

VIDYULLEKHA



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Another year comes to an end and a new year begins. We are once again gathered at the home of our divine master reliving our golden days recollecting His love for us and offering our gratitude to Him. We could do this every year until eternity and it will never get old. We will never exhaust the stories of His love for His children. We miss Him dearly. Even though our memories of yesteryears are evanescent, the time we spent in His company is vivid and eidetic. This is what draws us every year to His abode. We come to remember Him, remember His form, His smile, His word, His gestures and His message. Of the many things Swami has done for us, He has planted the sapling of love in our hearts and tended to it with divine care. That love has granted us the experience of the divine and helped us erect a fortress of faith to house our dear Swami in our hearts.

The hostel life was like a nursery where Swami tended to each flower sapling with the sunshine of His loving grace. We are now put into this wide world to play our roles as is Bhagawan's will. The world brings with it experiences good and bad. But through all of this we must realise it is Swami who is directing our lives. Nitin Acharya recollects a telling experience of Swami giving courage to Dr. Safaya when he faced professional challenges. This experience will give us the conviction to offer our difficulties at His lotus feet and sit back as He guides the ship of our lives through choppy waters to safe shores.

Swami expects His students to be leaders in their respective fields. A section of this edition is dedicated to the stories of three of our alumni from three generations who have gone on to become successful entrepreneurs. Anshuman Dass, Ram Ramdas and Sathya Pramod take us through their arduous yet rewarding journeys from ideas to startups, and how Swami's message was the guiding light throughout.

The alumni profiles present two inspiring examples of our brothers living up to the Sai ideals in their respective professions. Harish Mirpuri is a successful businessman who has taken Swami's command, "Take Bharath's Name High" as his life's mission using a unique medium - the fashion industry. In the second alumni profile, Nirbhay Lumde recollects his journey starting from humble beginnings all the way to his meteoric rise as a seasoned professional in the Corporate Social Responsibility sector. In both these profiles we see the common thread of Swami's ever present grace guiding and guarding His children.

In this edition's Gratitude Corner, we have Hari Ranjan Rao, IAS Officer and Additional Secretary at the PMO, share his views on Swami, the Sai Alumni and his experiences in connecting to Swami in everyday life. A Balvikas alumnus, his elder-brotherly advice to the alumni on reaching out and connecting to Swami even in the physical absence of Bhagwan is inspiring.

We conclude with a summary of two seva activities in the healthcare sphere. A new Palliative Care centre has been inaugurated in Parthi which is providing services to the local population. The Hospital Helpline which was started as part of Premabandham 2020 is going strong. Both of these venues provide excellent opportunities for the alumni and their families to engage in seva, in-person and virtually.

We pray this edition brings Swami's love to you and lights up your life. We pray His message stays with you and guides you through another year into ventures new and promising. We pray you carry His love to your near and dear ones and beyond. We pray you become the message of Sai.

Do write to us at Vidyullekha@saistudents.org and visit us at www.vidyullekha.in

Team Vidyullekha
Sri Sathya Sai Alumni

BHAGAWAN UVACHA

Faith or Experience, which comes first?

Love is the source and the destination. The journey between the source and the destination is an opportunity to experience the divine. His Care, His Uncertainty, His Admonishments, His Guidance are all an expression of His immense Love for us, which is pure, priceless and perpetual. The divine is a caring mother and a protective father to many of us, sometimes a strict taskmaster or even a generous grandparent to some. Most importantly, to many of us He is also our confidante; our most reliable shoulder to rest upon during testing times. It was during such times when He revealed different facets of His divinity, that our bond with Him was cemented. The pinnacle of the guru-shishya relationship is when there is no difference between the guru's vision and the shishya's mission. All of us have had such moments, however fleeting they may have been, but they gave us a purpose to pursue.



I had one such experience on an eventful evening in 2005. Bal Vikas students from one of the districts in Andhra Pradesh had put up a drama on Bhakta Prahalada in the Sai Kulwant Hall. Noticeably happy with the performance, Bhagawan showered the children with lots of photos and prasadam after the drama. When Bhagawan returned to the interview room, he was in a blissful state, perhaps reminiscing His times from the Narasimha Avatar, buoyed by Prahalada's devotion. The ever-spontaneous Bhagawan suddenly asked the two of us (another brother who also was serving Him with me), if we had any spiritual question for Him. Hearing this offer I felt I had won a lottery. Like a lottery winner who would not know how to spend the fortune in the initial moments after winning, I was juggling the many questions that were popping up in my head after hearing Bhagawan's offer. Finally, taking cue from the events that were so magnificently portrayed by the Balvikas children on Prahalada's life, I asked Bhagawan, "Swami, in our journey towards You, what comes first, is it the Faith or the Experience?"

The ever-resplendent Bhagawan looked into my eyes and replied with a smile, "Bangaaru, it is neither Faith nor Experience." There was a precious and pregnant pause after that statement. We waited eagerly, catching our breath for the message from the divine lips. Bhagawan graciously continued, "It is Love that needs to come first. Where there is Love, there Faith will build and develop. And, when there is Faith, Experience of the Divine is bound to follow." The message was plain and simple. It took a few moments for its profundity to sink in. Swami continued by citing from the Ramayana. "When Lord Rama was searching for Sita in the forest, He had no plans to pass by Sabari's hut. But it was her Love for the Lord that drew Him towards her hut granting her the experience of the divine. Love will lead to Faith and Experience. Take one step towards me and I will take ten steps towards you." Bhagawan also gave us a reality check on how easy we had it compared to the likes of Prahalada. "Even in the most extreme circumstances, Prahalada continued to nurture his love, faith, and devotion to the Lord, and as a result, the divine was always with him. He wanted Lord Vishnu to be by his side all the time, so how could the Lord ignore."

As I think more about it, I feel as if Swami has given us the license to be the iron filing to the magnet that He is. We only need to be 'in' His presence and He will ensure that we are drawn towards Him like an iron filing is drawn towards a magnet. We have been beneficiaries of His grace on various occasions, but the opportunity to seek Him and be assured of His grace is a divine experience that we have been blessed with. Bhagawan has declared on numerous occasions that His miracles or divine experiences are His visiting cards. The onus is now upon us to act upon those divine experiences we have had. It would be a pity to merely relegate these experiences to the pages of a book or worse to the dusty shelves of our fading memories. Many such episodes have made a lasting impact in the lives of countless devotees. Bhagawan in His immense grace has written many such golden chapters in the book of our lives. It is our turn to now dedicate a few pages of our book to living His message.

