were not sure, but he looked like him. When we walked away, this man called me by my name. It was him. I couldn't be more surprised when he started talking to me, so I asked him what had happened. It appeared that he had gone through a serious illness which had affected half of his body. He told that only one half of him was the old person that he originally was, the rest had completely changed. He was completely deaf, and one could only communicate with him by writing. He started to write many spiritual books and his life and attitude changed completely.' Sri Hari and his wife were very impressed by the entire change in her cousin's attitude.

Sri Hari told me a comical, yet powerful incident. One day, a bull came into their street in Bangalore. To everyone's surprise, the bull entered the small hall of their house. They offered the bull some rupees, since cows are sacred, but it was never enough. They increased the amount all the time, but the bull didn't want to move. Not until they had given him four-thousand rupees, he made a heroic turn in the small hall and left. Sri Hari's house was the only house the bull entered. He left the street straight away.

I didn't get the chance to ask Sri Hari all my questions, but having listened intensely to his words, I was not left with the feeling that something was left to be said. His life, as well as his wife's, was a living example of divinity. They did their duties during their younger years and lived their present days exemplary for all devotees: in constant service to the Divine and remembering Him all the time. He didn't pretend holiness and admitted all his flaws of character but was ever keen on staying on the right track all the time.

May Gods feet touch you in all its Divinity

- Linda -



THE MADNESS OF THE TRUST IS THE ULTIMATE WISDOM

- By Linda -

In January 2017, I had a Messenger-chat with **Carole Emaer (Lalita)**. In the few times that I had met her in France and later in India, she had made a strong impression on me. Her face was glowing with serene peace, which she herself probably didn't even notice. Her features were so harmonious and her total appearance astonishing in a simple and elegant way. Strange enough I had the same motherly feelings for her as I had for Diana, daughter of Marco Del Nero. During our chat I suddenly asked her if she would be willing to write down her impressive story for the world to know. Very soon, I received the answer to my question. It was a wholehearted yes. Interviewing her personally would be a bit difficult because of the language problem, so we decided she would write down her story in her mother tongue and then translate it and I would help her with the translation.

I was moved to tears when I read it and amazed by the authenticity, the honesty and the positive vibe of her narration. Read it for yourself:

'It is a real honour for me to bear this testimony, because sharing our life's experiences - each one so different from the other - seems like a worthy activity to me. And God knows that it is a work of consciousness and open-mindedness. My journey is a little complicated, but it is necessary for me to explain my life story and its turbulences without taboos, and from the heart.

I was born in northern France, into a catholic family, but not very practicing. All of the siblings; my brother, my sisters and me were baptized. We followed the catechism and did our communion, but we were not forced to go to the church regularly. As for me, a girl already, I did neither manage to understand religion nor did I understand the use of it. Later on, I was not able to abide by the catechism anymore. I was not interested in the contents of the Bible. And the places of

worship such as churches and chapels seemed cold and without cheerfulness to me. I received the teachings of the Bible to please the family. These teaching were as a constraint as I wasn't able to get any benefit out of it for myself, because it didn't provide me with the answers to my existential questions. To be honest - and with my consciousness of that time - I did not understand why there was so much misery on earth in the form of wars, suffering and diseases and it was impossible for me to hear people say that God was watching over us, while on the other hand innocents were starving to death. My mother, who had suffered the loss of her brother at a young age and under dramatic conditions, was only strengthening my doubt and so I was constantly in search for answers.

Who is God?

I was told that He was a friendly being; that He was able to listen to - and answer our prayers, performing miracles now and then but I had never got proof of His existence.

The adolescent crisis made me start asserting myself and I felt anger towards religion. Very soon, I decided to take a radical position and cut completely with religion, because I failed to understand why it was 'necessary' to prefer one form above the other.

When I met my future husband at the age of sixteen - he was twenty then - he simply announced that he was affected by a genetic disease with a remaining life expectancy of fifteen to thirty years. I couldn't believe that a person so sweet, affectionate and generous like him, could be so sick. It only strengthened my rebellion against God.

Shortly afterwards, he had his first organ transplant. The conditions were more than tense, but fortunately the operation succeeded, and he reappeared in better shape than before. By then, I realised that my feelings for him were more than those of a strong friendship. In my

heart of hearts, I knew that something else was in store for us. Isn't it surprising that we can have feelings for a person with such a fragile health? On further inquiry, I found that this disease implied increasing amounts of days in hospital, more and more intense care, daily inconveniences, painful events and an impossibility to start a family.

Everything could have made me question my feelings or my commitment, giving me the desire to run away, but none of that happened. Instead, I listened to my heart for my decision and despite everything, I engaged in this happiness, while trusting in my destiny. It was almost as if someone invisibly supported me in these trials. I knew that love was there anyway, stronger than anything. I knew that my willpower would enable me to support him and help him carry on. Not thinking about the future, allowing life to carry us and living in intense, unconditional love in the present moment; that is how we had decided to live.

David, being raised in a very Catholic family, brought up the question of the choice between a religious or a civil wedding. At first, it was out of the question for me to marry in church. I thought that I had made my decision and that I would not change my opinion about it. Until I started dreaming - several times in a row - which perturbed me a lot. In my dream, my father brought me to the altar, proud, touched, full of joy. Then, I realised that I was going to disappoint my family, my husband's family and my father, for whom this religious act would be very important. I felt that I would surely regret it afterwards. We therefore got married in church.

Having had these dreams, questions arose in me, like, who had brought me these messages? What was the power that made me change my mind? All these small signs of life made me smile. Having already lived and seen mysterious and more or less unexplainable things, I was very open and sensitive to the small signs, the messages,

the intuitions, the dreams. For me, there was no hazard, and it helped me a lot to understand and make radical decisions sometimes. For some people, my points of view might have seemed like madness, but I always trusted in my good star. But who was this star?

Faith in my destiny brought me to make important life's choices, at first on the personal level, then on the professional level, with more or less tight curves like changes of orientation. That for sure all contributed to the person who I am now and built my character, my personality and my way of thinking.

One day, exhausted by my job, the public and the difficult conditions, I felt that I had to turn directions. Despite the predictable financial consequences, I decided to stop my studies and create my beauty- and wellness centre; to dedicate myself completely to the care of others, in peace and serenity. It was a real challenge, but it opened a new door for me, and it allowed me to meet those who were going to change my life and my vision.

In my beauty centre, I met extraordinary people. One of them was Pascaline. We soon became friends and very close ones, too. Our conversations within my treatment room were full of energy and in a natural way we started talking about the values of life, spirituality and love. Today I would call her my spiritual sister and we know that we met to evolve on the same path.

One day, a customer named Soriane arrived, and I felt such an imposing presence in her, like a spiritual strength, and wanted to know with eagerness, from where she got all her values and this unearthly serenity that I desired so much. The friendship with Soriane and her husband Nhemten strengthened; our conversations deepened, and the day came when she spoke to me about India. I can still feel this whirlwind in my whole body when she pronounced the word India.

Enthusiasm, curiosity, admiration, I wanted to know every detail and more. To me, India seemed like a country so spiritual, that it became almost inaccessible. Gradually, Soriane spoke to me about Sathya Sai Baba. She and her husband had met Him while He was still in His body. They were the leaders of the France GKS family and had taken the whole group to India several times.

Next, they told me about Swami Gopal Baba. I asked her a question, but had some problem understanding all the information about an avatar, being the embodiment of the divine. Considering myself as already lost, I had trouble grasping this idea, but nevertheless, I had the desire to understand. Something inside told me that I had to trust her; that our roads had not crossed by coincidence and that she was going to teach me many things, as a guide on my path! Being on the path of spiritual development and willing to increase my sensory, intuitive capabilities, I agreed to try and follow the Jérusalem Céleste, a technique of clarification that results in transformation and development. The contents of the program corresponded completely with my need for knowledge, but the problem was in the name of the program, Jérusalem Céleste. The words lean on the text of Saint Jean's Apocalypse. Expressing my doubts to Soriane, I explained to her: "It is impossible for me to believe in a particular God, nor to adhere to a single religion, because for me, I believe in universal love, the forces of nature, the simplicity of life itself."

Soriane answered me with a little smile: "Then, you are on the path of light, you found the real religion, the religion of Love." And so, I decided to join the group. It didn't take long before I started noticing changes in myself and in my environment, because every month, we experienced somewhat strange and more or less intense disturbances, at the emotional, evolutional, and at the thought level, and even at the physical level. The most amazing was that my husband, who did not attend the program, simultaneously experienced what we felt, while

sitting at home. We thus became aware that it really worked, and that enabled us to progress on our spiritual quest every month.

At first, I had difficulty to listen to stories about God, but gradually, I was able to link my experiences with the textual contents of what we studied and thereby I was confronted with the fact that the truth and the virtual reality both were a proof of an existence far beyond our abilities. As a result, we opened slowly but steadily in the mystery of spirituality, and subsequently to energy techniques for healing and relief. I seemed to be gifted in transmitting the Energy of Life, originating directly from Baba, and we were very interested in holistic techniques for healing the body, soul and spirit. Due to Soriane and her work on karma, we knew how to analyse troublesome events in our lives, how to approach them and accept the fact that they were there to purify us and free us for the lives to come.

The Jérusalem Céleste and the various working techniques, always refer to our dear saints of India. I was interested mostly in Swami Gopal Baba, which was the simplest for me, for He is still in the body. I had a particular interest in Him, because several times in a row, I had been able to perceive His presence energetically. I felt that I had to meet Him not only for myself, but also for my husband, for whom the living conditions were increasingly difficult. In the process of understanding and accepting gradually that Swami was a divine incarnation possessing divine energy, I was able to make my husband aware of it as well.

In August 2014, we had the opportunity to join our friends of the French GKS group on a visit to Swami who had come to Holland. The conditions were a little risky for us to leave France. My husband was on a waiting list again. This time for a double transplant. He needed oxygen twenty-four hours a day, and had difficulty moving because of a medicinal neuropathy. Nevertheless, we decided to have faith one

more time, and to take the road, with all the medical load. Anyway, if Swami was to see us, He would help us to reach there.

Was it still madness? No, of course not, because this special day completely changed our perception as well as our lives. We received such a shower of energy and exclusive attention from Swami that it left us both completely transformed.

As soon as Swami arrived in the hall, David asked inside for help. Swami turned to him and they exchanged a look, so deep, that I burst into tears. Swami and David communicated with the eyes. Swami laid His hand on David's chest for an instant and told him that He would give him vibhuti. At that moment, my husband realised that Swami knew everything.

What a day this was. We were carried by the energy that was in the hall, the atmosphere created by the bhajans and the shower of love. At the end of the ceremony, while distributing prasad, Swami questioned my husband about health details that no one could have known. We were completely taken by surprise about His ability to fathom us. He made us sit in front of Him and massaged David's loins. He gave vibhuti that He blessed by keeping it close to His heart. Then He addressed me and gave instructions to apply it every night in order for the medical records to get better. This day was such an intense experience for us, not only due to Swami's special attention but to the love that prevailed in the room and the wonderful people we met there, as well.

Revitalized, hopeful and with bhajans still reverberating in our minds, the return journey passed without tiredness. Which was a surprise. There were many questions: *how could Swami have the capacity of reading people's minds and hearts and know everything about them?* We started realizing that a truly divine gift had been offered to us.

From that day onwards, I applied Swami's instructions to the letter. Every night, for several months in a row, I applied vibhuti on my husband's body and gave him some life's energy while connecting with Swami. Gradually and to the surprise of the people around us, David started feeling better, he regained strength, made great psychomotor progress, was more dynamic, regained weight, improved his breathing, and started driving again. What a present Swami had given to David; a new impetus and a renewed energy. Everything evolved well, until the day when doctors decided to do a 'little' surgical operation. We felt that it was not the right moment, but what to do and what to say when one's health is in the hands of doctors? How to explain to them that our feeling was clear that this moment was not favourable?

As a result, from this intervention, David had several lung infections, he weakened a lot, lost strengths from day to day. His schedule was no more than a chain of homecare, days at the hospital, medical examinations and more and more heavy treatments. Since there were no taboos between us, and since I always favoured open communication so that he was not alone with his thoughts, one evening, we mentioned the topic of death. Although it was obviously very emotional, this discussion only strengthened our love and our strong connection of trust. It was out of the question to think that it could really happen. It was necessary for us to live in confidence all the time. And to have faith in the help that was given to us. This time, we had to carry on and believe in our projects.

One day, finally, David was called to Paris for his transplant. We left full of confidence, but as I knew him by heart, I felt that he had a bad premonition. This proved to be true. The intervention went badly and his chances for survival were very limited. I then asked Swami for help through his close devotees and followed His instructions of prayer and application of vibhuti every day. To everybody's surprise, David's

condition started improving again. As for the doctors, who didn't have much faith in his recovery, it was a miracle. I remember having a conversation with an inquisitive doctor, and I told him that I believed in miracles, and that I kept faith and trust.

Baba's and Swami's picture - the one with the lingam that He had advised me - were hanging on the wall of the hospital room. It didn't matter to us what doctors and visitors thought of it; what mattered were the results. During the six months in the hospital, the daily vibhuti massages, the songs, mantras and energy of life helped my husband to overcome the long chain of trials. But these became more and more exhausting for the physical body, until the day when the painful diagnosis fell.

I lost my husband on the 14th of October, 2015. He was only thirty-seven years old.

At that point, everything collapsed: my hope, my faith, my belief in my techniques and in Swami's support. I felt abandoned, helpless, and could not believe that all our efforts and all our hopes, had only led us to failure, because every day I had clung to the hope of the expected miracle. I admit that I have thought that finishing my own life might be a way to free myself from suffering. It was only my good fortune that Soriane understood what I was going through and intervened at the right time. She made me understand that the solution was not in the direction of abandoning my problems. The solution was in accepting the challenge that my soul had chosen in my previous lives and in this one. I then took several sessions from her, and gradually started accepting the reality. Instead of abandoning my life I abandoned the idea of taking it. When I sent a message to Swami, asking Him for an explanation, He answered me: "God can do nothing against the will of the soul."

I understood that my husband had decided to leave. The repetitive medical interventions had become too hard to bear, and he knew that his future would always be difficult.

All of this allowed me to understand, to accept, and to resume the desire to fight. This time it was a fight for a better life for myself.

I took time to refocus. Books that helped me to get through my period of grieving crossed my path. They were of great comfort to me. My close friends, my family and my in-laws were very present, loving and caring. It is in these attentions, this loving care and these words that we feel the presence and the comfort of God's Love. Friendship and Love are God's presents!

I know that if I had not been in the hands of God, I wouldn't have received all this help when I needed it most. First of all, His Grace had given me the ability to be strong when my husband needed it. It had given me the abundant energy for all the necessary extra work and for the trips to Paris, to spend time by his side for six months, not to forget the follow-up in the hospital. And then it gave me the strength to recover and move on after his departure.

Little by little I came to know how to understand Swami, realising what He had done for us, and understanding that he was not responsible for my husband's death. After all, I had known from the very first moment I engaged in this story, that one day it would end this way. Even though I was in denial. Everybody knows that God cannot give eternal life to anybody. In this way I regained grip over my life, I got back to work, faced other people's opinion and abided by my faith. Every day I said to myself, whatever happens, it is just the way it is. I went back to the satsang gatherings with my spiritual GKS family and bathed in the ever-growing energy of Swami.

Those around me were amazed at how I was able to get over it so well, but I knew that I was never alone. I was definitely guided to overcome difficulties. I felt this as a certainty, and it was affirmed several times.

The work on myself made me aware that death was not a failure, but rather a liberation. For several months, I could feel Swami's eyes on me, knowing that He never left me, although I couldn't see or speak to Him, I felt His understanding and somehow, I felt He was waiting.

One day, the subject of traveling to India came up. It was scheduled for November 2016. After a few moments of reflection, it was obvious that I had to participate. I had to see Swami again. I had to go and see Him in the form, to look Him in the eyes and to receive His own answers. It was the only way to end my resentment. Before the departure for India, I was a bit disturbed. I knew that I was about to go through moments of intense emotions there, and I hoped that the dose wouldn't be too strong.

Curiously, as soon as I set foot in India, I felt so good, I had the impression of a healing. It was as if I knew, or rather recognized the places. I had no jet lag, not even needed adjustment time, whether it was for the difference in the rhythm of life or for the food. On the contrary, all this delighted me. It was as if things were set up to make this journey the sweetest possible.

On arrival at the Ashram, I sat on the Mandir floor and addressed Swami inside; Swami, you know why I am here, it would be great if I could see You today. Five minutes later, we were called because Swami was going to welcome us! Now I knew that He had heard me. From the moment I saw Him, His radiant face, shining with light, I felt such a love filling my heart, such relief and happiness of being at His feet and an immediate forgiveness. With each bite of the delicious prasad blessed and offered by Swami, I felt such an energy travelling through my body that it felt like my cells were sparkling. I told my friends around me, and in a fraction of a second, I burst into tears. I could not contain myself. I expected this reaction at Swami's feet, but not that much. Immediately, one of Swami's devotees asked me what

I wanted, and I explained him that I wanted answers concerning my husband and my future. Swami said that He would have His answer passed to me and it came the same evening.

At first, His message caused me some pain. I was asked to leave the past, to stop focusing on my husband, to accept the separation of our paths. Then, I became aware that this severe pain was still anchored in me and that Swami had chosen to use these words to make me react. Stronger yet, it felt like an agreement between Swami and me. The spontaneous attention upon my arrival allowed me to immediately release the sorrow that had run away with me, and the feelings which disrupted my development.

Surprising myself, I allowed all the tears and pain to come up that evening and I knew that I was experiencing a full clean-up. The next morning, I felt completely serene. Released of a heavy weight, I even felt joyful. I was amazed how I could feel so well, while only one day before I was in utter distress. The answer was simple, nothing is surprising when we are in Swami's hands. I knew by the exchange of a magnificent smile and an intense and deep look during the evening of Sathya Sai Baba's birthday-celebration, that Swami was pleased to see me happy. He congratulated me, and I was filled with joy. Every day spent in the ashram was one of pure happiness, lived in Divine Love, serenity.

The day before our departure, I felt the desire to receive a spiritual name from Swami and ventured to make the request. In a way, it was like a renewed baptism.

Swami's name for me was Lalita. I was happy to receive the name of this goddess and the explanation of all its symbolism. One day, I was told that by receiving a name, Swami modified our energy. The same evening, I felt a huge energy shake-up in my whole body, in all my cells. At the time, I did not know how to explain what happened to me, but soon I understood that the energy of my new name was already active.

With hindsight, I realised all the changes Swami had brought in me in less than five days. I had forgiven Swami, I was released from the ties which held me and prevented me from moving forward, and I had received new energy which allowed me to feel like reborn. All of this happened in full awareness, acceptance, always in confidence, in love and joy. The return trip was a bit tearful for I did not want to leave India. It had felt like home. But I am sure I will come back in India because I feel with certainty that I still have to go through experiences there for my development process.

Ever since my return to France I feel fed by a new energy, an excitement. I feel more alive physically and emotionally. Somehow, a broader view has developed. In fact, this journey was a reconnection. Swami made me refocus and woke me up and this was essential for my realization. I am constantly bathing in the Indian energy and feel the need to stay in this beneficial atmosphere. I feel Swami's presence much more than before, and I know that He watches over me every day, all the time, because when I pray to Him, I get my answer. My daily life is lighter, I work with my customers with joy. Many seem to appreciate my points of view and my approach. Discussions are rich and deep. This fast change may be surprising in the eyes of people who know me, but what is obvious, is the fact that this new energy radiates to those around me.

Now, if I distance myself a bit from my story and all my real-life experience, I know that I was always in the hand of the Divine, even when I did not believe in Him, because He never turned away from me. It was only necessary for me to meet the right people at precisely the right moment, because when I was ready, Swami brought those who could help me, on my path. He heard my call and appeared.

For me, God is life and all that constitutes it in its entirety. God is love, compassion, happiness, truth. He shows us the path of knowledge. His

wish is to make us become aware of the real value of life and to help us proceed towards the light. He is always present by our side and shows Himself in every experience of our life. Those experiences are for our development. Let's not stop because of what we see or go through, because we cannot move forward by looking behind. We would risk getting lost or missing out on all the magnificence right where we are. Let us be simply conscious of the greatness of life, its meaning, its natural cycle, by knowing that death is just a part of it, and nothing happens by coincidence. All that we live, the people whom we meet, the messages that we receive, the small signs to notice, the small voice that guides us - or even saves us -, the flower that opens at the time of our grieving; they are all important messages when we broaden our perspective and search for the real meaning.

My relationship with religion changed for the better. I admit being interested in the wisdom of Buddhism, and attracted by Hinduism, because of its magnificent texts, messages and philosophy of life, and because of the splendour and flamboyance of the goddesses; every part of it seems to satisfy my own needs. But no matter what name we give to our religion or to God, each and every one will find his balance and his own progress towards peace, light and universal love by recognizing God's omnipresence in all. Swami Gopal Baba is a manifestation of divinity and the divine energy that emanates from Him can even be misleading sometimes. His actions, His capacity to read us and to react on our deeper needs for higher development is hardly understood from our level. It is useless to try to understand His ways with our minds but let us simply receive the grace of being in the close presence of the avatar. Swami always acts in the right way, even if it seems to be destabilizing or appears incomprehensible at that moment. He opens doors and works on us directly, He rectifies what is not correct, to help us progress and move forward. So, it cannot be a coincidence that I got closer to Linda right after my return from India. Isn't there a small divine game being played in her asking me if I would

be willing to write this testimony? Writing these chapters made me able to close a chapter for I had to stand back and analyse my own life.

If you still doubt the divine existence, then lend yourself to the game and try this: surrender completely, in complete peace, in the hands of Swami... trust Him and observe...

The madness of the Trust is the ultimate Wisdom...

A few moments after I finished writing this testimony, I could clearly smell a soft fragrance of vibhuti. I said to myself, this testimony has been blessed by Swami. Thank you, Swami!'

In the peace: here we are beyond hope and expectation. We live our life bravely, no matter what the outcome

- Linda -



MY PATH TO GOD

- By Linda -

My path to God is an ongoing process, from my childhood until now.

When I called **Nhemten** - initiator of the GKS centre in France - to kindly request him for an interview for this book, he asked me in return to send me the questions by mail, in order to be able to think about it carefully. The questions were too deep to answer on the phone and had to be taken in consideration with due respect. So, the answers below are completely written by him and left unchanged as much as possible.

What does God mean to you?

'When I was a child, my reference to God was just an idea coming from the Catholic church I belong to. When I was ten years old, I decided to become a priest and because of that I spent many periods of time in silence asking Jesus for His approval. The desired approval never came or was never heard by me. When I was sixteen years old, I fell in love with a girl and forgot all about becoming a priest.

Around the age of 25, I started asking myself questions about the church liturgy being the same for centuries. Will it be identical at the end of my life, from one Sunday mass to the next, with the same identical words for over two thousand years? Isn't there anything new to learn from Jesus after all this time? And I started searching in the biblical scriptures. It was difficult for me to relate to the Old Testament

and all these stories about wars, conquests of land, killing of people, all in the name of Jehovah or Yahweh! Thinking of the present times, in which we are overloaded with crimes in the name of God by terrorists, all this biblical violence confuses me a lot. Is this really what God meant for us? And I discovered that the gospels were written seventy years after the passing of Jesus and that they were not identical, with important differences from one bible to another, from one author to the other.

And above that, when I closely took the historical past of the Catholic church in consideration, I must admit the Christians made terrible mistakes and serious wrongdoings such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, the killing and burning of the French Cathars, the forceful conversion to the Catholic faith of original inhabitants of newly discovered countries like the Incas and American Indians. Not to mention the ways the Popes acted as kings interfering in the political arena, totally opposite to Jesus stating: *Give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar and to God what belongs to God.*

Finally, I rejected all the Church hierarchy, including the Pope, to focus only on my faith in Jesus which was always strong in me and in His teachings that I summarized in just three sentences which became 'my own Bible':

*But you have to be perfect
as your heavenly Father is perfect*

Matthew 5:48

*Love your God with all your heart, all your soul,
all your strength and all your mind*

Luke 10:27

Love your neighbour as yourself

Mark 12:31

And for years I stuck to that, believing that if I could apply these teachings on an everyday basis in my life I could come as close as possible to perfection, which is still my goal today.

But when I was around fifty years old, I made a true discovery, quite unexpectedly. That day in Paris, I was told there was a special meeting to celebrate the birthday of an Indian spiritual guide called Sathya Sai Baba. I only heard his name once from an American friend who had made a trip to India to see this mystical man. So out of curiosity I decided to know more about Him. During my lunch break I entered at the back of a huge hall filled with people sitting on the floor; ladies on the left side, men on the right. They were singing happily in a foreign language, and they seemed to be waiting for a guest because there was a big armchair empty in front of the room. After ten minutes I decided this was fine but not for me, and I respectfully and silently slipped out. At the entrance I saw some books and bought one of them just to learn something about this Indian guide with the strange name. The author of the book was Howard Murphet and the title, Man of Miracles.

After reading it I felt moved, but still full of doubts, because this man declared to be 'God incarnated in human form.' However, one year later, a friend of mine, Dominique, invited me to a presentation of this same Sathya Sai Baba. At the end of the evening she stated that she was planning to go to India in the coming year, on which I almost immediately raised my arm saying: "I will join this party!"

That was the beginning of the most memorable adventure in my entire life!

Next February as promised, we were among a French group of thirty-three people to spend two weeks in India, in two of Sai Baba's ashrams, situated in Puttaparthi and Whitefield. Baba used to walk among the hundreds of devotees twice a day, and we had to wait a long time in queue to be close to Him when He would pass by. I felt nothing particular until one day I decided to put Baba to the test. He used to say, He knew all about every one of us: our past, our present and even our own thoughts. So, one day alone in my room I asked Baba a question in my heart. I had just completed a year's course on minerals called 'Celestial Jerusalem', taught by my friend Dominique. My question was: do I have to attend a second year? Since I happened to carry an amethyst, the mineral of that month, I decided to simply show it to Baba to see if He would bless it, which would be my signal to take the second year's course. Three days later, I was in the front line... a perfect opportunity to show my mineral to Baba. During His darshan He walked opposite of me, crossed over to my side but a little away from me, and I thought: *too bad, not this time*.

But then, the incredible happened. Baba turned around, looked directly at the mineral in my hand and said clearly: "It's OK!"

I was flabbergasted! So it was true He could read my mind and give me the answer I was looking for... Mentally I still objected He did not really bless my mineral... but fortunately, the people around me were quick to make me understand what a fool I was, because whatever Baba's eyes fall upon, is blessed indeed! And in this way, I finally surrendered and started looking at Baba with a different mindset.

But there is more about God. One wonderful day - on the first of May 2000 in Whitefield - our group was chosen for the most desired and valuable gift: an interview with Sai Baba. The small room was crowded with us French people and as leader and translator of the group I stood

very close to Baba, with my friend Dominique at my side. Baba's first question was directed at me: "What do you want?" I just replied: "I want to see you Baba." Then Baba replied with a pleasant smile: "Oh, you want to see me, then it's done and so you can return to France!" Sure, everybody laughed when I translated His answer.

The second question He asked me was more serious: "Where is God?" I replied: "But everywhere Swami." He said: "No!" and pointing His arm to different people in our group He said: "God is here, here, and here...", and pointing His finger close to my heart He added forcefully: "And you too!" No need to say I never forgot this statement! Immediately after He made a small and quick movement with His right hand and at the top of His fingers emerged a shining ring with nine minerals. Swami showed it to me and asked me: "What is it?"

I answered: "Swami it is a ring, a gift..." But Swami said: "No, it is nine planets." And taking my left hand He put the ring on my ring finger... This memorable day is written in gold letters in my heart; not only Baba declared to me that I am God but seconds later and at less than a meter from my eyes, He created a beautiful ring specially for me.

From this day on, my relationship with Baba took a different direction: more personal, more intimate and much deeper. Step by step I became a real devotee with a special yearly seva commitment: to bring a group of people to Him from France. And with Dominique as co-leader we called it Baba O. 'O' stands for 'only' because our main goal was total focus on Baba, with no sightseeing trips, except visiting the saintly places in Puttaparthi, like the wish fulfilling tree, the Chitravathi River, the Samadhi of His parents, the Super Speciality Hospital; all the places linked closely to Baba.

Dominique and I had got married in the meantime and Baba once told her in a dream: *Do you both agree to come to me in India for six months?* Our immediate answer was: *Yes, Swami*. As you can guess, this memorable trip to India turned out to be a great adventure. Just choosing one meaningful event amongst many. We had actually both asked Baba for new names, because we didn't not like our Christian names. One night, Dominique got a dream about it. The new name that was given to her in the dream was *Soriane*. Fine. But since I didn't not want to wait for a dream, I decided to ask my own new name through my pendulum. And to our astonishment it was *Nhemten*. After ten days of adjustment to the vibrations of our new names, we went to Girinagar and asked Gopala Krishna Swami to bless them. And He just did. So, from that day on, we became known solely as *Nhemten and Soriane*.

Applying the teachings of Baba and Gopala Krishna Swami, I do my best to look at them and contact them in my heart. I try to live my everyday life by my faith in them, seeing Gopala Krishna Swami as One with Baba. When I have a question to Baba or to Gopala Krishna Swami, I use my pendulum which I received in Puttaparthi, during a course on 'a Baba tool' to heal the body, called Vibrionic. I still use it and even developed another 'divine tool', called 'Sairavib', to heal the soul under the inner guidance of Baba.

This is my personal path to God. Since Baba once said it directly to me, I am sure that I *am* God. I believe I have the same divine nature as He does, but I have to live accordingly every minute of my life to make His statement true. I truly mean it when I say that I am God but not with the same 'size' as Swami. My best way to describe my feelings are: if I

see Baba as an ocean of Light, I am a luminous wave, if Baba is a beach,
I am a grain of sand, if Baba is a tree, I am a leaf of that tree.'

After drinking the light, everything will be perfectly clear

- Linda -



THE FOUNDATION OF MY LIFE

- By Sita -

It is May 2017 and supposed to be a spring day, but the temperature is more like winter while **Bas Koot** and I walk outside with our dog. It should have been a pleasant walk in a park and talk with Bas about his experiences with Swami. With strong wind and cold rain lashing our faces it is kind of hard to connect with our memories but talking about Swami's love for creation brings the inspiration we need to connect with our hearts. And isn't life like this? We are not always walking in pleasant sunshine with a light cool breeze. It is not like we can sit all the time in our comfortable homes and still develop the qualities we need to fulfil our lives purpose. Seemingly dark periods in our lives give us the training we need to find our way.

I ask Bas what God means to him, and to my surprise he answers:

'To me God is trusting and surrendering.'

This is the first time someone answers this question with a verb, like God is not a goal to reach but more a way to live. Suddenly I realise that this is exactly what Bas always does. In the 20+ years I have known him, he is always in the front rows when help is needed and even after he had to quit his job for health reasons, he and his wife are still doing a lot of voluntary work. They are truly living a life full of compassion, quietly doing whatever is within their reach to make this world a better place.

Bas continues...

'To me surrendering doesn't mean you just sit quiet and leave everything to God. To me surrendering means you take responsibility for what is the right thing to do right at that moment. Right for you and right for the other. It is to take actions that flow from your heart.'

How do you know which action is right and which one is wrong? Bas answers in three words.

‘I feel it! Even as a teenager when my parents didn’t trust me, I simply said, I feel nothing wrong or bad in my decision, so I go for it. My heart always was my first guide. To me God is a way of living, not an object outside of me to be worshipped. It is a Force that is driving me. No showy stories just a silent Power within me.

Through some hard experiences and disappointments with people I became a bit narrow-minded. Then Swami appeared in my life, right in time, and His love opened my heart and mind, which was like a new birth to me. I feel I’m a totally different person than before I met Him. In a recent confrontation with death I felt so much faith in Him and through Him also in my wife, who sat next to me in the ambulance. I felt their loving care for me all around and inside, and even when I was on the edge of leaving my body, I felt no fear, not even a trace. There was just love. And... since I know Swami, I smile a lot more!’

We are leaving the rough spring weather for what it is and go with a wet dog into the car to drive back to the comfort of my home. With a hot cup of coffee Bas continues to tell me a few highlights of his most wonderful experiences with Swami.

‘When our youngest son Vincent ended his own life while suffering of severe depression, our prayers to Swami and feeling His loving presence around us, made everything just a little easier to bear. Of course, we were intensely sad but deep in our hearts we knew he was somewhere safe. We framed a beautiful picture of him and placed it on our altar next to Swami’s picture. We lighted candles and whenever we prayed to Swami, we always had a small conversation with Vincent too. It felt good to do that. Unfortunately, some people who noticed

our fervent prayers started to criticize us, telling us that our prayers would block our son's journey in the afterlife. What had felt good to us suddenly became something to worry about. Did keeping our son in our thoughts and prayers harm him? We felt confused and didn't know anymore what was right or what was wrong.

Swami arrived in Holland for four days in 2004, and on a beautiful summer day my wife and I joined Swami and the small GKS group on an island in the middle of nature. Swami sat in the centre of a small circle of devotees and told the gathering they could offer Him any question they searched an answer for. I was sitting close to Swami and expressed my worry about our son. Swami's loving eyes pierced my soul with deep compassion and softly He said: "Nothing to worry, your son is with Me now. I will take care of him like he is my child. You can let go of all your worries about him." Swami held His arms like He was tenderly holding a small baby in his arms and started to rock his arms like a mother is rocking her baby, to comfort her child. Softly He started to sing an old lullaby, a song Mother Yasoda used to sing for Lord Krishna when He was a baby... I cried and healed. No one noticing this scene, so full of love and tenderness, could keep their eyes from tearing.