COVER STORY - SAI STUDENTS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

An Experiential Expedition: How SAI Enter-Prunes Lives!

Entrepreneurship. The buzzword among the GenZ. India has emerged as the third largest startup ecosystem in the world, with 107 unicorns (startups with valuations of \$1 billion or more) with a total valuation of \$340.79 billion, as of 7 September 2022. The year 2021 witnessed a record set of 44 entries to the coveted unicorn club, even as many 'sooncorns' (soon to be unicorns) waited in line.

So, is being an entrepreneur so easy? Can anyone and everyone become an entrepreneur? What does it take to be an entrepreneur? We will also answer these questions, with the added flair of 'Swami and His students'!

We connected with a few of our alumni brothers, who have now moved on to become entrepreneurs. Presenting to you a unique cover story titled – 'An Experiential Expedition: How SAI enter-prunes Lives!' – for this special edition of Vidyullekha, the alumni magazine. Through this cover story, we take you through a journey, in fact, journeys of our fellow alumni brothers, who now own startups and have become entrepreneurs. And while doing so, we hope to give you a plethora of takeaways, inspiring anecdotes and WOW moments (Yes, you guessed it right! WOW = SWAMI) Below is a brief introduction of the three entrepreneurs:



Anshuman Dass – Founder, Labby. BSc (Hons.) Physics from Brindavan (2001-04), M.Sc. Physics from PSN (2004-06). Labby, an MIT startup, is building next-generation technology to provide fast, accurate, and affordable solutions for dairy farms (website: <https://www.labbyinc.com>)



Ram Ramdas – Founder, Wonderlend Hubs. XI, XII and BSc (Math, Physics, Chemistry) from Brindavan (1980-84). MSc Math from PSN (1984-86). PhD in Mathematics from Parthi (1986-90). Asst. Professor, PSN DMACS (1990-92). Wonderlend Hubs provides expertise in Credit Profiling, Loan Origination management and Incentive Compensation automation (website: <https://wonderlendhubs.com>)



Sathya Pramod – Founder, Kayess Square. XI and XII from PSN (1990-92). B.Com (1992-95). My first 2 years of degree were in Parthi and my final year at Brindavan. Kayess Square is a boutique consulting company specialising in Transaction Advisory, Corporate Services and Restructuring (website: <https://kayesssquare.com>)

Here are excerpts from the interactions:

Every entrepreneurial journey has a story; happy or not so happy. Each story begins with an idea, an idea which seems new and unique, which could later prove to be groundbreaking. Or ideas could be modifications of or improvements on existing original ideas. To understand what truly inspired and motivated them, let's hear it from our Sai entrepreneurs:

Anshuman Dass: A startup wasn't something that I always wanted to do. After I finished my PhD, I was considering taking up the academic line and becoming a professor. However, during my postdoctoral studies, I went to the Tata Center for Technology and Design at MIT. The Center's mission was to look at challenges that are generally found in India, get the best engineers from prominent institutes like NIITs and try to match problems with people who could possibly solve them. The stint at the center helped me get valuable insights into looking at problems.

Subsequently, I started working with many hospitals and other organisations in India. While I was working with these organisations, I started getting some clarity on the direction that I should take my career. I felt that whatever research I have done, should be useful to society. Not everybody thinks that way, because there are people who do fundamental research, and maybe in 30, 40 years, somebody might use their work. So, I was driven by the fact that I should make my research useful in some way to make somebody's life better and have a positive impact on the society at large. In a way, giving back to society. One of the things that I was working on fit that thought. Broadly, the technology could be applied in different applications. And I felt that let's start an initiative, like a company that could commercialise the research. That's how in 2017, I started the company.

Ram Ramdas: I had done my PhD in Math, and I don't think that, during my education I had envisioned that I would be an entrepreneur. Going back to my college days in Brindavan and Parthi. I think one thing that Swami quite often used to say, and I'm sure you might have heard about it from various teachers or old students and that's implicitly stuck in my head. Swami used to say, "Don't be job seekers, be job creators or job givers." And I think that got ingrained into me. So, after my PhD and teaching for a few years, I was with consultancy services in an applied R&D centre. Doing research and innovation has always been something I liked to do. To look at problem statements and come up with unique sustainable solutions, has constantly been one of my drivers. This led to an opportunity to be a technology R&D leader at an European software company. It was during that time that I got this idea of having a technology platform that can manage a lot of real time or non-real time data and be able to apply a lot of configurable business rules, business logic, and create a decisioning and workflow kind of system. So, that was basically the idea with which we started our first company, Herald Logic. And now Herald Logic and Wonderlend Hubs are coming together.

Sathya Pramod: Entrepreneurship is a loaded word. It is what someone wants to do to accomplish something which not too many people have tried doing. It has a social element to it, but a lot of commercial elements as well. The person who is trying to do something, wants to show the world that this is possible. It takes a lot of guts, effort to do something. It is more about the passion and the dream that the person wants to realise. I always had this dream to work with young minds and early stage companies. I decided that I will start something that will help these companies realise their dreams, and in the process, I realised my dream of working with early stage companies. Currently, I work with about 45 to 50 organisations at different levels, including companies which came to us at the incorporation stage. Each of them is decently sized (300 to 500 members) and they are growing in terms of their valuation (some of them are valued at 500-600 crores). Seeing them realise their dream and being a big part of that, gives one that satisfaction and also the encouragement to work with more such people. Just to give an example. Many of the startups are badly lost, in the sense that they know what to do but not how to do it. I have been in the industry for 20+ years and seen things from multiple perspectives in India and outside India. And seeing the plight of entrepreneurs at times, gives you the energy to help them and make them move on.

Once you have got the idea and the motivation for your startup, next you need to have many diverse factors to fall in place as one cohesive unit. Many entrepreneurs find the first steps to be a cakewalk, but what are those factors that worked for our entrepreneurs?