When you ask me, what is my relation to God, all I can say is that my relationship with God is through Swami. I talk to Him all day long and pray for Him too. He means so much to us. It is difficult to explain to people who have never experienced this. When I am in the temple sometimes it is like He passes by me and I feel His smile upon me. I don't speak about it, not even with the people in the temple.... He is so near; He lives with us and we with Him.

And He is a great Protector on the road! So many experiences we have with Swami being with us on our way in our car. Once we were in the temple and after the Abhishekams we had to go home which is a more than one-hour drive. It was winter and the weather terrible. Snow was falling, and we could hardly see anything around us! But we prayed and knew for certain that He would go with us. Just when we left the village and entered the small dark roads leading to the motorway, out of the blue a car started to drive slowly before us. It was easy to follow the lead. It kept driving before us till we reached the safer motorway. Then it turned left. On the car, we saw these words: Security Service! And this was not the only time, many times He came to our rescue. My faith in Swami is the fundament of my life. Of course, we ourselves must act and be responsible for our actions, and we must keep that faith, that he is always with us.'

I ask Bas what he would like others, who are interested in Swami, to know about Him. He points to his wristwatch with the Sarvadharma symbol.

'I would tell them: Practice your own religion with love and in the knowledge, that we are all one. We are all walking our individual path to the same God, whatever name we call Him. I call Him Swami and to me He is a ray of the divine Sun we call God. The ray comes from the sun and is one with the light.'

By now the coffee has turned cold; which happens when we talk about our life with this great Light, we call Gopal Baba, we get lost and forget the world...

*All service should be regarded as an offering to God,
and every opportunity to serve should be welcomed as a gift from
God.*

When service is done in this spirit, it will lead to self-realisation.

Sathya Sai Baba



THE GREATEST GIFT

- By Sita -

May 2017. **Kannaiah (Bas van Velzen)** and I are sitting in the sun on the jetty behind the Sai Mandir in Holland. A soft wind brings playful waves in the water. It is a wonderful and tranquil place just at the backdoor of the Mandir. At our right hand we see the huge Shivalingam which is placed in the beauty of the garden. The garden, with its balanced colours and fragrances is almost like a Japanese Zen meditation garden; it vibrates harmony. On our left a canal, which opens into a large lake, young waterfowls are playing in the water ripples, calling all the time to their parents to feed them. While we are talking, I notice how their parents constantly bring them little fishes to keep them happy and satisfied. These little ones are totally dependent on their parents to survive. We talk softly about spirituality and our lives with Swami. Like the focus of the little birds is completely on their parents, even when they play around; similarly our vision is on Swami, who offers us everything we need to survive in this world of illusion, even when we have to play our roles in the world. I have known Kannaiah - in this life - for eighteen years and still there is much to share.

I ask Kannaiah what God means to him.

‘My teacher used to explain that question in a beautiful way, he said; Imagine the whole of creation is energy, then that energy has to be generated. When generated there has to be a force that controls it and finally a force is needed to bring the energy back to its source. All these expressions of energy can be called God. In Hinduism it is named Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

To me it is absolutely clear that nothing in my life happens without a reason, everything is always full of meaning and part of the divine Force in one of these aspects. When you ask what God means in my life, only one answer is possible for me, everything! Really everything!

For as long as I live in this material world, I will always be subject to one of these divine forces. This is what 'I' call God but of course I realise you can experience Him in countless other ways too; this is just my way of expressing it. The Masters I met in my life are like my prophets, offering a guiding system to live life and supporting me down the road.'

Could you call these prophets mirrors of divine love?

'I asked Swami once: 'What are You doing to people?' because I noticed how many of them were teared up before Swami, especially those with big inflated egos. Swami answered: 'I am merely a clear mirror, the one thing I do is reflecting, the clearer the mirror, the brighter the reflection. What they perceive is just the reflection of their own divinity, the most beautiful part of them, their divine soul. That only brings tears to their eyes for in that moment they have a short view of the power of love in their own hearts. The Master shows them their own Truth.'

So, He doesn't reflect their ego qualities but their pure soul?

'Exactly, all the potential that's latent inside you, which is unlimited, it touches you deeply into the core of your being, the moment the Master makes you aware of it. It is truly pure beauty which you are allowed to behold in such a moment. You yourself have experienced this and have seen it happen with others before Swami.

Yes, it is an overwhelming experience. In the beginning I had a thousand questions for Swami in my mind, now I understand that most of these questions rise from ego and its need to keep control. The ego-mind restlessly and fearfully tries to find safety. But the longer we are with Swami we notice that the real questions cannot even be put in words.

And the words which you receive from the physical form will be just a small part of what the Master can give from within. Our love for our Master is so intense that we want to go asking, on and on, so His focus will stay on us. The remarkable thing is, we don't realise that when we are able to be silent in His company, He will come nearer than our breath. If we have the courage to allow silence to be part of our communication with Him, He will reveal more than ever can be expressed in words.

Some people say that in His discourses Swami never tells something new. Of course, for in truth, nothing new can be told. For ages the Masters have told us the same thing over and over again, but the real truth can only be grasped in moments of silence before Him and the silent listening which you practice in your daily life. In these quiet moments you receive a deeper understanding. These become your lightbulb moments that make you wonder: Why didn't I see this before? These are the real answers of the Master!

It is a sign of spiritual development when you become more silent and your need to communicate with the Master within grows stronger. No longer will you need the approval or recognition from others, for you will now recognize His presence within, simply and quietly knowing that He is there! The doubts which arise the moment our Master ignores us are the fruits of our own narrow-mindedness, when we think we are not good enough or fearful for having done something wrong. Is there anything He doesn't know? Is there anything I can keep from Him? He knows everything. He knows our deepest secrets. When I sit before Him and I realise this: that He is always seeing my soul in its naked truth; it gives me such a good feeling. No need for shows, just being me. Nothing to hide, no masks needed. Even when His physical form plays innocent and acts like not knowing anything about me, He really knows everything, absolutely everything!

Is this why a master can be scary to people? For as long as there are parts in you that you want to hide for yourself and the world, the Master can be a huge confrontation.

‘True! We people break ourselves down with feelings of guilt, feelings of being not good enough, etc. In the morning I talked about Gurudakshina in the mandir. Gurudakshina is that what you want to give to your Master out of gratitude for all He gives you. To me this means you should give Him something that really matters to you. It can be a bad habit, or something material that is not easy to give up. If you can sacrifice for your Master, it will purify you and at the same time give you more focus and insight in what really matters in your life. But the sacrifice should be genuine. For example, when you are a millionaire and you offer five euro, it doesn’t mean anything but when you offer five hundred thousand euro, it will be more like it. Or if you like to drink alcohol and decide to drink one glass less daily, well you wouldn’t feel that much, will you? But when you decide to stop using alcohol for three months, now, that would be a sacrifice! And such a sacrifice will give you a great return, for in these three months your focus will be fully on your Master. We find this difficult to do, for we are comfort-oriented, and that is where the Master comes in. He helps us to stretch ourselves beyond our limited minds and habits. We take it for granted that He has entered our lives, but oh my God, we hardly realise what a great blessing it is, to have Him next to us.

Through your Gurudakshina you will again become focused on why you are here and your goal in life. You will feel happy to give something to the Master in return for His blessings and guidance. It should hurt a little to keep you awake!

Right now, I am reading the life story of Sri Ramakrishna together with Carla. Ramakrishna says: *God’s first blessing to you is that He gave you a human body, His second blessing is when He gives you the desire to find God and the third most profound blessing is when He opens your heart to allow your Satguru to enter your life to guide you to Him.* How

blessed have we been to see so many true Masters and Avatars and the great blessing we have got by meeting Swami! We can call Swami by many names but to me He is the purest aspect of the divine Mother! So many experiences...'

Kannaiah becomes quiet and meditative before he continues.

'Still, there will be times in which your ego mind will distract you. When you sit next to Swami and your mind suddenly says, what is so special about Him? He is just an ordinary man. Especially when you live near a Master you will be subject to these kinds of thoughts. When you are close to such a divine Power, you will reach a point where the bright light blinds you and you become unaware of its full radiance. Even Vivekananda when he sat next to Ramakrishna in his final hours, had thoughts like this, when he saw Ramakrishna's worn out body. Of course, Ramakrishna was fully aware of all the thoughts going around in the mind of His spiritual son. For a moment, Ramakrishna opened His eyes and in a split second He gave Vivekananda a powerful look and a slight nod with his head. Immediately, Vivekananda realised his mistake. Ramakrishna was most definitely not just this small broken body before him, beyond this body was the Sun of his life, more radiant than ever and with full divine power.

At Swami's feet I experienced the most profound moments of bliss, but also the most intense moments of maddening doubt. I realise now that both are needed to discover truth.'

So true! You have shared so much with me, so I have only one last question. *What are your feelings about why Swami is in your life?*

'Simple! I always missed something. I was always searching, even as a young child I missed something in my life. The moment I met Swami I felt complete, like the missing piece of the puzzle was finally united with me. In my first week with Swami, He told me: 'Matha, pitha, guru, Deva. God comes first as the mother and father, then as

the teacher and at last as the Divine (in the form of a Satguru) to lead you directly to Him. That is who I am’.

Do you think that everybody is actually looking for this missing piece to make their life complete?

‘Yes, but in truth you cannot go and search the Satguru, He will find you, it is His grace. You can allow Him in your life only when it is His will.

Last week I had a teambuilding training with thirty of my colleagues in the canteen of the mandir. At the end of the day I invited them into the mandir. I told them about Swami, but it is so strange, in these moments it is just like I am switched off and Swami is switched on. It is like He speaks through me. At the end they were perplexed by what they had experienced. They were so touched and not just a few, all of them! They all hugged me when they left, and I knew something had stirred their souls. I don’t take any credit for this, for I know, it is Swami. I was very moved too, for this is what makes my life purposeful, when I can share and bring light.’

Can it be Kannaiah, that in those moments it is not that important what you want to tell them about Swami, but that it is far more important that you give Swami all the space He needs and allow Him to speak through you so He can touch their souls?

‘Yes exactly, and then beautiful things occur. If we stick to bad behaviour and we think we honour our Master, we make a big mistake; it will rebound on us. But if we are willing to live and practice His life, then that’s really the only thing we need to do. We don’t even need to talk about Him, it is more than enough when we live Him. He once told me, just watch Me and follow My lead. It’s that simple, but we have this unquenchable need to understand every step He coaches us into. Letting go of your control, your worries and fears, and keeping your faith strong, even when you are severely tested, is the greatest Gurudakshina.’

What a great test it must that have been for Jesus followers. He talked about a new world and there He was, crucified, hanging on the cross, dying after intense suffering. It must have broken their hearts...

‘Yes, and how in their hell of doubts they even denied Him three times! Never can we understand our Master, we can only trust Him. Switch off the ego and have the courage to jump into the deep.’

The young birds next to us have filled their tummies and swim quietly with their parents. We too are silently digesting the wisdom we just experienced. For an outsider two people sit on the jetty behind the mandir at the waterside, but this is not what we feel. In the soft gentle breeze, in our breath, in the beautiful sparks of sunlight on the waves, in the twinkling of our eyes, in the gratitude of our hearts, we are with Him, our eternal shadow...

*Where can we go to find God if we cannot see Him in our own hearts
and in every living being?*

Swami Vivekananda



ALWAYS BE CHEERFUL

- By Linda -

The first meeting with **Renate (Shyamala) Del Nero**, mother of Marco Del Nero and yoga teacher by profession, was in 2015 at the airport in Düsseldorf. I was on my way to our beloved Master Swami Gopala Baba and would meet Renate and her grandchildren in Düsseldorf. Marco - who had brought them to the airport - introduced me to his mother who smiled gracefully at me and looked stunning, notwithstanding her advanced age (seventy-four at that time). This smile appeared to be her trademark, for I have never seen her gloomy or sad in the year's hereafter. We travelled together with her grandson Luca and granddaughter Diana. Diana, who had arranged our tickets, proved to be an excellent tour guide during the whole journey to Bangalore until she fell asleep exhausted, with her head on my shoulder in the airport taxi. My motherly feelings awakened with an explosion and she calls me mummy ever since. She told me I look much like her own mummy, Sybille. Later, when I met Sybille, all of us saw the similarities in appearance. We look like sisters. We were of the same height, same length and colour of hair, we shared the same year and even same month of birth: April 1964. Maybe therefore our characters had many similarities. We had almost the exact same furniture in our house. We were both married to a man of southern origin. And a small detail added a little fun to all this likeness; when Later, in august 2016, Marco and Sybille visited us, I saw she had the exact same hair-decoration pin as I did.

Renate, her mother-in-law, happened to be my roommate in the dispensary in Girinagar, Swami's guesthouse, and we got plenty of time to get to know and appreciate each other. Being an enthusiastic yoga teacher, she even taught me some pranayama exercises. The name Shyamala was given to her by Swami during this journey and

Swami explained the meaning as Krishna, deep blue sky. When I asked Renate what these words meant for her, she answered:

'High in the air, not so heavy. Oh God what is the word for that in English?'

'Elevated?' I guessed.

'Oh yes, elevated! That is the right expression,' she exclaimed delighted. 'Not so much ego. More light.'

In July 2017, I felt the desire to call her on the telephone for an interview. This was a difficult period in her life because for the fourth time she had been diagnosed with cancer. She miraculously survived the first three cancer attacks. She just woke up after her power nap that she needed badly in between radiation therapies. I let her have her own say about how courageously she coped with her problems:

'The cancer came in the form of a carcinoma of three centimetres in size. Fortunately, it could be removed in an operation and now I am undergoing a series of radiation therapies which is only preventive. I feel that Swami is helping me. On my radiation bed I hold Sai Baba's and Swami's hands. I say to the radiation: 'You are beautiful divine Light and you are helping me.' My blood reports are OK now. I don't suffer from any side-effects of the radiation, no pain. I only feel a bit tired, but always faithful. I say to myself; *everything* will be fine.'

I already admired Shyamala a lot, but that feeling only grew during this very special interview. She asked me what my questions were, and I fired my first one:

What does God mean to you?

Shyamala excused herself for using poor English but her vocabulary was as complete as it could be.

'God is All. It is the highest name. Nothing is above Him. It is my HC - do you know the term HC? It means Higher Consciousness. Phyllis Kristal uses this term a lot - and in the end, God is in me. Everyone has God inside. I believe in it. It is not a man, not a person but rather an

energy and the highest expression amongst men. The most wonderful and the highest which we have to come to understand. It is nothing like the man with the white beard. There are many names for Him. Everyone has to find out the meaning of God for himself. Everything is God or Divine. Do you have more questions?'

Well, my next question is: what is your relationship with God? And I smiled internally about her speed.

'Oh, very close because it *is* very close. I learned from Sathya Sai Baba that real renunciation is to give myself up and then the guru will give me the freedom to follow my free will. It doesn't mean that I already live this but at least I am living this now with my recent disease. My experience with surrender during this period is the best so far. In my previous disease periods, I didn't experience the same amount of surrender like I am feeling now, although I was strong in all cases. I have a much better understanding now. It even feels like grace that this disease came to me. I don't ask myself, *why me? or why this disease?* I was helped to remove fear and to find inner peace by a method that includes Reiki in combination with beautiful music and a text. This process reaches into the subconscious and helps one to gain inner peace. Now, I even help other people who have to undergo an operation. A doctor called me from Munich and wants me to help her with a preparation for her own operation! People go home very much changed and peaceful.

My life was not an easy life. I was very unhappy in my marriage. But now there is nothing to forgive. I feel free. Even when I die it is OK. I have no questions left. I am happy with myself even though I live alone, and the children live far away.

I was always strong when I had to go through a disease. In decision making I could be doubting or in front of others I could be weak but inside I am quiet. In the past I used to feel weakness when others were dominant; I appeared to be easy-going but was not happy inside. That

was not good. I had to learn to assert myself. That was difficult. My son Marco used to point this out to me, and he was right. This disease helps me to get stronger in this aspect of my life. Swami has sent me a message through Prema and Sita: *Focus on God. Do Namasmarana and forget worldly matters. The body is not permanent. The world is an illusion. Only God is real. Take the prasad that Swami has given, and He will make sure that you will have no pain.*

These words came like a confirmation of my own thoughts which I shared just a few days ago with Marco.

The doctor says that I am always smiling and that my smile helps her through the day. When I am on my way to the radiation therapy appointment, I am always picked up by a taxi and my journey takes me through beautiful fields and nature. The taxi driver and I talk about the good things in life and he doesn't ask me where I am going, and I don't tell about my disease. There is no need to talk about it. All my yoga students send me good wishes and tell me that I am always smiling. When I teach them I forget myself. I read texts of Sai Baba for them and share my experiences. I embrace my students and smile. They are astonished and ask me to write a book about my experiences. I have a deep faith that God is doing what is best for me.'