Anshuman Dass: Yes, there were factors that worked our way. The very fact that the company is still alive stands testimony to it. I'd say that being very patient and persistent in general is very rewarding. Being an entrepreneur, you are tempted to jump; this market is not working, let's try

something else, let's try to pivot. That might work in some cases. But it wasn't the case for us. Because we spent so much time building trust with our customers (farmers). It was not something that we could just ignore and move to something different. So, that paid off pretty well. I think the reward that we get is not just monetary. The problem became very personal. It stopped being transactional. Say, you started a bakery. You want to get emotionally linked to your customers. But for us, since we work with livestock and we see how hard they work, I wanted to make their lives better somehow. I wasn't expecting anything in return, but it became a central driving force for us.

Ram Ramdas: I would say that basically when you start, you must have some of these factors that give you a head start or a competitive edge over other players in the market. For us, the ability to understand very complex problem statements and the various dimensions, in terms of the data, the workflows and very complex business rules was the edge. The ability to translate that into a customer solution. Second, from a technology standpoint, we may have a very deep understanding of the technology and implement a particular solution. But if those data elements, the business rules, keep changing, you need to provide the capability to your customers to modify in a simple way. Else, the solution will remain static. I think these two are the factors that allowed us to get an entry into the market and then be able to scale up, even though we were quite small.

Sathya Pramod: The favourable thing was that we didn't start very early. I wasn't looking at Kayess Square to meet my daily needs. On the financial side, we had a reasonable leeway and runway. I started Kayess when I was about 42. I had my reserves and other financial resources. My co-founder too had a similar structure. So, it didn't matter if we went a couple of years without salary. Which is not possible if you start young. There was no pressure of revenue from day one. It took about one and a half years to figure out what was the right business model to work on; what kind of startups we want to focus on, which are the areas you want to support them on and things like that. It does take some time. Another advantage was that I had a 20+ year journey in the industry. So, a lot of leaders knew us really well. For getting references to push the startups to the right investors, it became easy. So, a lot of those boxes were ticked for us. It wasn't like we were starting on a blank sheet. And I was always actively investing, getting to know the startups which are doing well. So, that gave us the fillip that even though one and a half years you are not doing too much, you can still survive. That becomes really important for any outsider who starts up.

Swami says, "Life is a challenge, face it." Not everyone gets a rose bed of success to walk on. One comes face to face with myriad hurdles and obstacles. But how do you face it if you are venturing into an unknown path? Let's see what challenges were encountered by our brothers and how they worked their way out of those challenges.

Anshuman Dass: The line of being an entrepreneur is very difficult, especially for people from my background. We don't have training in running a business, although it's common for engineers and scientists to start a company. It can be really challenging to enter the industry. For example, in my case, I work with farmers. But I had zero farming background. So, I had to build personal networks and it takes time. And building networks as an immigrant in the US, it's not as easy as we can do with farmers in India. To build their trust, there are no shortcuts; it takes a long time. Other challenges are common. You don't start making money on day one. You have to raise funds from investors. If you are not able to raise money in time, then you will run out of funds. Again, if you are in a foreign country and you run out of funds, you are going to be in a difficult situation. That's one. Now, you want to raise money but the investor is going to ask, "Where is the product? Why should I give you money?" You have to make some progress somehow. There are technical challenges too. We were working on a hardware device with a huge cloud component. To find the right talent, to build and test it out was another challenge in itself. The unique challenges today include those related to supply chain. You say that you will release a product on a certain date. But it gets pushed because of delays in supply chain. I'd say that in every aspect of business, there are challenges.

Ram Ramdas: When you initially start up, the biggest challenge is to get people – early customers, investors – to believe in you. When it comes to trusting a small, unproven company with important business problems that they want to solve, it's a huge risk for whoever is taking that decision. So, one is the funding, the ability to convince investors that this is a business worth investing in based on your vision. Translating that in the minds of both the investors and the customers is a big challenge. And third, I would say even from an employee standpoint, we want to get good talent into the company. Obviously, people may like a lot of the other things that you do. But two things really matter a lot. One is, to convince them that if they join, they have a very good, long-term growth and career opportunities. And second, is to have some degree of job security.

Sathya Pramod: All of us start with something, and kind of morph into something else. For example, Flipkart started with buying books and selling and later turned out to be one of the biggest online marketplaces. So, not everyone will get it right the first time. The beauty about startups is that you need to be nimble, you have to hustle and figure out what will work for you. In our case too, we started as services. There were people who were asking us if we could offer multiple services. But the problem is, Again, the question: "If you are getting a good amount of revenue by offering these services, why do you want to leave them on the table?" As an entrepreneur, the biggest decision you have to make is to stick to what you want to do. Again, having an idea is not enough. The execution is key.

"Tell me your company, I will tell you who you are", says Swami. The organisation is what it is, because of the people who are a part of it. It is the employees that give meaning and value to the existence of a company, especially so for startups. Let us get to know what work culture exists in the startups spearheaded by our Sai entrepreneurs.

Ram Ramdas: At Wonderlend Hubs, we have what we call a principle of 'Disagree but Commit'. It means that on a tactical or strategic issue, if there are five people who are involved in that decision, it is possible that three people may feel one way and the other two feel another. But you must have a very questioning culture. Not because Ram said something or XYZ something. You should have a critical conversation. But the conversation must be outcome driven. And once that outcome has been agreed, even though you may not intellectually agree with it, you must commit to it in terms of the action. All the five people are 100% aligned with the team to execute. I think this is a very core principle.

Sathya Pramod: It's a very open environment out here. For example, I sit with my team. They know exactly what I am working on, who are the people I am talking to. I am a big believer that knowledge is not power, but it's more of how you use that knowledge. So, everyone knows everything out here. There's no secret out here. It's an open culture. Anyone can talk to anyone at any time. Everyone has access to all the research reports and software.

Swami has promised us, "Wherever you may be, I am always with you, in you, around you." And this has been experienced by our brothers. Be it while making a crucial decision or seeking help when in a dilemma, they could feel Swami's invisible hand, holding their hands and showing them the right path. Or an indication on what Swami wants them to do. Let's hear it from them.

Anshuman Dass: I have certain experiences where I have felt I received Swami's invisible support. Initially, the times were very difficult. We used to run out of money quite often even as we were waiting for a round of funding. I used to pitch at startup competitions and somehow win some prize money to help me through the month. Or there would be some invited talks that would pay me a little extra. So, there always was some opportunity that would show up and help me with my finances for that month. I experienced this even in the beginning, where I had to make make-or-break decisions and needed some clarity. Like when you have two investors, with the same deal

and similar other details, and you can only choose one. You need to make up your mind. That time you need an internal force to give you clarity.