What is Swami Gopala Krishna's role in your life?

'Oh, He is all important. I have come to know Him in a miraculous way.'

Shyamala started telling the marvellous story of how she met Swami Gopal Baba. Although she told me everything during our telephone conversation, I have to use her written words here, because only she can describe her feelings exactly as she experienced this all-important part of her life story. Shyamala's story was published earlier in the international GKS newsletter in July 2005. She mailed me her copy, which I have rendered below with only small adaptations.

'I want to share with you my experience how the Divine Will is working in our lives. In 2001, I decided to undertake another trip to India. Since 1990, I have been a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The more I became devoted, the more I was longing to be close to Baba. The only possibility to fulfil this desire was by travelling almost every year to Puttaparthi. This special trip in 2001 evolved in one of the most miraculous journeys ever. In fact, this trip appeared to be vital for my spiritual development and progress and showed how Divine Grace and Love are working and leading us when needed.

So, my trip started in September 2001. As always, I was full of expectations about all the good things which would happen this time to me during my stay in India. In this mood I entered the plane and looked for my seat which was one of the two in the row. When I came closer, I saw that one seat was already taken by a man who appeared to be Indian. So, I thought this is my first connection with India even before I leave Germany! After some time, he asked me where I came from, which place I would visit in India and what the purpose of my trip was. I answered about my plan to visit the great saint Sri Sathya Sai Baba, not being sure if this name would be familiar to him. "Oh, how beautiful," he answered, "for many years I am a true devotee of Baba."

He introduced himself as Venkatesh, born in Bangalore and living in Florida USA for 30 years. He was on his way to visit his relatives in Bangalore. After a while he started to talk with enthusiasm about a certain Swami Gopala Krishna living in a temple in Bangalore-Girinagar. He told me that this Swami is strongly connected to Sai Baba and that Baba's answers are flowing through Him. He also informed me that this Swami Gopala Krishna calls Himself something like Sai Baba's radio, broadcasting for the various devotees. This was a wonderful message for me, because, especially this time, I had several important questions to ask, which I would like to have answered. The

ability to put a question personally to Baba in Puttaparthi is almost impossible.

Of course, I know, I can also get inner answers, but this appealing information opened a wonderful possibility to establish direct contact with Baba through this saint. Never before did I hear about this Swami, but my curiosity to know more about Him was awakened instantly. So, I was eagerly listening to all the wonderful divine events Venkatesh told me.

He said: "In any case you should go and visit Swami Gopala Krishna tomorrow morning, you have to be there at nine o'clock. He will be present, because normally at this time He gives some interviews to His devotees. I will leave you my business card, so you can show it to Swami and tell Him that I sent you."

Joyfully I agreed, because inside I already made the firm decision to visit this Swami Gopala Krishna the next day. It felt as if I was drawn to Him, I had to do it, there was no doubt in my mind! So, before I left him, I promised Venkatesh to be in that temple the next morning at nine o'clock.

I definitely didn't want to miss this appointment and therefore I wanted to be punctual. The next day I was standing in front of the old temple and to my surprise it seemed to me like a Puttaparthi miniature. I was convinced to be at the right place and meet Sri Sathya Sai Baba through this Swami Gopala Krishna. Exactly at nine o'clock I entered the temple and stopped, devotionally waiting close to the door. The first thing I saw was this loving Swami, dressed in orange, and sitting at the left-hand side of the temple in a big chair. A devotee was kneeling at His feet, listening to Swami and I saw another man (Venkat), translating what Swami said. Swami immediately interrupted His conversation and observed me attentively. He smiled lovingly and with a gesture of His hand he invited me to come closer. I bowed before Swami and presented Him the business card.

I said: “Venkatesh gave me this on my flight from Germany and he sent me to You. Now I am here and later I would like to visit Sri Sathya Sai Baba in Puttaparthi.”

“Oh,” Swami replied: “Venkatesh... yes, of course, I know him, it is good that you are here now.”

Swami smiled at me with His loving, wonderful sweet eyes and it was as if He had waited for me; as if He knew that this morning, at this time I would come to Him. Now He allowed me also to ask my questions. Meanwhile the other devotee was waiting patiently. Immediately Swami gave me all the answers I needed. These significant answers surprised me a lot and I stored them carefully in the back of my mind in order to remember them well, later. For me it felt as if Sathya Sai Baba was speaking to me personally and my heart was full of the greatest joy and consolation. I was really at the right place and I had full confidence that all the things Swami said were true. That moment I knew I would be helped. There was nothing else in my mind but this wonderful encounter and this loving Swami. Then Swami blessed me with His hand on my head, He gave me vibhuti and sweet prasada and I felt so overwhelmed by His sweet and wonderful appearance. I was immensely grateful to Swami for all the grace He had given me in this short time. In this state of mind, I left Him with all His blessings and stepped into my taxi.

On the way to Puttaparthi I was convinced that this wonderful experience wouldn't end here but would continue one way or the other during the rest of my stay in India. And how this came true!

The most blissful day of my life was still to come. Many days in Puttaparthi had passed already. I attended darshan daily and enjoyed Baba's presence, but within me there was still some disappointment. During these days nothing special happened, every day was similar to the other. Besides, some doubts raised their ugly heads again: was my

experience in Girinagar really true; could I believe what happened over there? What would my family say (they have all been Sathya Sai Baba devotees for many years) about it, when I come back in Germany? Would they say: *there are so many swamis in India, maybe this was a fake one; how can you be sure?* Thinking thus, I realised these thoughts didn't come from a high energy level. Instantly I decided to rise to another, higher level of mind and I said to myself: *from now on the Divine Mind will work through me; I want to be even more devotional and open to it.*

After this statement I went to the afternoon darshan very peacefully. I was alone and I didn't belong to any German group. Although I was full of joy about a place in the second row, unexpectedly, one of the sevaks gave me a seat in the first row. Being comfortably seated, I was completely open inside and gave room to the divine will. Waiting for Baba's appearance I filled myself with inner light. Suddenly I heard my inner voice telling me, *only a few words are necessary*, which I was not able to interpret immediately. I was used to these 'inner messages' which I heard from time to time over the past few years, whenever I was in India and they were always full of important spiritual meaning to me. Sitting there I was praying with all my heart to Baba and I thought: *when it is really true that You are speaking through Swami Gopala Krishna in Bangalore, please give me a sign, just a clear sign that You heard my prayer.*

A sevadal member approached me and told me: "Please, cover your feet." I looked around and many women in front of me also had uncovered feet and they were not told by the sevadal to cover them. I covered my feet obediently and it felt like a preparation for Baba. Someone behind me handed me a letter and asked me to give it to Baba when He would pass. So, I kept this letter in my hands to offer it to Baba and that moment I was full of love for this unknown person, who had written on the envelope: To S. B./a worried soul. I stayed in this quiet and devotional mood. I prayed that Baba would help this

person. Then Baba arrived and passed right in front of our first line. A young lady on my left had a letter in her hand as well. I kept praying continuously. Baba approached from the right and passed me closely without looking at me. The next moment He took the letter from the young lady next to me. Then all of a sudden - I really didn't expect it anymore - He turned, approached me and stopped right in front of me, meanwhile looking at me a bit roguish, with an indescribable and unforgettable smile which grew bigger and bigger. His eyes were like the rising sun, which bundled rays of immense sweet and infinite Divine Love and overwhelmed me, just incredible. He was showering all His Divine Love on me. Now I realised that He undoubtedly focussed on me. This moment was almost too much for me.

Swami accepted my letter and asked: 'Where are you coming from?' I felt that every word was full of Divine Energy, what a great gift of His Grace was given to me! I answered timidly: 'from Germany.' Then Baba asked: 'How many are you?' First, I didn't understand the question, but then I was able to reply: 'No, Baba, I am alone.' 'Oh, alone', He said and then He made a blessing gesture with His hand and walked on.

Suddenly I remembered my inner voice: *only a few words are necessary*, and exactly that had just happened: only a few words from Baba were more than enough to make me understand that Baba knew everything about me! I realised that it was Baba's wonderful way to arrange things. It was Baba who arranged the meeting with Venkatesh in the plane and guided me to Swami Gopala Krishna Baba. The same here in this Puttaparthi compound. Baba perfectly arranged a special seat for me in the first row and let me cover my feet decently for this meeting with Him. And more important, He had given me the clear sign as an answer to my questions regarding Swami Gopala Krishna. That moment I realised that Baba is always with me, blessing and guiding me in every situation. This overwhelming happiness made me cry; it was just too much for me. Meanwhile Baba was still walking

through the rows, I felt an intense heat flooding my heart chakra, as if I had a burning hot necklace on my chest and this sensation lasted for about half an hour. All I desired was a pure heart, nothing else. After a while the bhajans started and I perceived the divine power and joy in the hearts of all the devotees through the choir of their voices and I realised: we are One.'

You will surely remember that I was still on the telephone with Shyamala, while she shared her story with me. She explained that according to her, Swami Gopala Krishna had come into her life because it seemed like a natural step. It felt so familiar. The way He had welcomed her - as if He knew she would come – had blessed her so gently and had given her sweets, it all felt like it had to be that way. The nearness that she felt and the fact that He repeated Sai Baba's words. The feeling of being in a miniature Puttaparthi with all the same colours and peacefulness; it felt like coming home.

'It felt so near, I cannot describe it,' she added. There was this little concern about how her son Marco would react. During her first interview she had shown Swami Gopala Krishna a picture of Marco, and Swami had said determinedly: "Marco has to come to India and He has to go to Holland to meet Kannaiah." Her fear was completely resolved when, on coming back in Germany, she found out that in the meanwhile Marco had had a dream in which He had seen the face of Swami Gopala Krishna. Thus, Marco showed no resistance at all, which surprised her a lot, for in the past he had mocked her with her tendency to get impressed by 'again another enlightened man' she had met.

I was enjoying her stories so much that I only regained conscious of the present moment when Shyamala asked me curiously about my next questions.

Could you describe the influence of Swami's Presence in your life?

'Oh, I feel His influence very much. He felt near when I was ill. He blessed me so much, He used to send me mails with answers and directions in earlier times. I could always ask Him what to do when I was in doubt. I have His pictures all around my house and He is my second Master, together with Sai Baba. Nothing is more important. I even tell my yoga students about my experiences, about His sayings and their importance and beauty. When I started to go to Sai Baba, everything started to change for me. I became much more detached from life. Now I am reading, praying, chanting mantra's and feel so happy and elated, even though I live all by myself. When I was younger, I had many desires. My greatest desire was for a better man. He never came and still I am happy as can be. I am happy inside now, no desires. There is possibly no greater happiness in life than the one that I am experiencing right now.'

Considering the fact that Shyamala declared this while undergoing thirty tiresome and weakening radiations for a malign tumour, I was in awe for this marvellous lady.

'Maybe when a person is healthy, he doesn't understand this if he hears it from the mouth of a lady who is seriously ill. But you might ask yourself: is this healthy person really happy inside? My happiness is not dependent of my state of health. It is instead deeper and stronger than ever before.'

Renate passed away peacefully, some time after this interview. Swami's promise that there wouldn't be any pain, had come true. At the time that Swami made this promise, Renate could of course not foresee what Swami already knew. May her soul rest in peace and may she be with her beloved Baba forever. I have always admired her devotion, strength and positive attitude and I want to thank her from the bottom of my heart for her love.

Seeing is, feeling with your eyes.

- Linda -



I AM YOUR REFLECTION

- By Sita -

It is late summer 2017 and **Pushpa Bhambhwani** and her husband who live in Mumbai are on a short holiday in the Netherlands. They spent some time with their daughters in the US and decided to visit the Netherlands on their way back to India. We are very happy to have our Indian friends a few days with us to show them around in our small, beautiful country. On the last night of their visit we attend the Thursday evening ritual in the GKS temple, and I ask Pushpa whether she is willing to share with us her ongoing experiences with Gopal Baba. And with a big smile she says, 'Of course!'

I ask Pushpa what the word God means to her.

'To me God is a superpower, a power beyond our comprehension. We think of Him as having human qualities because He came to us as a human being, but in reality, He is far beyond our understanding. He has so much power, it is beyond the perception of our limited mind. He keeps repeating; *You and I are one*, but we feel separate. I pray to Him: *How can I really be one with You?* He answers: *I am your reflection*. So, I try to discover Him when I look at myself. When I see my eyes in the mirror, I search beyond myself... I want to see God in me. I remind myself that this reflection is God too! For He is the Source of all Light and we all come from this limitless Light. We are all but forms of this divine Radiance, and so in reality we are all One. Only not yet able to be conscious of this truth. To keep me walking on this road He grants me precious moments when I can feel glimpses of this Unity. To keep these truths vivid in our minds we need other people around us travelling the same road. To be with likeminded people will support our own growth tremendously.

This trip to Holland, to be with the Dutch GKS turned out to be a spiritual journey we hadn't planned ourselves. In the past when Swami came to Holland, we were so eager to come with Him but somehow something always interfered, and now suddenly we are here! Here with our friends in Holland, experiencing the Divine in each other while sharing our experiences.'

How do you feel about the relationship you have with God?

'I consider God as Mother and Father, when I go to Sathya Sai or Gopal Baba, I silently pour my heart out; I tell them everything that bothers me. There is no barrier in my heart between my divine Mother and me. That which I cannot confide to anybody, I tell Swami. I plead with Him, *You are my everything, You must take care of it.*'

Do you experience any difference between Sathya Sai Baba and Gopal Baba?

'No, absolutely not. He is the same, I feel the same for both, for me there is no difference! We lived in Spain for many years and so often I prayed to Sathya Sai Baba. I would pray and beg of Him: *When will I ever sit before You, talk with You, massage Your feet, serve You food, be with You like I would be before my divine Mother?*

Then, many years ago, after I just came to know about Gopal Baba, my mother and I were in Bangalore for some work. We went to visit Gopal Baba. My mother was talking to His mother and I was talking to Him. While I poured out all my love to Him, I suddenly realised right there, at that precious moment at His feet, my dream and deepest prayer had been granted to me. I experienced Gopal Baba fully as Sathya Sai, the same overwhelming love, the same motherly tenderness, the same sweetness in His eyes. It was like Gopal had merged into Sathya

Sai. I even saw the same mole on His face just where Sathya Sai has one. When back in Mumbai I told my GKS friends how wonderful my meeting with Gopal Baba had been, and I told them: “He even has a mole at the same place as Sathya Sai Baba!”

My friends looked surprised at me and said; “No, no, Gopal Baba doesn’t have that at all!” Then I realised He had given me that vision to show me there is no difference whatsoever between Him and Sathya Sai Baba.’

It touches me deeply that many people we’ve interviewed have this experience; it is like Sathya Sai Himself directs us to Gopal Baba and grants our heartfelt prayers.

We continue our interview.

Pushpa, why do you think or feel these wonderful Saints have entered your life, why did they call you?

Pushpa’s eyes look at Baba’s picture in front of us. Her face becomes peaceful. After a while, she answers:

‘I feel He is there to remind me of all I have already received in life. It is like God says: Did you really digest all the deep soul experiences I gave to you? Why would you long to have more in the future? Be here, with what you have with Me right now. Stop searching and start living with what you have and are. I came to you as Sathya Sai and you listened to my words, now I am in your life as Gopal Baba, I spoke to you and awakened new wisdom in you. Now live this wisdom. He made me aware of this and it brings peace to my mind. When we surrender completely, our mind will be free of desires, we will be like a hollow flute, then like Lord Krishna, He will pick us up and carry us always with Him.’

Pushpa, even while we speak, I see your emotions and feelings change, how would you say His presence in your life has changed you?

‘He has been guiding us step by step, so now when we have to take a decision, I silently ask inside myself: *will He approve of this?* It is like He walks next to us and we keep Him involved in all our choices. We keep asking in our heart, *is this right or wrong?* Like that we have changed a lot in how we live.

Last time in Prashanti Nilayam I bought a shiny ring. In the centre it holds a reflection of Sathya Sai, but only for me to see. It served me, for sometimes when the world became overwhelming and I noticed the ring, which sparkle attracted me, I became aware again of His presence right next to me. I feel we are chosen by Sathya Sai Baba, who gathered us and directed us at Gopal Baba to work hard with His grace.’

It is uplifting to share with each other, Pushpa. Now imagine you meet someone who is really interested in Gopal Baba but doesn’t know much about Him. What would you tell him?

‘I would tell him about how I changed after coming to Sathya Sai and even more after coming to Gopal Baba. I would tell them about my transformation.

Once at the beginning of my relationship with Gopal Baba I had a private interview with Him. At that very moment the transformation happened. He told me all about my previous problems and said: “Forget about them, forget them all! Now I give you a new life. The past is gone, start your new life now! I know everything about you, I know... Forget it, take the gift of a new life from Me. A new life with Me, go ahead I am with you.”