I'll tell you about a major experience. Before I had started Labby, I did some consulting work for a very large optical company. They asked me to make a device to see if the technology that I was working on, can be applied in the alcohol industry. I did make a prototype for them. Then I started thinking that maybe there is a market in that field. But I don't drink. So, working in that industry was making it very difficult for me. Like for instance, I would go to some customers, they'd offer me a drink. And it used to be very awkward then. And many times, I thought, "Why am I doing this?" It so happened that my dad was not feeling well and I had come to India. A family friend, who was then the Chairman of the Dairy Board, visited me in the hospital. We just got talking. And then he said, "You should be looking at milk as an application. And not alcohol and stuff." That gave me a lot of relief. I am definitely going to try this. It's something which I can relate to much more than something that I am not comfortable with. And it is very dear to Swami; there is a Gokulam in Parthi and Swami was very close to cows. And culturally too, it was way better at a comfort level. The family friend was connected to Amul. I went to Amul and saw their factory. Through this experience, I felt that there was a Divine intervention from above that helped me in taking the decision to work on something from which I would find more satisfaction.



Anshuman with Shri Ratan Tata

Ram Ramdas: I think a startup is not a linear journey at all. It is a rollercoaster ride. You should have the belief that you're true to your purpose. It's not about whether you're dishonest in your practices within your organisation. More than anything, you should be true to yourself. I have never ever felt that I need to give up. And that I think comes from the core, there's that kind of a very strong guiding spirit within us which comes from Swami. The spirit of knowing that you need to do something because that is true to your purpose, irrespective of what kind of outcome it produces in the short term. I think that's what has kept me going.

The Sai army of students are prospects to become entrepreneurs in the future. What message do the current crop of Sai entrepreneurs have for the future bunch of Sai entrepreneurs?

Anshuman Dass: Entrepreneurship is about solving problems and bringing value to customers. Always keep an eye out for problems around you and turn them into opportunities. It is not an easy path but the satisfaction is immense when you play a part in making someone's life better

Ram Ramdas: First, find your purpose. You must really understand what is the purpose of the startup? The long-term purpose of your startup has to be core to you. Second, you may not have all the means that you need to work to accomplish that purpose. But you shouldn't let that deter you. And third. As Martin Luther King says, "You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." So, if you think that you need to have a complete picture of what you're going to be building and only then, you can start. It's probably utopia! In fact, even people as successful as

Steve Jobs or Bill Gates, none of them envisaged the state of what their organisation was going to be. So, you will not have clarity. But that should not make you afraid of saying what is it that I want to do today or, tomorrow. There has to be a strong purpose, but an entrepreneur needs a bias for action. Don't quantify. Don't theorise too much. Don't overanalyze. What I like to call as 'Paralysis by Analysis'. Only when you do things, you will learn. Eight out of ten things you do may not be the right things. But doing it itself, becomes learning.



Ramdas with Swami

Sathya Pramod: I am a big believer that you need to see the world a little bit before you jump into entrepreneurship. At least 3-4 years of experience in a corporate or a startup, where you will see the world and that will help you sharpen your pitch a lot more. You can start it out of college. But the thing is, that you are so raw that you don't know what you need to do. Gain some experience. Partnering with a solid co-founder becomes a very, very important thing. Have your first customer in mind when you start. Make sure the customer is ready to back you. So, if you have these three, you can accomplish whatever you want.

This article was a humble attempt to explore the entrepreneurial journey of some of our alumni brothers. Who can give us more relevant, reliable and most importantly, relatable inputs and insights, better than our own alumni, who have undergone the rigours of the Sri Sathya Sai education system and now have blossomed into bright personalities, applying the valuable lessons in their everyday life.

We are grateful to brother Anshuman Dass, brother Ram Ramdas and brother Sathya Pramod, for taking out time from their busy work life, and sharing their entrepreneurial journey and much more.

FROM MY DIARY - NITIN ACHARYA

Mein Hoo Na -The Divine Assurance

Once Dr. Safaya sought Swami's permission to discuss hospital matters in private (circa 2005). He wanted to convey to Swami some urgent and important administrative matters in the Super-speciality hospital. Dr. Safaya was summoned inside the interview room and he explained the whole scenario in the hospital in a dramatic manner by comparing the hospital to an aircraft.

He said, "Swami, the Hospital is like an aircraft that carries the patients as passengers and their treatment (hospitality) is entirely dependent not just on the doctors but other staff of the hospital as well. Medical staff like Doctors and nurses make up one wing and the Paramedical staff, technicians, dietitians etc. are like the other wing. Perfect harmony is required to have a proper balance and a safe journey". Dr. Safaya spread his hands wide and explained through gestures by doing the balancing act imitating an airplane in turbulence. His actions conveyed the gravity of the problem he was facing. Swami was also very much engrossed in watching the hospital chief do his actions. In the end Swami smiled and I could barely control my laughter sitting by Swami's side.

The hospital chief then described the issue and Swami listened intently and silently and then looked up towards the clock for some time. After a few moments of silence Swami gave courage to Dr. Safaya by giving him these words of Divine assurance.

"You are on the wing, But who is in the cockpit?" He continued, **"I am the pilot. I will take care of the situation. Do not worry."** Swami gave him padanamaskar and filled his hands with packets of Vibhuti. Dr. Safaya continued his duty at the hospital for another 7 years. He was one of the chosen and most able instruments of Swami who occupied the chair of Director of the Super-speciality hospital for more than 20 years (1991-2011).

In the souvenir released on the 60th anniversary of the Sathya Sai General Hospital, I was delighted to come across almost similar words of assurance given by Swami to Dr. Sitaramaiah, the first Superintendent of the General Hospital who served Swami for almost a similar span of 20 years (1956-1975). The text in the souvenir read,

"Swami assured this blessed doctor that He Himself would work through him for the doctor was nothing but an instrument in the Divine plan and it was his great fortune to be the chosen one.

Truly, when the master comes, He comes with a master plan."