That statement changed everything for me!’

It is already late, and the next day Pushpa and her husband will fly home, so we have to say our goodbyes, but her words so full of love and trust make my heart smile while we drive home. Even writing these words down I feel again in how many beautiful, miraculous ways Swami is touching our lives.

Look at the world with the vision of peace, love, and compassion.

Then the whole world will appear loving and peaceful.

Sathya Sai Baba



MOTHERLY LOVE

- By Linda -

On the 24th of November 2017, I entered the temple in the Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram after the 92nd birthday celebrations of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. **Vasant Kumar**, one of Swami's boys, who was doing seva in the temple, returned my blue inflatable pillow that I had left about everywhere. I thanked him and asked him for his name. He told me that his name was Vasant and that he knew me for more than twenty-five years. I looked at him in surprise as he said:

'I am a product of Satguru Sai Shankar and you came to the ashram in Ponnampet.'

He had been eighteen years old at the time and he remembered that I was there with Guruswamy, Sai Shankar's successor. What he told me struck me with wonder and we chatted a bit about sweet memories. Shortly later, at lunch, I got the chance to ask Vasant some questions for the book.

'It was heart wrenching for me when my guru passed away in 1989, Vasant told me. Sai Shankar had told him that Sai Baba was God, so he went to Whitefield with his friend Harish to see if this Sai was really that divine and if so, He would definitely be able to help him. I want some sign, he prayed to Sai Baba inwardly, while sitting in the ashram under the big tree that secured some shadow for the devotees. Somehow, he got separated from Harish and Sai Baba came exactly to where Vasant was sitting. So, it happened that only he got the privilege of padnamaskar and a gentle pat on his back. That was the clear sign that he had asked for. Many years later, in 1997, he got the same gentle pat on his back from Swami Gopal Baba in Girinagar.

How did you come to know Swami Gopal Baba?

'I still see Sai Shankar as my guru, but I went to Girinagar with the intention to visit a spiritual place.' Vasant touched the residing swami's feet as he would reverently do to any swami, while inwardly repeating his mantra: *Om Sri Satguru Sai Shankaraya Namaha*. But the loving and gentle gesture of patting his back reminded him of Sathya Sai Baba and touched his heart immensely. He received so much love. It was like the love of a cow and her calf or a mother who found her long lost son.

'You come tomorrow,' Swami said. Vasant came and found out that Swami was more than a mother. He had prepared upma for Vasant and told him with the sweetest voice:

'Vasant, I have prepared upma with my own hands. You like upma, that's why I prepared it.' How did He know that I am very fond of upma? Vasant thought puzzled. Vasant kept on coming daily for the next five or six months.

'A fantastic time,' Vasant told me with a broad smile.

'Swami talked with me about spirituality all the time.

Then, one day Swami said: "Vasant, we will go to Bombay. You go by train, I will fly. Stay with Pankaj." Slowly I came to know about the truth of Gopala Baba. The Divine is only One. For me, He is God. There is no difference between the sun and the sunlight. Consider Swami as the sun. I came to know that everything is temporary. In the end there is death. All will go. It is all His Leela. Holding on to one identity is an illusion.'

What is the influence of Swami on your life? Why did you stay with Swami although you had been with Satguru Sai Shankar since such a young age?

'I was only eighteen when Sai Shankar left His body. I didn't understand much of what He had told me. Swami Gopal Baba has had a huge influence on me since we first met. He is my guide. I am clearer about God and how a Divine personality behaves in the society. Swami took me to the next level.' Pointing towards his wife, he added smilingly: 'And he gave me this wife. It was all Swami's work.'

What would you like to tell others about Swami?

Humbly he answered:

'I came to Him because of His grace. He pulled us towards Him. He is God. To understand God is the most difficult thing. Therefore, it is very difficult to tell anything about Him. I am not eligible to tell anything. I am just enjoying. He is God. Many times, he has confirmed that he knows everything, e.g. one day He asked: "How is your father?" I answered: "Swami, you know better than me, is anything wrong with him?" At the time, there was no telephone and I had not seen my father for quite some time.

Swami answered: "Yes, but now I am taking care." It appeared that my father was paralyzed, and it took me three days to meet him. My family was highly surprised by how I had come to know of my father's condition.'

Here we had to end this beautiful conversation, for Vasant's duty was calling him.

I felt very grateful to have spent some time in the embrace of the ashram energy, with these humble, radiant and lovely people.

Choose only God

- Linda -

WE ARE OF DIVINE ORIGIN

- By Linda -

Linda

It is Saturday 27 November 2017. There is a lot of joy and gratitude in me. I am sitting on the tiled floor of the porch before our room in the Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram in Nidaghatta. We have been graced by Swami Gopal Baba to be able to take part in the festivities around the 91st birthday celebration of Sathya Sai Baba. Now that the festivities are over and all the guests have travelled to their various hometowns and countries, the opportunity came to stay in the ashram for a few days. I am peacefully listening to the wind in the palm trees and the chirping of the birds that cheerfully flit about in the branches. Away in the distance I hear the traffic, but the highway is situated far enough for the sound to be a non-disturbing factor in the background. The morning sun heats the tiled pavement. After many months I had a good night's sleep. Which in itself is a miracle, given the number of factors that have kept me from sleep during the last few years. Nights of only one or two hours of restless sleep can drive a person mad. This morning in the temple, my heart and everything in and around me fell into place. I felt at home and very, very welcome. An angelic feeling overtook me and at the same time music was heard that came directly from heaven as far as I am concerned. Tears on my cheeks and a heart that extended all over the world. I had missed this feeling for so long and it felt like coming home. Although I knew that feelings come and go, even the loftiest of feelings, but I secretly hoped that *this* feeling would remain. Yesterday the idea came to interview myself. For me, writing is an



enlightening activity. Things

become clearer for me once they hit the paper. So, I will ask myself the same questions that I have asked everyone for this book.

What is God for me? The question has been playing through my mind ever since Sita and I started writing this book. One day in meditation, these words came to me: *We are the angels, we wear God as clothing.* We are of divine origin. Seen from the ego point of view, this sounds like blasphemy. You don't say these things, do you? But from a deeper, broader dimension it sounds very natural and true. In addition to the surprise, I felt the veracity of the words when they came to me. Swami once told Sita and me, in an answer to her question about angels, that we are the angels and should strive to behave like one. All I could think of, was, that Swami was referring to good behaviour and seva. Not to a lofty state of being or something like that. But when the words came about God being the angels clothing and we are beings of divine origin, I experienced and understood for a moment that it was more profound. Swami must have been referring to the ego-identification being one big illusion. Or one big pantomime, as Sathya Sai Baba says. And this is meant for everyone. It is not a selective right to be like an angel. Anyone who dares to say, in all sincerity: I am Sai or I am God or I Am That, certainly will at some point, get a first-hand experience that he is not the ego. This experience can be the basis for further sadhana, for an experience is only a start, not a requirement nor a performance or diploma and also not a goal. It is all about the integration of this wisdom in every moment and in every aspect of life.

My first mantra was: *God is love; I am God.* At the time - I must have been nearly twenty-five years old - these words felt like a relief and something inside me felt connected to them. The word ego was an unknown formula to me and maybe that was exactly why I could step

over ego-identification automatically and unknowingly while in meditation. Daily meditation started at the same time; in those sessions I repeated the mantra and visualized light everywhere. A feeling of space and lightness was the result. There were no books that I had read, and no one had told me how to meditate except for a dream therapist who told me that one could focus on a mantra and gave me the earlier mentioned words as an example.

My relationship with God is twofold, perhaps threefold or even more. Of course, there was the God-on-a-cloud-in-heaven idea. Even at a pretty early age, I must have been less than twelve years old, I asked myself who could have made up such a ridiculous idea and I wondered if that person could believe in this stupidity himself. At the age of twelve or thirteen, I did regular visualizations with my sister to clean our aura. A few years later, I was touched by spiritual books, attended yoga lessons at my mother's yoga class but I was as distanced from myself as every adolescent. Religion and church visits were no longer part of our family's system and with my interest into spirituality on the one hand and my daily life on the other, I lived in two different worlds. At the time, people who were 'into spirituality' were hard to find. I remember how pleasantly surprised I would be whenever someone told me that he or she believed that there was more between heaven and earth than meets the eye. A more truthful and integrated relationship with spirituality started around my twenty-third with the above-mentioned mantra: God is love, I am God, with a developing faith and trust in a certain unity between my true self and God. On the outer level, the events of my life seemed to force me in a new direction. Various physical, undiagnosed problems made daily life a challenge. Mentally and emotionally I was torn apart by relationship problems that culminated in the break of an almost ten-year long

relationship. It was during that period that I heard a soft voice inside of me, that spoke to me for the first time. Or maybe it was the first time that I became aware of this voice. The voice was tender and loving, comforting and guiding. It seemed to break through my normal mental state and endless thoughts; mostly when I was quiet enough to catch the words. In the beginning the words sounded somewhat solemn, even religious. And often cryptical. Always leaving room for interpretation. Never telling me directly what to do. This quiet voice has been guiding me ever since. I call it by different names, and it is as if God is using this voice to broaden my view, deepen my understanding and activate my devotion.

It is interesting to mention another new phenomenon that occurred at the time. One night, I woke up with Gregorian songs playing through my mind. Words and melodies that I didn't even know. It was all the more strange, knowing that I didn't have a memory for music lines at all.

In 1989 the God-devotee relationship became a brand-new option for me. I deeply connected to the idea of the lover and the Divine Beloved. Sathya Sai Baba literally danced into my life (in a dream), captured my heart and kept it in custody ever since. To merely think about Sai Baba was enough to cause a warm glow in my heart. The image of Him - walking as a Living Light on the warm concrete of the compound in Puttaparthi, His right hand in the characteristic 'energy-uplifting-gesture' - is forever in my heart. And that was only the outer relationship. If the outside could trigger so much positive movement in my system, imagine what the inner relationship could. That relationship turned out to be even more far-reaching.

During dreams I experienced a total surrender to a love that was flowing equally from both sides. Both Baba and I always seemed to be over the moon to see each other and we had many creative ways to express that. I didn't consider Sai Baba to be my guru. Rather an Eternal Beloved, if not God himself. This mutual and divine love was in great contrast with how I felt at the time. In daily life, I didn't feel loved and understood at all and self-respect was greatly lacking. I cannot imagine a greater psychologist or psychiatrist than Sai Baba, for feelings of unworthiness, loneliness, feeling unloved, were brought to daylight and vanished in His vicinity.

In 1991 a new aspect of my relationship with God started for me. My meeting with Guruswamy in Ponnampet simultaneously granted me a stream of love and very understandable practical wisdom. In this way, both the *jnana-* and *bhakti*-side of my being were nourished. Sai Baba's teachings really started sinking in. Where at first, they were but an insignificant aspect for me, now they were provided during long conversations that never bored me. Without ever having noted a word of our conversations, Guruswamy's words still come up in me, naturally and at the right moments. During the ten years that followed our first meeting, I never saw Guruswamy as my guru. I think I was too Western for the concept of having a guru. Until one day, when a strong feeling overtook me while I was cooking. I felt I was ready to ask Guruswamy if He wanted to be my guru. I wrote Him a letter in which I expressed my desire and brought it to the post-office. The next morning my mother called to tell me that Guruswamy had just passed away. That same afternoon, there was a letter on the doormat. A letter written by Guruswamy himself. The letter was written and posted ten days before his demise. An intense feeling of gratitude for all that He had given me was the first emotion that came over me after my

mother had called. That I was also devastated, I realised only a few weeks later when I was at a befriended therapist's, lying on his massage table. He asked me: "Do you still think about Guruswamy sometimes?" I burst into tears and couldn't stop crying until forty-five minutes and two boxes of tissues later. Then it took me three months of deep mourning to get over it.

In 1996, I met Swami Gopal Baba for the first time. Dear friends from Bangalore took me to a bhajan session in a family member's house and both Guruswamy and Swami Gopal Baba were attending the bhajans. I had heard about the Saint of Girinagar from my friends and they were so impressed by His energy and their amazing experiences with Him, that they were convinced that He was an embodiment of Divinity. At the time, I didn't know that this Swami was going to be so important in my life. The entire evening, the centre of my love and concentration was Guruswamy, whom I had known for five years by then. At the end of the evening, someone took me by the hand and introduced me to this Swami Gopal Baba.

He blessed me with His hand on my head and said: "She is a very good girl." I pondered His words, for I was a married woman with a small child, and He had called me a girl. Apart from appreciating divine communications, I used to analyse the message behind the words and found that a part of me still wanted to be a girl and not a woman. I asked Swami to bless some of the mala's that I had bought in Puttaparthi, which was almost like a sport at the time. Everyone loved to get pictures, rings and malas blessed by the divine, so that this divine energy could be literally taken back home and cherished. Apart from this interaction, there was no contact in the years to come, for I was completely focused on Guruswamy.

A few years after Guruswamy had passed away, something happened. Swami Gopal Baba graced the Netherlands with His presence in 2001 and we were devotionally immersed in the sounds of bhajans in the Sri Sai Mandiram in Onderdijk. There was an intense energy loaded with love and I missed Guruswamy very much. I looked at the face of Swami Gopal Baba while we sang. At that very moment I saw the features of His face change in the familiar and beloved face of Guruswamy. I experienced the remaining part of the service through a haze of tears. I understood that this Swami would play a special role in my life. Why otherwise would He appear in the beloved form of my deceased guru?

Sometime later, I got a dream in which it seemed as if my legs were rubber bands and unable to carry the rest of my body. Swami Gopal Baba appeared, put me up on my feet and simply said: “Now you walk.” With these three words the elastic legs disappeared, and I could walk normally. I understood this Swami would put me on my own feet.

Swami Gopal Baba turned out to be a Swami of few words. His loving and conscious acts were actually His message and He didn't need lengthy conversations to teach, other than through His own wordless example. I had longed for a teacher-pupil relationship as described in books by Swami Yogananda or in the stories about Sri Ramakrishna by his disciples. A lifelong relationship in which both softness and severity guided the pupil to perfection.

Softness because the heart's nature is naturally gentle and kind and severe because that is sometimes the right method to create an opening into clarity. I had read that no deeper bond exists on earth than the bond between the Master and His student. Even the love between husband and wife and between mother and child can hardly

be compared to this connection. Such an eternal and unbreakable link was my desire. In addition, there were the earthlier desires that were born of the physical proximity of Sathya Sai Baba. Someone got a sari, an interview or special attention, et voilà, up came the desire to experience that as well. Of course. We considered these gifts as evidence that God loved us, and we longed for a physical proof of that love. After all, we are human, right? And for the Divine Master to trigger the sattwic ego of His pupils with outward signs of proximity, is an effective way to encourage them to stay close to their hearts. Until we no longer need these things. And I can imagine that we have not reached that point until we have been fully integrated forever in the concept of oneness. Being with Swami Gopal Baba was like being invited to an extensive Christmas party with abundant tangible and intangible gifts, some of which I don't even remember having ever put on my wish list. Such is the love of the Master. He is giving more than you can imagine asking for, once you have stopped asking, and you have simply opened yourself for the concept of divine abundance. All divine gifts are intended and suitable for the heart to open and to stay open. Some gifts were bigger than I would ever have dared imagine. It started already with the first gift. Swami told Maanish, my husband, at their first meeting in 1998: "I will come to your house." And He fulfilled this promise not only once, but three times. Our house is deeply imbued with His energy, from the cellar to the attic and even the garden, because Swami is very fond of plants and trees.

When He came to us for the first time in 2001, He sat on the bed in the room which we had lovingly prepared for Him, while bhajans had already been started in our temple upstairs. Swami looked at me with endless love and some humour and said:

“I told you I would come. Swami always keeps His promise.” This was clearly with an intimation to our first telephone conversation in which I had told Him that I would only believe that He would really come, once He was there. For one never knew what swamis mean by their words. It could be symbolic as well.

Swami promised us to lift us out of the water of samsara and put us safely on the Eternal Beloved's lap. This was the promise that I had been longing for and found in Swami. For it is the protection-aspect of the Master in which I can wallow like a struggling child in the arms of the mother. The child can occasionally make impetuous movements, but safely in the arms of the mother, it is protected from more dangers than it ever knew there were.

Since Swami is in my life as my beloved guru, I feel His presence flowing through my life. Reluctantly, I must admit that I am not spending my entire day thinking about Him. But I talk to Him whenever I am grateful or sad and ask for His advice. In the lucky times that Swami called Himself an 'e-Swami', we were fortunate to be able to ask our questions by mail. Later on, He asked us to turn inward, to the Swami in our hearts and ask our questions inside. In both happy or sad events in my life, I see His loving and guiding hand and try to be grateful for both. Although my life might look ideal for the outsider, I experience it not always as easy, but in quiet moments with God I sometimes feel the enormous love and unity. My annual visit to Swami ensures that even the rest of the year I keep thinking of Him because there are always a few months of preparation and a few of reminiscences. Also, the weekly Lingam Abishekam² over the Vaidyanatheshwara-lingam

² Before we moved to the North of Holland in November 2018, we performed Rudra Abishekam for 18 years on a weekly basis in our Sri Sai Mandiram in Landgraaf, as per Swami's instructions given during His first visit in 2001.

which Swami materialized in 2001 for our temple, keeps me vigilant. Professor Subbaramaiah said a few days ago during the translation of one of Swami's speeches, that in His presence we always behave like good little boys and girls but beware when we are not in His vicinity! And it is so true. But weekly Abishekam, daily personal rituals, seva, as well as annual visits to India are all reasons to stay in touch with His presence and in that way, refine my own energy. Because that is where it ultimately is all about: to increase our vibrations, allowing us to feel more and more divine energy and express that energy in daily life. All Swami's teachings are pointing towards love, forgiveness and gratitude, which are the highest vibrations on earth.

What would I tell others about Swami? Maybe this: go and meet Him if you want to experience unconditional love in yourself and have no expectations about the ways in which Swami will teach you. Go to Him if you have the courage to do self-analysis and when you are ready for destruction of your ego-constructions. Go if you're willing to live the best version of yourself.

I'd like to conclude with a poem that came from my pen, one night in the guesthouse in Girinagar. That night consisted of both hellish and heavenly experiences successively. Which to me, is a proof that life is an experience of endless opposites; they are merely two sides of the same coin. We should not judge ourselves and others by our experiences, good or bad, because they come and go. Only God is eternal. I experienced oneness that night, which doesn't make me holy (I wish it did), but I like to share with you the feeling it gave me.



Devotion is the bridge
you cross to everlasting peace
Here in the peace
there is no land to land on
Not even the need for a bridge
to stand on
Forget about the stories
the earth and the sea
Just be Me

Why fear when I am here
doesn't mean there is someone
to come to my rescue
It means when I'm here in the ever-present
There is no need for fear
When there are no stories
to hold on to
no stories to belief
there is no need for
joy or grief
Just this being
Just blissful being in This Here
Just Love
No worries, no sorries, nothing
to hold on to
- Linda -



WHATEVER YOU DO WITH YOUR HEART, YOU DO IT WITH ME

- By Sita -

Smitha and Arvind Nagaraj

A rose can grow everywhere, if it is provided with good soil, enough light, water and the right temperature. A rose from India will flourish in Holland too. It will even survive the dark and cold depressing days of winter. Sure, in winter, her leaves will fall, and no roses will be found. During these cold months the rose directs her energy to her roots which sustains her. When spring arrives, new fresh green leaves appear and within a few weeks the rose blooms abundantly!

These thoughts came to my mind when I was thinking of Smitha and Arvind. Originally from India they have been living in the Netherlands for a long time now. It is as if they were uprooted from the rich Indian culture and planted into Dutch soil. They survive the coolness of the west, the different circumstances and the lack of their beloved family, because they are deeply rooted into the age-old teachings of Mother India. It is a good combination, Indian roses and Dutch soil. They feed each other, we learn from them and they learn from us.

It is April 2018, I am in our vegetable garden, three miles from our house. Growing your own vegetables is a wonderful thing to do, it makes you aware of the abundance of mother earth. What paradise can we create out of a few handfuls of seeds. Smitha, Arvind and me decided to meet here in the quietness of this garden, surrounded by birds, spring flowers and roses in the bud.

We met each other by 'coincidence' at Bangaluru Airport about eight years ago. After our first meeting we exchanged our email addresses at the airport. I never expected to hear from her, but Smitha was keen to learn more about my reason to travel to India so often. She started to email me and soon she and her husband became dear friends and

fellow devotees, touched as they were by Swami's motherly love and wisdom.

When they arrive, and we are all comfortably seated in the shade of a garden umbrella, I start to interview them.

I ask Smitha what God means to her.

'To me, He is a supernatural intelligent power that controls everything. We can't see Him with our physical eyes, but we can feel and experience Him.'

Arvind adds, 'Yes, still... when He wants it, He *can* make Himself visible for us and we *will* be able to see Him!'

It is nice how Arvind adds to the conversation and fills in. They complement each other. How strong have they grown as a couple since I first met them.

Smitha continues,

'If you ask me personally what aspect of God I really love, it would be Lord Krishna. Arvind likes Lord Vishnu but to me it is Krishna, I love His playfulness, I can relate to that!'

As soon as Smitha talks about Krishna, her eyes sparkle, and a warm broad smile lights up her face.

'He acts mischievous and naughty, but in the end His Leela's are beneficial for all.'

How do you experience Swami?

'To me He is like Shirdi Sai Baba, I see Shirdi Sai Baba in Him and once when He was singing, I saw the face of my mother. But a true Guru is like a Mother, so I see that in Him too. He is a Teacher on our road to God, He shows us the way to live. He is Guru and a Guru to us is like God.'

What change do you see in your life, since you know Gopal Baba?

Arvind answers,

‘There is one aspect of our life in the Netherlands where I felt uncomfortable about. Swami helped me to develop a broader view on these things. When He came to Holland, I had so many questions to ask Him, but there wasn’t any opportunity. Then one evening we found ourselves in the middle of a small group sitting at His feet. He started telling stories and suddenly, without my asking anything, He was answering some of my questions.

I found it difficult that here in the Netherlands I could not perform the proper rituals for my deceased father. The priests here do things in a different way, and I had the nagging feeling inside that it wasn’t right. Gopal Baba started to tell how people nowadays tend to use religious rituals mainly as social events.

They hire a priest and the priest is mainly interested in his fees. The head of the house is more focussed on the guests. Even when the ritual is performed and the priest is reciting the sacred mantra’s, the host will ask his guests if they had coffee or food. The women who prepare the food to be offered to God are involved in the latest gossips and while they are busy chatting even spit in the food, making it unclean. While preparing something for God, should their thoughts and words not be directed to the divine, instead of gossip? Even when the rituals are correctly done, with the right mantra’s, in this way, the result will be negative. It is intention that matters most!

Swami told another story about this.

There was a Brahmin who had a puja performed by priests. Food was cooked to be distributed to the hungry. It smelled deliciously and some sadhu’s (holy men who renounce the world) who had been without a proper meal for a long time were attracted. The Brahmin served them food. The priests became angry for in their opinion the food should have been offered to them first. The

Brahmin explained a fresh round of food was being cooked to offer to God and to them. It was not that they were served the leftovers. Still they were angry. This doesn't make any sense. The Brahmin fed the poor, that is precisely what he had to do, but the narrow mindedness of the priests spoiled the day. What makes more sense, feeding the hungry or satisfying ego? Consider what is important... Intention is more important than ritual! Deep inside you know this is true. Express your gratitude to your parents. Think of what they did for you and shed a few tears in their name. Help the needy, feed the hungry, that is enough ritual!

What development did you notice in yourself after meeting Swami?

Smitha says: 'I became more receptive and patient. When I see Swami, there is so much calm in His face. I don't have to spell things out. Being with Him I feel just peaceful and light and happy.

Before He left the Netherlands in 2014 and when we were both sitting at His feet, I was overcome with emotions. He told Arvind: "Take good care of her, ensure that she doesn't have to cry." Still tears kept springing into my eyes and I felt sad. He smiled and said: "So, you fight, so what? Even Parvathi and Shiva quarrel. As long as there is love, it is no big deal. But if one is angry, the other one should be love and vice versa."

It touched me deeply that he knew about our worries without us expressing them.

I am more relaxed now, more balanced.'

Why do you think He entered your lives?

'He changed our outlook on life. He also changed our perception of Sathya Sai Baba. I became more convinced about Sathya Sai through Swami.

My final question to them is,

'What would you tell an interested person about Gopal Baba?'

Smitha answers with a smile.

‘We have a divine Guru. He melts your ego away and breaks down any barrier between you and the divine, He cleanses your heart. He activates in you whatever wisdom there already is, wisdom you might have learned from other teachers is refreshed, renewed and awakened. He changes your life into so much more...’

We smile at each other and feel fulfilled. It is nourishing for our souls to listen to the stories of the Divine. While talking and sharing, somehow, we don’t feel thirsty or hungry. Our senses relax, our minds become tranquil: again, the interview has become a meditation.

There is only one caste... the caste of humanity. There is only one religion... the religion of love. There is only one language... the language of the heart.

Sathya Sai Baba

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

- By Sita -

These words from 'A Course in Miracles' popped up again and again in my mind on the day I talked with **Yvonne Doffer** about her experiences with the Divine. It is the beginning of May 2018, the atmosphere in her living room and small garden breathes peace and serenity. In the spring garden, robins are flying off and on, curiously watching us through the window.

A centre piece in the garden is a statue of Lord Buddha and Yvonne tells me with a smile that the birds love to rest on his head.

She explains how she does a small morning ritual every day, not some set ritual but one that bubbles spontaneously from her heart. How she enjoys starting the day with seeking a conscious deep connection with God. Now, with spring around the corner and temperatures getting more pleasant, she loves to do this in her small garden while listening to the joyous birdsongs.

She tells me how she prays daily and just sings the words from her heart. To give an example she starts singing softly:

'I am Light, I am love, I am God...'

Simple words but because they are expressed with emotion, they make a powerful statement.

Again, the mantra out of '*A Course in Miracles*' comes to my mind.

'I am the Light of the world...'

How valuable it is to meet each other in this knowledge?

Of course, I am curious what road Yvonne walked in life that guided her to spirituality. She paints to me a picture in my mind of her childhood.

She was a dreamy girl, educated without any religion but with a deep inner knowledge about divinity. Especially outside in nature she experienced a silent connection with all of life. Her main goal when she was young was a deep urge to stand on her own two feet, independent, choosing her own way instead of following what others advised. She also took the opportunity to be outside in nature as much as possible.

‘Because I was not willing to listen to others, I made many mistakes and learned it the hard way.

I just *had* to do things that felt good to me and not what others told me to do!

I still do that. I want to listen to my own heart and follow that only, not what others think is right, or befitting, or what is socially demanded. I was a sensitive child and open for the subtle worlds. That made my childhood often very lonely and difficult... I was so different, and I felt hardly anyone understood me.

I didn’t like school, I was bored... but when I discovered spirituality, I read every book available to me. I was so hungry to learn and learn and learn even more. When it comes to spirituality, I was ready to go to university!’

I remember Gopal Baba once told us, that many go to spiritual school but that Sathya Sai Baba told Him that Gopal Baba’s mandir is like a spiritual university, and that Sai Baba would send students to Him who are ready to take the next step.’

Yvonne continues:

‘In these years I had an experience I will never forget. I was not grounded so well and as a result it happened that I would suddenly ‘fall out of my body’ at times. I liked these experiences for I felt so free without the heaviness of my human body. I would hear beautiful music and see myself, surrounded by light. But this time I suddenly noticed two long arms of light appearing besides me and I experienced being

uplifted by two loving hands of pure light. These hands put me firmly back on earth and into my body.

No words were spoken but I knew that from that moment on I would have to concentrate more on life on earth. To me it was like the Universe closed itself for me and I was feeling so sad.

I always kept that longing in my heart, feeling homesick in the back of my mind, knowing I didn't really belong here, my real home, like everybody else's, is heaven.

Luckily, I had my animal companions, my pets whom I loved dearly. For me they were the little messengers of the divine and softened my feelings of loneliness. I remember when I just learned about singing mantras and how I loved doing that. One day I sat down singing mantras softly and almost flipped out of my body again. But my cat, purring on my lap kept me nicely grounded. Or the day when I sat on my sofa and suddenly felt my heart chakra opening so wide and my little dog jumped on my lap and put his little nose into my heart, it was so sweet as if he wanted to bathe in the love that came through me. God is so near, if we are only willing to open our eyes, ears and hearts!'

Yvonne, why do you feel Gopal Baba entered your life?

'Well, Sita, I told you how lonely I often felt. I knew God was there but still missed a more personal contact and a spiritual family! People who would be able to understand me; where I could feel at home, not having to wear the masks we need in the world.

Sathya Sai Baba and then Gopal Baba gave me this feeling so much. I feel so at home with them and with the devotees. There was not even a trace of doubt. Immediately from the very first moment I saw them I experienced that I had finally reached my true home.

It was also very special that Sathya Sai Baba came to me and gave me a vision about Gopal Baba even before I knew Gopal Baba. In that vision I found myself in a beautiful natural scenery.

Sathya Sai was standing right in front of me. He beckoned someone at a distance. The person came near. Sathya Sai took His arm and guided Him to me. At that moment I stood eye to eye with Gopal Baba. He looked at me with such deep love, the experience touched me to the core. I stood there totally overwhelmed by the experience and all I could say was, 'Oh my God, Oh my God...Sai Baba!'

The memory brings tears in her eyes and Yvonne continues her story full of emotion.

'I used to feel often very much alone, but Baba and Swami are letting me experience again and again that they truly and genuinely love me... Not like ordinary people who say many times they love you and still you don't feel it. This is the most valuable treasure that Swami gives me. I experience Him as my true Mother. I remember when we were in Girinagar, Bangalore, and we wanted to see Sathya Sai Baba in Whitefield. You asked Swami if we could go, just like a person would ask his mother. I remember that some in our group didn't like that, and thought we should just go, but I liked it very much. Swami blessed our trip and just like a true Mother warned us to return home in time. I enjoyed Baba's beautiful darshan but kept looking at my watch so that we could go home in time. I felt so protected by His loving care for us.'

I ask Yvonne what changes in her life she has noticed since she has known Gopal Baba?

Yvonne thinks deeply before she answers:

'I am very much on my own, I don't need a lot of people around me, but these last decennia I have felt so much at home at the gatherings in our Sai temple. The people who attend the services feel like my true family to me. We are all very different, still we are bound together by our love for these beautiful Masters. Everybody is allowed to be his- or herself without distinction of background. Even when I am unable to visit the temple for a while, I still feel connected to all of

them. In this spiritual family I have learned to stand up for myself without hiding my feelings for God and spirituality. It is a place where I can safely express myself without being judged.

My confidence in my own unique path has grown a lot. Now I always feel God around me, as soon as my mind is quiet, I feel lifted and start to sing softly from the depth of my soul.'

My last question for Yvonne is: *What would you tell others about Gopal Baba?* She smiles and answers,

'I always say, observe and listen with your heart. If you meet Swami and look at him only from your mind, you will not be able to really see Him, you will only see his outward appearance. You can recognize the real Swami only from love, for Love is what He is.'

I will always reside in your hearts.

Whenever you call me, I do not need any means of transport to reach you.

I do not need a car, an aeroplane, a train, or any other type of vehicle to reach you.

Love is the real call and the true attraction for me.

Gopal Baba



BIRTH

- By Sita -

A few weeks later, **Danny van Kessel** is with me in our living room and we talk about Swami. Danny is married to our daughter Prema. It is late spring, and he finally had a little time to sit and share his experiences with Swami.

‘It was amazing’, Danny says. ‘It was such a profound change that happened’

Recently Danny was having a very bad reaction to antibiotics; he couldn’t sleep or work due to a severe rash all over his body. Being a musician and music teacher, it was difficult for him to let his students down. And of course, there were his gigs. He felt there was a lesson to be learned and he prayed intensely to Swami to clear his mind and show him what he hadn’t been able to see.

‘During this intense prayer I felt a sudden change! I saw clearly where I had got too much involved in my career and too little in my family. Of course, I love my wife and children, but somehow, my attention had been on music a lot. With this realisation came an immediate transformation. Swami implanted in me the very quality I needed right there in that moment and I felt a strong urge to be more involved in the lives of my children.

Before Swami came to the Netherlands in 2014, He granted me a vision in a dream that left a lasting impression on my mind. In the dream I saw Swami looking at His devotees. He showed me how He worked in our energy systems. By a snap of His fingers or a small movement of His hands He could remove or add certain qualities in us. In that way

helping and supporting us to reach the Divine within. I know this is what has happened to me after my intense prayer. He changed me, and the change was just by His grace. It is not that I trained or took a course to become a better father, it just happened. All that was required was my pure intention to be a better child of God. I realise, even being able to have this strong intention, is also Grace. My family is happily surprised by the changes that are happening in me. You ask me what does Swami mean to you? Well this experience is part of my answer.'

I smile and understand; Swami is so much more than words can ever tell.

Still I ask Danny, 'how would you define God?'

To me God is an all-encompassing Energy, He is with form and without form, there is nothing without God. As a child I loved to go to church with my classmates. Somehow, I always had friends who came from religious families. My parents didn't practise any religion, but I liked the feeling of togetherness and the values I found in different churches. Even as a child I knew God was too big to be fenced in by just one religion or church.