The General Hospital, commonly referred to by its abbreviation 'GH', was the first of many such GHs i.e. the 'Gift to Humanity' by God in Human Form as a beacon of hope and shining example. It's been 60 years since the inauguration of the 1st GH. There are many more such Sai 'aircrafts' in the sky - General Hospitals, Super-speciality Hospitals and Mobile Hospitals. Inspired by Swami's example, countless more such hospitals, clinics and medical camps are being run by devotees and Sai alumni all over the world. In all of these, Sai is the Pilot doing the balancing act and guiding the aircrafts towards their destinations.



Aircrafts and their wings are many but the Pilot is the One and Only - Sri Sathya Sai. When there is a tempest in our lives and we need a steady hand to guide the ship of our life, let us pray to Swami to take over the controls even as He calmly assures us, "Mein Hoo Na" (am I not there), like he comforted Dr. Safaya. Bhagawan is always eager to respond to our call.

ALUMNI PROFILE - HARISH MIRPURI

The First Lesson: Take Bharath's Name High

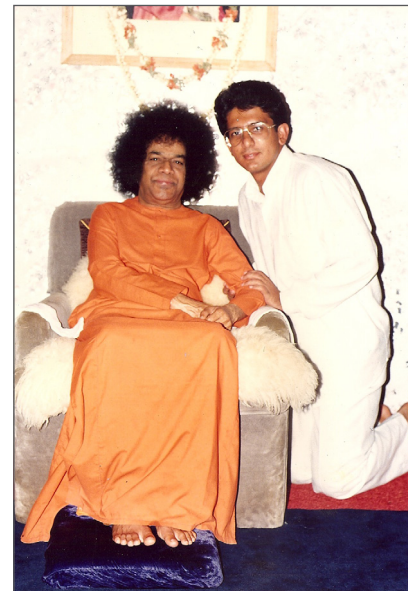
After completing his studies at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in 1993, Swami asked Brother Haresh to join his father's business in Indonesia. For this, he trained at the Toyota system of garment manufacturing in Tokyo and at the garment manufacturing system in Daewoo's plant in South Korea. He then went on to help his father in sales, marketing and merchandising. In 1995, Swami asked him to relocate to India to start a garment manufacturing company under the name 'Sai Lakshmi Industries Private Limited'. For this, Swami gave him a piece of land which was the property of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust. Swami told him, "Whatever you do from here, make Bharath's name proud". This first lesson from Swami meant that one should work towards earning a good name for one's country and just about Swami's institution or about being Swami's student. It also extends to the culture of Bharath.

Haresh was trained in Switzerland, Belgium and Italy, in spinning, weaving, printing and dyeing. During this period, he easily established rapport with many people around him who were not aware that they were training the director of a company. By being humble, he was able to acquire a lot of technical knowledge in textile and garment manufacturing. Swami has designed many practices for His students on the lines of simple living such as to wear white clothes and to have only a limited amount of money in bank accounts. This brings in an 'equalisation effect' amongst the students from affluent and not-so-affluent backgrounds of Swami's institute and hostel. This has made students relate to each other not by their religion or by their economic status, but only as two human beings who are pining to get chances from Swami. This beautiful equalisation effect helped Brother Haresh to build rapport with people right from the cotton farmers to international buyers. Swami's teaching of authenticity through practice help students learn to love each other before talking of love and are taught to participate in Seva before talking about one. These lessons helped Brother Haresh in articulating his thoughts in a way which others could relate to very quickly.

The Second Lesson: Meticulous Planning

When construction was about to begin, Swami asked him, "How many months are you going to construct the factory?". Haresh replied, "Swami the consultant says 18 to 24 months". Swami replied, "Swami ka project kabhi bhi nao mahina se jyada nahi hona" (Swami's project should not take more than 9 months). Swami explained that the moment the money comes into the account it should start working and not stay idle. Swami also gave the instruction of starting exports within nine months and to postpone the construction of office buildings later. Needless to say, the first container export was done in the ninth month. Swami was very happy with this.

The main takeaways from this incident are meticulous planning, the value of the seed capital and how it is important to make it work so that there is a cash flow. This was a big eye-opener to Haresh, as a capital intensive industry such as this could not only break-even but also make a net profit in the first year - a tough feat. All this happened at a time when venture capitalists were unheard in India and that Swami actually thought like one. When Haresh visited advanced industrial countries such as Japan, he discovered this is exactly how they think and execute. Such was the profundity of Swami's guidance.



Keeping the Promise

Eventually, Sai Lakshmi Industries became the most acclaimed spinning manufacturer and was considered to be a gold standard for quality in Asia. It exported even to China and was averaging beyond 97.3% efficiency. At this time a buyer from Switzerland was interested in buying yarn at the full capacity of the firm for 10 cents per kilo more than the market rate. But the buyer did not want 'Made in India' labels or the mention of India anywhere on the cartons as he had planned to resell them as Swiss quality. Haresh said that he was willing to resell it labelled as a product from India. Everybody insisted on going the 'Swiss' way so as to make huge profits. Haresh, on the other hand, reminded of his promise to Swami, declined. Within a month after this incident, there was another buyer who was willing to buy the yarn at 20 cents per kilo more than the market rate. The buyer was also willing to source from them for the next 5 to 6 years at a premium rate. This shows that by following Swami's words and by not giving in to the temptation we would be able to reap bigger benefits.

Divine Guidance on Health

Due to frequent travelling and intense work pressure, Haresh was unable to keep himself fit and was putting on weight. Swami had warned Haresh many times that when one puts on weight, the mind becomes dull. Swami has always instructed His students to wake up early and exercise. While Haresh had success after success and expanding his business, he was not paying closer attention to maintaining good health. After 12 years, he started facing difficulties and made some wrong decisions, which he now realises could have been avoided with proper mental alertness. All the while Swami had kept telling him, "Kya ra puri, reduce your weight!". Haresh felt that his mind was not as alert as it should have been to take on the growth of the company. So he decided to lose extra weight to gain more alertness. This helped him to face challenges in business. Here is an example. An American buyer, who was the second largest American menswear brand, had not paid a large sum of dues. When Haresh sought Swami's guidance in this matter, Swami asked him to think like an American and understand the American law. So, everyday from 8:00 PM to 12:30 AM, Haresh would read and understand the American law. This helped so much that along with Swami's blessings, Haresh won the lawsuit against this buyer. He attributes this success to the alertness of mind gained by keeping the body fit. Even today, Haresh still stands by the daily exercise routine in the hostel, as it is mandatory to keep the body fit.

In 2007, his company was going through a tough time financially with over 187 cases filed by different Government departments, creditors and banks. Haresh tried to take Swami's guidance on this matter and approached Him many times. Swami would smile at him or just take his letter and move on. One day, Swami came to him and said, "*Kya Abhimanyu, kaisa hain?*" (Hey Abhimanyu, how are you?). This was the first time Swami had called him "Abhimanyu". Swami said, "*Tum to Abhimanyu ban gaya. Andhar gus gaya abhi bahar kaise aana nahi malum hain. Tumahara yahi problem hain.*" (You have become Abhimanyu. You have got stuck and you do not know how to come out. This is your problem). Swami then taught him how to resolve each of the cases one by one.

Being in the marketing field, Haresh describes himself to be a very jovial person and a good storyteller. Swami had taught him that being in management, one must not talk unless asked to. Haresh realised the importance of being a good listener after eight years of marketing. This is an invaluable management lesson as the more one talks, the greater the chance of others taking advantage. It is very important to communicate what a customer can relate to. So being a good listener actually makes one a better marketing person.

Work is Worship

Many times Swami, in His own way, has told us that every student of His should be His institute. Every task that we perform in our organisation should be done with the spirit of offering to Swami. The dictum "Work is Worship" means that the work is not done towards a manager or an organisation. It must be dedicated as a worship to Swami. Those who have done that have risen so beautifully. One must not separate work from worship to Swami.

The first day Brother Haresh went for a sale after finishing his training, he met a lady who was the top buyer of one of the largest stores in the United States. He was sent there to meet the buyer and get an order. However, to his surprise when he met her, she asked him to get out. He later learnt that she was angry at him as her shipments were stood up by his company. Haresh then realised that if he did not get the order, then he would have to tell Swami that he failed. So deciding that he would not leave without getting an order, Haresh sat outside her office. Despite her repeated orders to leave Brother Haresh persisted in his efforts and sat for two full days outside her office. When she enquired about his persistence, he replied, "I have come as a representative of my father to apologise for all the mistakes that we have done and to secure a new relationship with you." "Don't even dream", she replied. During lunch time she came out to check if he had left. Still there, he told her, "In our culture we are taught that unless we are forgiven we should not leave." By the end of the day, Haresh had secured orders worth \$500,000. This effort was motivated by his drive to show Swami that he had adhered to Swami's guidance. At the end of every day, we have to report to Swami what we have accomplished.



Seva Initiatives Undertaken

Within Sai Lakshmi Industries, there is a trust created, wherein 2% of the sales are contributed. The trust gives free education to children of artisans and craftsmen. During COVID-19 pandemic, oxygen concentrators were sourced and donated to apartments in the neighbourhood. The trust also supports 100 families that are below the poverty line in the neighbourhood.

Advice for the Younger Alumni

This is what Brother Haresh has to tell the students of the institute. "Enjoy every bit in the hostel and understand that the lessons are being

taught for the long term. One would tend to think there are other ways of living, but in due course of time, one would realise that that is the most invaluable way of living. When Swami emphasises on simple living high thinking, we must not be attached to the things that we buy, but learn to live life with the least possible attachments. Swami, amidst all the wealth, was the embodiment of absolute simplicity. He could sit like a King in a Maruti 800, in a BMW or in a Rolls Royce. He is the real master, because He can command anything at His will and He can let it go without being attached to it."

Swami always expects His students to wear clean clothes and to be well groomed and clean shaven. He was never casual about it. Brother Haresh feels there is a reason why Swami made us look the way He wanted us to and it would be great if we, as alumni, can remember the importance Swami gave to this. The lifestyle in the hostel was specifically designed by Swami of how to build a day in our lives. Many successful alumni are still following it. If we cherish the ideals of our hostel life we can hear Swami within guiding us at every step of our lives. By this way each one of us can become an institution by ourselves.

Team Vidyulekha wishes Haresh all the very best for his future endeavours.

ALUMNI PROFILE - NIRBHAY LUMDE

(Bachelors in Arts, Prashanti Nilayam 1998)



Brother Nirbhay Lumde is a seasoned professional in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) sector, having headed the CSR and sustainability initiatives at several organizations such as CGI Asia Pacific, Fidelity Investments and Landmark Group. He has also worked extensively in the non-profit sector, serving for more than six years as a program coordinator at the Azim Premji Foundation. He was

Most of Nirbhay's work focuses on gender equality, climate change and building sustainable models of living. He also works to promote computer-aided learning and entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Nirbhay's journey had a humble start. Born in a small town on the border of Maharashtra and Telangana, he is the second of three children. He was born with a physical handicap that had to be corrected surgically. He studied in a Telugu medium school and was raised in a family that spoke Marathi and Telugu. Growing up, Nirbhay considered himself an underdog. He was not physically strong, was soft-spoken and sensitive. However, he worked hard and did well in his studies.

Nirbhay wasn't very familiar with Swami before he joined SSSIHL. He had never travelled outside his hometown, and all he knew of Sri Sathya Sai Baba was from a photo that he had of Swami and a book he had read on the Sathya Sai education model. Intrigued, and feeling an irresistible pull toward Swami, he decided to apply for Swami's college. His lack of fluency in English turned out to be a hurdle. But once the Lord beckons, there is nothing in the world that can stop a bhakta.

A spiritually-inclined doctor helped Nirbhay write his application essay. Nirbhay travelled to Parthi for his entrance exam, the first time he was travelling outside his hometown. He still marvels at how he cleared the exam despite his poor knowledge of English.

His education at the institute started in May 1995 with the summer course at Whitefield. It was here that Nirbhay, travelling from Parthi with barely any money in his pocket, had his first darshan of his beloved Swami. Thus began a sojourn that transformed Nirbhay and built him for life. Over the next three years during his B.A., Nirbhay was prompted to ponder deeply about the meaning of life, and the true purpose of education. He was a voracious reader and devoured all the books he could lay his hands on. He set up the hostel library of the Senior Boys Hostel from scratch and ran it for three years. Despite joining the Institute with poor English skills, Nirbhay had resolved that by the time he graduated from college, he would be proficient enough to deliver a talk in front of Swami. And being the persevering underdog since his boyhood, achieve the goal he did.