When I first went to the temple and saw Swami in 2001, I had a feeling I didn't belong there. It was like a wonderful loving family but not mine. Swami was very kind and sweet to me and even gave me great advice, but it was as if I was there by mistake. How could I be good enough to be allowed to be part of His devotees? Well... that changed a lot! He happened to me, I didn't go out and search for Him, He found me, and now I am just so grateful He did. After meeting Him I became more interested in spirituality and studied it. I came to like the books

of Neale Donald Walsh (*Conversations with God*) and learned so much more.

After the first years, life became hectic for me and my wife Prema. We finished our studies and were blessed with three wonderful children. There wasn't much time anymore for quietness and prayer. This is our time to practise what we have learned. Sometimes it feels like we are in a storm, so much is happening and so much that needs our attention! But Swami is always there; He is always in the background and stops me when I need to stop and guides me when I need guidance.

To me He is a loving parent and strict teacher at the same time.'

Would you say, that is your relationship with Swami?

'Yes, but not just that, it is more, I can't put it into words, and it changes and grows all the time. To me He is the Force that carries me through life. He shows me He is always there and knows everything. I experience Him when my children do something sweet, or when I meet a stranger on the street, and we have a sudden deep understanding for each other. I feel Him when a music performance goes really well, and I soar in the bliss of music, but I feel Him too when things don't go so well, and He helps me out.

Prema, and I asked Him what kind of spiritual training was important for us and He made us very clear that 'our' spiritual road is mainly doing our duties with love.'

I ask Danny what development he sees in his life since he has known Swami.

'I look even more within, trying to find answers when life is presenting me challenges.

I had this fear that I was never good enough, but now I feel worthy of love, deserving to receive and to give. Everything is good.

Swami told me in my very first interview with Him that I should follow my heart, and I became better and better in doing just that. It is still growing, this feeling of knowing deep inside, what and when to do things... Such grace!

He makes me aware of duality and protects me so that I will not fall into too much drama.

For example, recently I got an expensive ticket from traffic police. Before, it would have made me very upset and now? Of course, I was disturbed, but it lasted only a few minutes. After that, I simply accepted what had happened. It was just an experience and I stopped labelling it as good or bad. This change in me makes me more peaceful. See, this is how He helps me through life.'

When you meet someone who is really interested in Swami, what would you tell them?

He laughs his deep belly laugh and answers with a big smile,

‘Ha! I would send them to Kannaiah and the temple, and maybe I would share some experiences we had with Swami. We have so many, but the one that is in front of my mind is what He did for Krishna, our first-born.

Krishna was born after a long and difficult delivery. He was too exhausted to breathe. The doctors tried everything, and fifteen minutes passed. Fifteen long minutes! It felt like ages, the doctor told me to inform my wife, but, how could I? She suffered a lot and was so tired and now I had to bring her this news? I bluntly refused and then Krishna started to breathe. We were all so relieved, but he was rushed almost immediately to the neonatology department in the hospital. Prema, asked me to call you to inform Swami.

Swami knew everything, there was no need to explain anything.

He said: "Breathing problems, tell them to pray, there is nothing to worry."

Krishna who had been crying and crying because of the pain all over his small body, stopped crying after we contacted Swami and followed His instructions.

But there was even more to it. Somehow, we felt a strong resolution to allow only people to visit us who would have the same faith as we did that Krishna would be fine. We allowed only a few close family members who shared our positive faith. Even when the doctors would start to describe all the problems our son could develop because of the problems at birth, we silenced them and simply said: *Today we have a son and right now everything is improving by the hour; today we choose to be happy with him and we don't want to think about tomorrows!* Speaking these words, it was like we became part of strong protective shield over us and our boy.

A miracle happened! The first day Krishna had so many tubes and meters all over him, but he amazed everybody by doing so well. The doctors couldn't believe what was happening with that little boy; how fast he improved and after six days, he appeared to be a normal healthy baby. My wife had to leave the hospital after seven days, but they wanted to observe Krishna a little more. We prayed that we could take him home; we needed our little boy with us; to give him all the love we had to share and to spend more time together to wipe out the stress of his birth. On the afternoon of the seventh day, a doctor approached us and said: "We call him the miracle baby, actually I cannot find any reason to keep him in hospital, you can take him home!"

Needless to say, we were happy and so grateful for all Swami did for us and for our Krishna. He is now 8 years old, and a healthy, talented, sweet big brother for his two little sisters.'

Danny and I talk a little more about Swami's impact on his life, there is always so much more. Still I feel that this very experience will be uplifting for many. When I went to Swami a few months after Krishna's birth and fell at His feet with tears of gratitude, for what he did for our grandson, Swami simply answered, 'I went, I saw, and I put!'

What is meant by the phrase to know GOD?

It means to love GOD

Sathya Sai Baba



BIRTHDAY BOY

- By Sita -

It is a beautiful summer evening when **Lennart Claus** or **Murali** as Swami named him, sits down with me to share his experiences with Swami. The summer³ hits a record in Holland when it comes to warm tropical days and I just love it. It reminds me so much of being in India and near Swami. But tonight, it is not only the temperature that brings us sweet memories, no, tonight we share the thoughts and feelings that live in our hearts when we think of our Swami.

Some of Swami's messages need time to digest, they are like a Buddhist Koan: a riddle when contemplated on, that leads you to a deeper understanding. One of the things Swami said to Murali is: 'Sathya Sai Baba was actually born on the 24th of November.' Most of us consider the 23rd of November as Sathya Sai Baba's birthday, so why would Gopal Baba say such a thing to Murali?

So, let us start at the beginning of Murali's journey with Swami, and maybe we will discover the answer in the following story. Murali tells me:

'When I met Swami for the very first time, I was full of expectation, I was so excited that I could not really feel much in my heart. It was during a Lingam Abhishekam in Girinagar, Bangalore. The ritual was finished, and I stood outside with my girlfriend and I asked her, whether she had experienced anything during the ritual. She confessed that not much had happened to her.

What happened to me during the next few minutes is hard to describe. It was like a huge wave of love rose up from my feet and flooded throughout my entire being. I was so overcome, I needed to sit down, so I went back into the temple to sit down to digest what had just

³ 2018

happened to me. But sitting down in the temple only intensified the feeling, it felt like I really couldn't hold more love and that my heart was near exploding.

This was a very intense experience. In the short interview with Swami that followed, Swami called me a good boy, and I was just happy, very happy!'

I ask Murali what God means to him.

'All-encompassing Love; more than I can understand. God is everything to me. It is hard for me to relate to such Greatness. But I can relate to Swami, as an embodiment of this Greatness. I can feel so much love for Him. It is easy to experience divine love, when I am with Him or think of Swami. For me this is much easier than trying to grasp God in His formless aspect.

Swami is like a bridge that leads me to the experience of the source of love and creation.

I feel Him in my heart as an ever-present teacher, guiding me, giving me the feeling where to go and what to do. Whenever I decide in line with my soul and thus with Swami, I feel this peace and joy inside. Whenever I see Him, I experience immense power.

And as a teacher He is amazing, He always gives me just enough to handle, it might seem sometimes as too much, but no, it is always just right. Of course, I need to stretch myself and reach beyond my concepts and projections. I have to travel through attachment and ego programmes but then the reward is always mind blowing. It amazes me times and again how He knows the depth of my being and my most hidden thoughts. The right lesson at the right time and always wrapped in true love.'

Can you give an example Murali?

'Oh yes, many but let me share one of last year November in India. I hadn't seen Swami in years and meeting Him again, His welcoming smile and words, it all felt like coming home. But then my mind started

to play its ego game. Thoughts kept popping up in my mind like: *am I really worthy of His love; didn't I do wrong things in the past years; how can I deserve His love, etc.* Swami's reaction was instant. He avoided to look at me and my doubts became more intense. A week later we celebrated Sathya Sai Baba's birthday. While sitting down in the beautiful temple in the ashram, I was so hungry for a sign of His love for me. I prayed and begged silently. It felt as if He smiled to each and every one but me. For two long hours during the bhajan my only focus and prayer was: *Please Swami, give me a sign, even when it is just a small sign, please hear me!* I reached a point where I felt so lonely and rejected, I couldn't go deeper in sadness and self-denial.

Like a fresh soft breeze, a new thought started to whisper inside. *Maybe it is just okay, even when Swami doesn't look at me, maybe it is just okay... I am here, sitting here He called me from within to be here in India now, and maybe everything is just alright the way it is. It is fine even when He doesn't look at me. It is just fine; I accept that, too.*

The moment I allowed and accepted that thought Swami looked at me and smiled. Immediately I knew, this is the lesson, let it go, let unwanted thoughts just pass and let them go. Just trust and know that He loves you.'

What development do you see in yourself since you have known Swami?

'Slowly and steadily He leads me to be more mature spiritually. I take more responsibility for my own life. There is more trust and acceptance. Most of all, I experience much more love in my life.'

What do you tell others about Swami?

'Usually these questions come when they are visiting me at home, for I have a big beautiful picture of Swami in my living room. They often ask, who is he? I explain to them that He is my teacher, my guru, that I like to see Him and be reminded of Him because He means so much

to me. I will tell them that to me, He is God. Not just part of God, like a ray of the sun, to me He is the sun.'

While Murali tells me all this, my heart is so full! How much our joy and devotion increase, when shared with others? How I recognise his doubts, his struggles; for have we not all been there? Are we not all tempted to go the lane of self-denial now and then? But also, do we not share the same feeling of being uplifted in a moment of clarity? I have just one more question for Murali.

Is there more that you want to share with the readers of this book?

Murali's eyes soften and are directed inward. His voice softens as well, when he narrates the following experiences.

'It was the 24th November 2010, my birthday, the day after the birthday celebrations of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. And a few days after the Abishekam. During this Abishekam I had a strange feeling. It felt as if Swami positioned Himself in my heart. During the ritual, I had my eyes closed and saw Him entering me, surrounded by a brilliant light, He placed Himself into my heart. He filled me with His brilliant light and tears kept rolling down my cheeks. It felt so good. On the same day I had an opportunity to ask Swami questions. I had no real questions, my mind was still digesting all that happened, all I could think of was that I never wanted to lose this feeling inside me. So, I simply looked into Swami's eyes and asked, Can I keep it?

He smiled affirmingly and answered: 'Yes!'

He never asked what or how, He knew...

Then, a few days later, there was a medical camp and Swami asked me to take some pictures of the kittens in His garden. Of course, I was delighted to perform this sweet task. At that time, I experienced Swami like a parent and a loving teacher. Still, one aspect of the Divine was hard for me to grasp. Could we also be friends with God? Could my relationship with Swami be one of true friendship as well? While I

was in the garden, Swami was so kind and playful, just like the kittens that I was supposed to photograph. He handed me small sweets and at one point He asked me to take a picture of the large photo of Sathya Sai Baba in His temple. He stood next to me and put His arm around

I do not consider one particular day in the calendar as my birthday. When divinity blossoms in your heart, I consider that day as my birthday in you. Therefore, each of you should individually celebrate such a day as my birthday. When you resolve to practice my advice, follow my directives, translate my message into selfless service and engage in spiritual discipline, that day is my birthday for you.

Sathya Sai Baba

my shoulders. I realised then and there, God is also our true eternal friend, always next to us.

Swami smiled and said: “Do you know that Sathya Sai Baba’s true birthday is actually on the 24th?”

Frankly I didn’t understand why He would tell me this. It took me some time to figure it out. The following words of Sathya Sai Baba shed some light on this mystery, for it was actually on my birthday that He planted the flower of His love to blossom in my heart, by simply telling me I could keep His love and guidance forever more...’



CROSSROADS

- By Sita -

What if the path you walk in life suddenly ends in an intersection, splitting the road into two lanes each leading to a different destination? Neither of them is your choice and on top of that, both roads are extremely difficult to follow; overgrown with thorny bushes. Which road would you take?

Brenda Karsten found herself exactly in this situation and prayed intensely to Swami to help her choose the right path, and to give her the courage to start taking one of the roads. Even after Brenda had tried everything, she found herself in the midst of broken dreams. She longed so much to do the right thing; right for her, right for her daughters and right for her husband.

Brenda sits with me in our living room on a bright early summer afternoon and tells me about the big changes she experienced in her life.

‘Sita, it was so hard for me to make a choice. I was in the temple on a Monday evening and I prayed from the depth of my soul. The storm in my head made me completely unaware of the things happening around me. Little could I know that this deep prayerful mood would lead to one of the most magical moments in my life. One thought kept popping up in my mind. Could it really be true that I was allowed to follow my heart? Another thought followed. Could it be true that this unlikely choice was the most loving thing to do for me and for all involved. Could it really be?

Suddenly like a thunder in the storm I heard Swami’s clear voice saying, *Blessings are there!*

I was startled out of my deep prayer and bewildered I looked around me, but found myself completely alone in the temple, for all others had already left. I was thrilled and immediately tears started streaming endlessly. I had felt so lonely and desperate, but with Swami's words I felt embraced by His love and compassion. Through my tears I spoke to Kannaiah: he too was touched by what had just happened, and simply said: 'Now you know what to do.' The truth is, I didn't, but I did know what direction to take and I knew too that I was supported by my Swami. Later that year, when I was in India, sitting at His feet, He confirmed, but emphasized the importance, no matter what, to be good parents for our children.'

I ask Brenda what God means to her?

'Energy. All encompassing, always transforming, ever growing energy. Sometimes I unexpectedly become aware of this all-powerful Energy. I call these moments, moments of magic! In these moments I suddenly fall in line with my soul, with That what we really are, beyond all veils, we are sparks of divine energy; energy that sustains and envelopes us.'

What part does Swami play in your relationship with God?

'Swami helped me to become more aware of these moments. Because I am more aware, I experience more of them. God feels much closer than before. Swami is also a mirror for me; a very clear mirror. He encourages me to reflect on myself, where and whom I think and feel I am. On worldly level, I experience Him as a helpful wise teacher, and as a loving wave of energy, carrying me through life on soul level.'

Why do you think He appeared into your life?

‘I have always been a seeker, even from the age of fifteen, I tried to find answers to:

Why are we here? What is beyond this world? What is the goal of life?

Through my contact with Kannaiah’s parents and later Kannaiah, I learnt about Sathya Sai Baba. It didn’t appeal to me. It was all so strange and far from the familiar things I was raised to belief. I wasn’t attracted to it at all and when Kannaiah suggested to travel to India, I laughed out loud! But life has a way to make Her own plans... One year after this conversation, I actually *was* in India together with Ronald, my husband to be. Did I like being in India? No. Not at all!

I hated it, the crowds everywhere, the noise and smell, the dirt. It was just too much. I wanted only one thing, to go home. I found myself in a severe culture shock. All I could do was try to hide from this strange world which bombarded my overloaded senses. I stayed in my bed, feeling ill and frozen, not willing or able to allow more impressions.

Ronald on the contrary thrived in India, he liked it a lot. He went to see Swami and told Him about me. Swami smiled and gave him a packet full of vibhuti with the explicit instructions that I should apply this all over my body. He also told Ronald that he would take care of me.

That night much happened, my body was trembling beyond control and after much turbulence I fell into a deep sleep. When I woke up in the morning a miracle had happened! I loved everything around me! The sounds, the smells, the people, I suddenly loved India! He really took care of me, and He still does.

That is why He is in my life. To help and support me. To take care of me. He is my divine parent, walking next to me, and when I am lost, I can simply ask, where should I go? And He will answer.’

How do you experience His influence in your life?

‘He always *is*. In the river of my life, he is not just a raft to hold on to, which will keep me from drowning, no He *is* the very river that carries me. I know that even when Swami has to leave His body. He will still be there. This is my anchor in life, the knowledge and experience that He will always be there.

The magical moments in my life are reminders of this truth. They are like wake-up calls, telling me, *Hey! I am here! I am in your heart. You are in mine. I am God and you are divine too.*’

Which development do you see in yourself since you know Swami?

‘I make better choices; I choose what is good for me. Even while I say these words, they sound selfish, and yet I know they are not. It is only when I love myself and make choices that sustain me, I can truly love and sustain others.’

What would you tell others about Swami?

‘I would tell them to go to the temple and open their hearts to have their own experience. I don’t tell them too much about my experience for they deserve to dive in, open minded, without being too much influenced by my stories. It is what I did. I went in without any expectations, they should have that same chance.’

If you could use only three words to describe Gopal Baba, what words would you use?

‘Love. Compassion. Teacher.’

When we close this interview, the afternoon shifted without our notice into early evening.

The light of the sun is tempered by the summer leaves in our garden. In India this hour is the time of evening prayers when incense is burnt and offered to God. Temple bells will be ringing in harmony with the

call of the Cuckoo. A time where two worlds meet, and magic appears to be near. That is what I heard in this interview with Brenda. True divine magic is always around the corner. The moments of alignment with God or Soul appear unexpected. The more we listen the more we hear. The more we hear, the more we become aware of that what we really are, and our lives become rivers of Grace.