Nirbhay was blessed with much proximity and many interactions with the Lord during his three years. These were moments that gave him the much-needed strength and solace over a stellar career that he was to build in serving others.

After B.A., Nirbhay completed his M.A. in Political Science from the University of Hyderabad and M.Phil from IIT Bombay (for which a 17-member panel interviewed him) - all of them on scholarships. He credits his brilliant academic qualifications to Swami's grace. Upon graduating, Nirbhay realized that Swami never let him pay for an education, no matter where he went. He was fired up with a resolution to serve society and give back in all he did. This sense of purpose served him as a guiding light throughout his career.

His first job was with the AC Nielsen Group, which involved working in Aanganvadi centres, travelling and working at the grass root level. He was then handpicked by the Azim Premji Foundation, where he spent 6 years running the Computer Aided Learning Program in rural areas. After spending years carrying out service activities in rural areas, primarily in education, CSR and sustainable space, Nirbhay moved to Bangalore for a stint with Intel. He is now heading the Corporate Social Responsibility- Asia Pacific division at CGI. He also heads the employee volunteering initiative.



His CEO once quipped, “I’m the second most famous person in the Asia Pacific region. Everybody loves Nirbhay Lumde.”

He has earned several accolades throughout his career and was recently the recipient of the Net Zero Transition Leadership award by the Union Minister for Agriculture. He was known as the Life Saviour Officer during Covid, helping innumerable people with timely hospitalisations and oxygen supply.

He has put Swami and seva first in everything he does and finds this the purpose and mission in his life. Nirbhay lives Swami’s values and feels Swami guiding him every day. He often hears how among crowds, he stands different, and this is because the values he learned at SSSIHL are ingrained in his daily life.

He works for something larger than himself and says his goal is to build a sustainable model of living that outlives him.

GRATITUDE CORNER - HARI RANJAN RAO



Sri Hari Ranjan Rao is a personality of two very accomplished facets – different in their demeanour yet complementing in their nature. Mr. Rao is a senior IAS officer (1994 batch) working for the Government of India. He currently serves as an Additional Secretary to the Prime Minister of India. The second facet is that of a Balvikas Alumnus and an ardent devotee of Bhagwan. He hails from a family of devotees, and since the 70's, he has been actively involved in Seva activities wherever his illustrious career has taken him. He recalls with pride that he is one of those lucky students whose Balvikas diploma certificates hold the divine signature. Below are excerpts from a discussion Vidyullekha had with him.

My parents were involved in the activities of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations in the small towns of Madhya Pradesh where they were posted. I was a student of Balvikas then. After I got into the IAS, I had a 3-year stint in Indore, where we had a very good youth group involved in multiple Gram Seva activities. The activities were both elevating and humbling, and left us with many fond memories. That group is still like a close-knit family to me. Later, during my 10 years of posting in Bhopal I got involved in EHV and that is where I feel most committed and connected to. This for me was one of the best opportunities at Swami's feet as I am convinced that EHV is the way forward for the world.

Interaction with SSSIHL alumni:

To some extent I feel deprived that I was not a student of either Brindavan or Parthi Campus, yet throughout my journey I have met alumni at every corner. Some of them guided me and with some, I have had fruitful collaborations. Working with alumni is always a great honour because of their evident discipline and level of commitment. Swami always said that His army of white shall take His mission forward. So, Alumni are really blessed. And the good part is that they have been making their mark wherever they are. There are so many instances where the difference in a person can be traced back to being an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai Institutions.

On the Role of a Sai student

I think the role of an alumnus has metamorphosed. I will enlarge the group, not strictly confining myself only to these two campuses but also include all the Sai soldiers. All their roles have now blossomed. One has to now be Swami's messenger, rather than only do His work. This shift has already started. The impact of the campus can immediately be seen in the humility, softness and gratitude that linger on after they have left the place. There is one interesting advantage of alumni having worked and stayed in the campus. Having been part of that Swami's journey, it doesn't take time to trigger the goodness within them for any cause.

The other day I was speaking to one of the students, an alumnus, who also happens to be the daughter of one of my close associates. According to her, a lot of the students from the campus had been accepted into the company. For the management, it becomes very evident that these students are "made of different stuff". She says, "As soon as they realise where we are from, they rarely doubt our deservedness". So, I believe that Swami has been guiding you all along.

Recognise your passion and align yourself to the mission

Whenever a child becomes a part of this family, the value of seva automatically gets ingrained in him/her. Seva is the most attractive feature for a young mind. The intent towards personal Sadhana comes much later with maturity.

I remember this one incident from my school days. I had topped my district during my higher secondary studies, and my principal had decided to organise a small felicitation and make me address the school. That day, Swami, speaking through me, said that our freedom struggle was not

over yet. India still needs fighters; and when we play a role in it, we should derive the same pride that our great freedom fighters did back then. But what do we fight now? As long as there is a single tear drop in this world, and it is possible for us to wipe it, our job is not done. Personally, I would like to see India free of poverty, people not having to struggle for basic necessities. Swami had always wanted education, peace, harmony and love for all. This is a goal that has not been achieved yet. The “fire in our belly” should be towards this goal.

I enjoy my work as I feel that it is still Swami’s mission that I am working on. Every student and alumnus should also find that mojo in their scheme of things, where they can connect and feel that they are working on His mission. If someone achieves such a goal (end poverty) for India, he should look towards the rest of the world, like Africa. That place too has poverty, and if it is not Swami’s student who does something for them, who else will? So, the path is cut out for a soldier/student of Swami and we all should have the courage to walk on it.

How do we connect to Swami when we feel low?

There are times in our life when we feel very low. These are the times when we should force ourselves to be optimistic. We should never imagine that situations will remain the same forever. Everything around us changes. When such critical times come, I have a simple technique. I close my eyes for a moment. And I imagine myself sitting in Sai Kulwant Hall, where Swami is sitting on his chair and I’m sitting at his feet. I touch his feet and take His blessings. And then I also imagine that I’m looking at his face and Swami puts his hand on my head and says, “Don’t worry, I am with you”. I do this whenever I have a critical meeting or take an important phone call. On multiple occasions I have seen people’s tone change while talking to me and I believe it is because I have been praying to Him.