*All the powers in the universe are already ours.
It is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is
dark.*

Swami Vivekananda



AWAKENING

- By Sita -

*Love says, 'I am everything'. Wisdom says, 'I am nothing'.
Between the two, my life flows. Since at any point of time and space I
can be both the subject and the object of experience, I express it by
saying that I am both, and neither and beyond both.*

Nisargadatta Maharaj

It is a cool morning in October 2018. My husband and I are getting ready for our journey to India, when **Ries Ijseldijk** calls me. He is a homeopathic physician who has known Swami Gopal Baba since 2002. He is also a good storyteller and has many experiences to share. So even when I am quite occupied with preparing for our journey, I am really happy with the chance to add his experiences to our book.

Before we even start with our interview, in his eagerness to share his road to happiness, Ries tells me about his truly enlightening meetings with Swami. Luckily, my recorder was on.

A few days later, while rain falls, and a strong wind rustles the many coloured autumn leaves in trees and on the streets, I relisten the recording. My thoughts are just as rustled as the leaves outside. Somehow, I always considered myself to walk the road of devotion. It has always been 'my thing'. I love singing bhajans and to adore God in His many forms. I like to talk and walk with God in the feeling that I am His child. But it is not just that, for the famous verse of Adi Shankar always brings tears in my eyes without knowing why.

These ancient words stir a deep longing within me.

*Mano buddhya-hankara chittani naham
Na cha shrotra jihve, na cha ghrana netre
Na cha vyoma bhumirna tejo na vayuhu
Chidananda rupah shivoham shivoham*

(I am not the mind, intellect, thought, ego, or some form of the supreme being; I neither have ears, nor tongue and I neither have nose (nostrils) nor eyes; I am not the sky, earth, light or the wind; I am the fortunate, joyful, supreme Being who is truth, knowledge and eternal bliss. I myself am the spiritual joy of pure consciousness - Shiva; Shivoham, Shivoham.)

Ries' story is all about this, and his words open new gates to me. I let him talk to you now.

'It all started with Sathya Sai Baba. I always was seeking the secret of life; I was searching everywhere to find the answer to this simple question: who am I? I read many books, and one day I picked up a book and quickly went through it. I saw a picture of a guy with a big dot of hair and the words materialisation popped up. It didn't hold my interest, so I put the book, which was about 'some' Baba back on the shelves and left the store. The very next day I was at a meeting with other homeopathic practitioners in Germany. I was introduced to a lady, wearing a beautiful ring, and I complimented her about it. Never before had I done that in my life; I am not interested in jewellery at all. So, I quite surprised myself. She said it was materialized by her Guru; so immediately I asked: "By Ali Baba?"

"No, no," she corrected me, "by Sai Baba." She started to tell me about Him, and it really hit me. Gosh, this seemed to be what I was looking for, this man could probably answer my burning life questions. Next day, back in Holland, I returned to the bookstore and purchased the book about Sathya Sai Baba.

Shortly after, my wife and I went to India to see Sathya Sai Baba. It was beautiful and mind-blowing to see such a divine person but there were thousands of people... I was happy but also disappointed not to be able to ask any question. Of course, I kept reading and searching. I came to know that Sai Baba often recommended some books to western devotees to read, one of these books was written by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. I studied Advaita Vedanta and tried to grasp the truth these masters reveal.

A few years passed in the school of my life and then you, Sita, invited me to see a video of Sri Gopal Baba, whom you had met a few months before. You were so touched, and it became clear to me how life-changing your meeting with this man had been. I became intrigued. Here was a wise, divine being, available for me to go to and ask my crucial questions. As soon as possible I went to Bangalore to meet Him.

It is February 2002. When I first meet Him, we are with a small group. He is approaching us in His small temple. The other members of the group touch His feet when He greets them, but I feel resistance. *I am a westerner, why should I bow down for another human being?* When He stands before me, He welcomes me very lovingly, but I am still struggling with His feet. A strong inner voice rises inside me saying, *surrender, bow down for the Divine, bow down for your highest Self, kill the ego.* And I bow down; there is no other option left... Swami asks me what I want, and I answer: 'Enlightenment.'

An older gentleman sitting in the back of the temple, smiles and says: 'That is very difficult.' I feel somewhat discouraged.

During our stay, one evening, we go to see Sathya Sai who happens to be in Whitefield, Bangalore.

We are with thousands of people singing bhajans, on a big temple square. Seeing Baba back after ten years brings tears in my eyes. I am fully focussed on Baba and no longer aware of the crowd around me. I enjoy the music and move my thumbs in the rhythm of the songs.

Suddenly a thought flashes through my mind. Baba, can you move your thumbs just like mine? Immediately Baba changes the position of His hands and moves His thumbs in the same way I do. He looks straight into my direction and I am totally overwhelmed. Only later do I realise this was a lesson in oneness. After the bhajan we rise and the first thing I see is a text on a t-shirt right in front of me, saying: *Keep your dream tight*. Yes! I will not be discouraged by anyone, I am here to discover, to learn and no one will stop me.

Back at Gopal Baba's place, I enter the mandir. My heart still so full of all I experienced that evening. Seeing Swami, it is just as if a huge wave of love is sweeping me from my feet and I ask Him, whether I can touch His feet, there is no resistance left. It melts away in an ocean of Love.

The second time I went to India to be with Swami I travel with my wife and daughter.

We are in His temple on Monday morning. Swami performs the ritual of Lingam Abhishekam. The small temple is packed, and I am squeezed in the middle of people with faces full of devotion. Suddenly all kind of strange thoughts enter me, negative thoughts, very negative. I try to fight them, I don't want these thoughts, but they keep coming. It confuses me, I pray... but they still keep popping up in me.

After the service I went to sit down in the back of the temple, still feeling confused and sad.

After a while I decide to walk towards Swami who is in the front, at the same moment He walks towards me and asks me: "What? Are you not happy?"

I tell him about my struggle with negative thoughts. He smiles and says: "Don't worry; they will leave again. It is a matter of will and wish. It was the will of God that those thoughts came to you and it was your wish that they would go away. They will disappear the moment He wills them to disappear. It was your wish to have more positive thoughts, but they will change the moment He wants them to change." During this stay I am allowed to do service in the free clinic opposite

the temple. In the evening when the clinic is closed, we have good sathsangs together in which I am working on understanding what Swami has told me.

The third time I am there, a few years later, I am still seeking the answer to my question: *What is the secret of life?*

It is a Monday morning and very quiet in the temple. Usually there are always people searching Swami's blessings, but on this morning, it is just Swami and me. He sits in the altar and with a big smile He invites me to come and sit in front of Him. He says: "Come, come, sit here, now I am going to tell you the secret of life, but you have to remember."

I sit down and look up at Him expectantly.

He looks deep into my eyes and says: "Everything is God! Even the ego."

At the same moment I feel a shift in my perception, and everything falls into place, all my questions are answered in this instant, what a beautiful Truth!

Swami asks: "What are you sitting on?" I answer: "On God."

With a smile He answers, Yes, yes, everything is God! Even the floor on which you are sitting. We are equal, not our bodies, but That which controls creation, the Source.

And I say, from the depth of my heart: "I surrender."

That moment everything changes for me.

Not outwardly; I still work as a homeopathic doctor, but this insight has changed how I look at my patients, how I look at life. I realise now that everything is important and a vital part of the Universe. Even this cup of tea, that tree, a bird, you, me, Swami, everything is of equal importance for everything is part of God. Like Swami said: *in truth there is only One.*'

I feel, with this story all is said. Of course, there are the questions we asked our other contributors, but for Ries the questions are answered in the last statement.

It reminds me of a Sanskrit shloka:

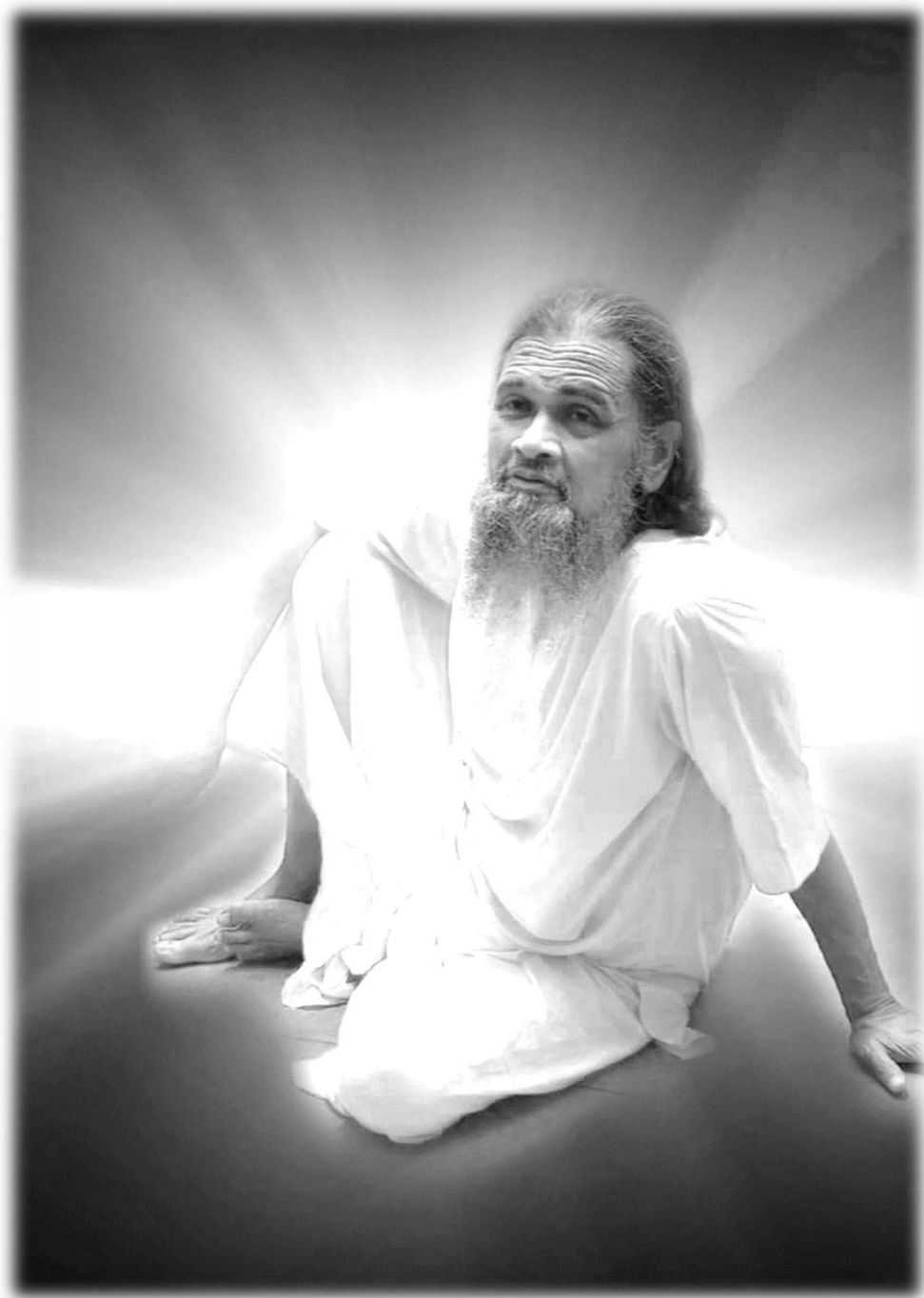
Om Puurnnam-Adah Puurnnam-Idam Puurnnaat-Purnnam-
Udacyate
Puurnnasya Puurnnam-Aadaaya Puurnnam-Eva-Avashissyate

Meaning:

*Om, That (Outer World) is Purna (Full with Divine Consciousness);
This (Inner World) is also Purna (Full with Divine Consciousness);
From Purna comes Purna (From the Fullness of Divine
Consciousness the World is manifested). Taking Purna from Purna,
Purna Indeed Remains (Because Divine Consciousness is Non-Dual
and Infinite).*

After writing down this interview, I become silent inside, we are already One, we only think we are separate. We have heard this before, but now the truth is revealed just a bit more, through this beautiful life story. It has always been my deep wish to become one with God, and here Swami tells that our egos are also part of God, it confuses me.

To me Swami is a Mother, and all I want is to be just a child at Her feet. This confusion leaves me when He makes me realise these are the very roads, the Masters often refer too. The path of Jnana and Bhakti: wisdom and devotion. And as Swami told me once: *they meet in the end*. I trust His words for it is not something that the intellect can grasp. Like Ries, I can say only these two words... *I surrender*. It is my prayer that one day we will all understand that we are one Light, one Love, one humanity.



Swami Sri Sai Prabuddhananda Saraswati Maharaj' **spiritual lineage**

In November 2015 Swami founded His Sri Soma Sai Skanda Ashram, in Nidaghatta Village in Maddur Taluk and the ashram was dedicated to the world by the Honourable Governor of Karnataka, Sri Vajubhai Rudabhai Vala with grand ceremony. Swami created the Ashram with a vision - It should become a Centre for 'Adhyatmic' (spiritual) Excellence, providing an environment for 'Adhyatmic' seekers to progress on their path to purify their mind.

Ever since that day, Swami is manifesting more forms of His divine nature. Sometimes He will even appear as the Divine Mother.

We now know Swami by His sanyas name as Swami Sri Sai Prabuddhananda Saraswati. In this manifestation He adorns a new look by wearing kundals (earrings) as per the tradition of Nath Yogi's. Nath samprada has a rich tradition and starts with Shiva (Adinath) and Devi (Umanath) and continues with some of the legendary Matysendranath and Guru Gorakshanath. This was further enhanced by Sainath Maharaj himself. There are various books that exemplify the tradition and history of Nath sadhus. Sri Gopal Baba is continuing in this tradition.

More and more we hear Swami talk about Swami Samarth Sri Akkalkot Maharaj, Sant Tukaram, Sridhara Swamiji from Varadahalli, Sri Ganeshpuri Nityanand Maharaj. All these saints are Dattavadhoot. They are part of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara and take avatar to release their devotees from the cycle of birth and death by reforming their true devotees. Swami Himself says about His connection with these avatars: 'We are all like those bulbs of a serial set, dangling along a single wire... glowing here and there ... with the same energy of

current passing through the entire wire, making the bulb glitter and glow, showing light to the world.'



Epilogue

Reading the interviews in this book, we heard the experiences of many. Every road to God is unique. Your road is a perfect fit for who you are, and my road for me.

We feel however that whatever path we walk towards God, one thing is needed most of all, Grace. Without Grace we cannot move even an inch. It is this Grace that can be found in a great Master. A Master like Jesus, Sathya Sai Baba or Sri Gopala Krishna Baba, (Sri Prabhuddananda Saraswathi Maharaj) or as our heart simply knows him as Swami or Mother.

This is the end of the book, so this is where we start, refreshed again, our beautiful journey, from God to God. It is time to rejoice for indeed we walk each other Home. Home, our Source and Truth. Home where God is, Home where Swami is, right here within you and me.

Linda & Sita



The entire creation is the manifestation of God. There is no second entity. Once this truth is realised, the mind ceases to exist. You see diversity in this world only due to the thoughts and counter thoughts of your mind. When unity is realised in this diversity, then there is no mind. Everything is God. Whatever you see, hear, think, speak, and do and wherever you go, everything is God. Only when there is a second entity is there scope for thoughts and counter thoughts. But when there is only unity, and that is Brahman, there is no scope for thoughts and counter thoughts. This is the state of amanaska, meaning a state devoid of mind. There is only love in this state. That love is the truth. In fact, truth and love are one and the same. When truth and love unite, the world loses its identity for you and you see God everywhere.

Sathya Sai Baba



Sanskrit explanation

Abishekam	Ritual of pouring water on a statue of a deity while reciting mantras
Ashram	Monastic community
Advaita Vedanta	Advaita Vedanta is one of the schools of Hindu Vedantic philosophy and is based on the concept that the higher or true Self is identical to God
Arathi	Offering of light, waving a flame before an object of worship
Bal Vikas	Children's class on spirituality and human values
Bhajans	Spiritual songs
Bhakti	Devotion
Gurudakshina	Offering to the Guru
Jnana	Wisdom
Jyoti	Lamp
Kurda	Pond near a temple
Leela	Divine playful game
Lingam	Symbol of the formless aspect of the Divine
Neti-neti	In the search of what truth is the feeling of 'neither this, nor that'
Padnamaskar	Touching of feet as a symbol of surrender or respect
Paramahansa	Saint

Puja	Religious ritual
Puja room	Meditation room
Prapti	Obtaining the power to enter or penetrate everywhere
Prasad	Food or flowers that are offered to God and later shared among devotees
Puttaparthi	Birthplace of Sathya Sai Baba
Rahu and Ketu	The north node and south node of the moon showing your purpose/passion and where you have come from
Satguru	The ultimate teacher who can lead you to liberation.
Sathsang	Good company, usually used for spiritual uplifting empowering gatherings
Seva	Service
Sevak	Servant
Suprabatam	Morning song
Upanayanam	Upanayanam is the ceremony by which a young boy is invested with the sacred thread
Vibhuti	Sacred Ash