So, whenever you feel low, close your eyes and talk to Swami. Everyone has their own personal way to connect to Him. Swami has never failed me. Another advantage of being part of Swami’s mission is that our conscience is always clear. Guilt comes only when one has done something wrong. When I haven’t done anything wrong, why should I worry about it?

There is a slightly more philosophical way to look at this. Swami never worried about his body. Whenever he spoke about his body, He would always call it “this body” and not “my body”. So should be our approach. Anything bad that happens, be it disease, accident or losing one’s job, it can only happen to your body. It will never reach the level of Atma. So, if you break every problem down like this, the problem seems inconsequential. Fear is the absence of love. When we have love within us, there’s no place for fear. If we don’t have fear, the majority of our worries are gone. We are scared of uncertainty, but there is nothing uncertain in our life. It is all set. My suggestion would be to just sit back and be part of the blissful journey.

How do you continue to connect with Bhagawan in the physical absence

Swami always sits personally in my office in the form of a photograph. Initially, I used to be scared that someone might object to this. Instead, this has worked the other way round. Whenever people enter the room and see Swami’s photo, I notice a change in them. There are people who come in with different motives and wrong expectations. Surprisingly they behave quite differently once they notice His presence. Swami’s photo in my room is a sort of declaration that He is the one who handles my affairs. It is a great hedge fund which you create for yourself.

Swami is in our hearts. We need not flaunt our connection to Swami because we don’t really deserve to claim to be his messengers. But then one also need not be hesitant in admitting that he is Swami’s soldier. Swami is here, He is with me. It puts a lot of responsibility on us but that is okay. It is also a kind of self-check, reminding us to conduct ourselves properly. living that outlives him.



LOVE IN ACTION

This year's seva report presents two unique seva initiatives in health care. These seva initiatives portray how our alumni, inspired by Swami's life, collaborate with the society and leverage their expertise to provide care and comfort to the patients looking for support.

Sri Sathya Sai Palliative Care Centre, Puttaparthi

For the first time in the state of Andhra Pradesh, a Palliative care centre has been established to provide patient-centred care rather than an ailment-centred treatment to patients, including terminally ill patients. In line with Swami's philosophy, the centre provides services with no cost to the patients.

The centre is initiated by the United Care Development Services (a non-Profit company founded by alumni) in collaboration with Palliative Care Society, Hyderabad. It was opened in July 2022 as a 10 bed facility. Shri Ratnakar, Managing Trustee of SSSCT graciously inaugurated the facility. The project is supported by the Local Administration (i.e. Collector, Sri Sathya Sai District and Department of Health – Govt of AP). It should be noted that Sri Sathya Sai district has more than 450 villages and a population close to 2 million

Situated near the ashram, the facility has 11 full time staff, including a doctor and 5 nurses. Additionally, there is a counsellor and physiotherapist who provide their voluntary services to the centre. The centre is providing care to patients suffering from cancer and has provided cremation services as well. Sixty admissions have happened so far. The centre also has a home care van facility which caters to 5-6 patients across the district daily with about 200 patients registered.



The global estimate is that only 14% of the patients requiring Palliative care actually receive it. The estimated population of patients requiring Palliative care in India is 6 million. Due to lack of Palliative care, patients receive aggressive and expensive medical treatment forcing patients to leave hospitals against medical advice. The aim of home-based Palliative care is to promote and restore a person's maximum level of comfort and health including care towards a dignified death. The centre takes into account value systems including religion and culture of the patients along with giving respect to patients' right to privacy and dignity.

The centre provides opportunities for community volunteers including alumni and their families to be part of the initiative through physical and remote seva opportunities. For service opportunities, please reach out to brother Gunaranjan (gunaranjan@yousee.one) or brother Sridhar (Ph 9491130211)

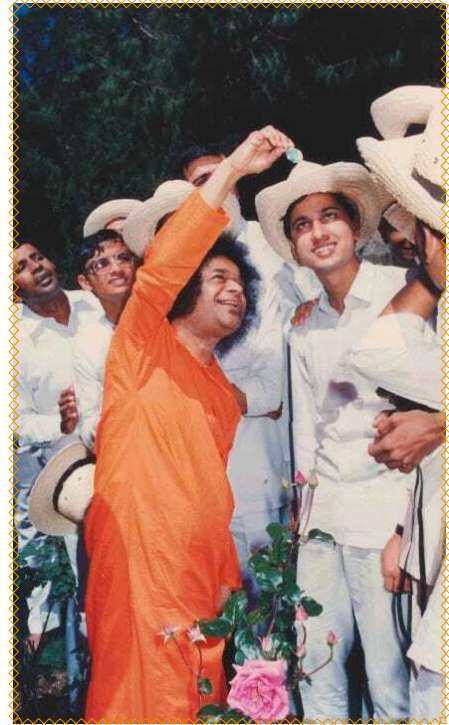
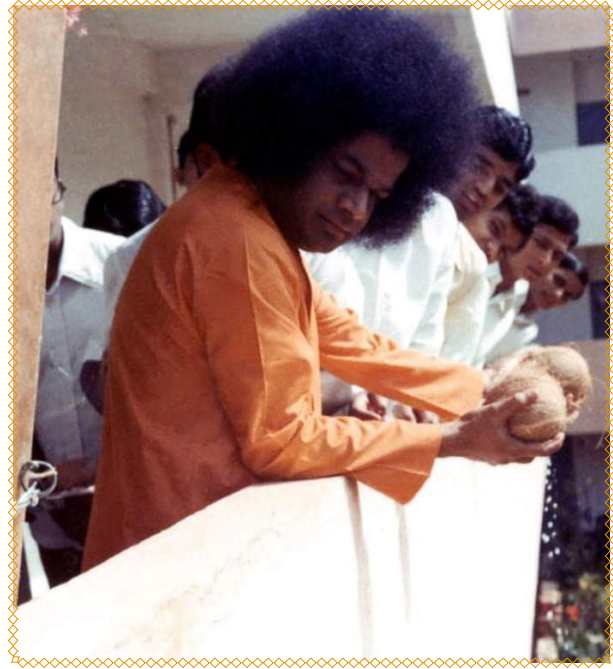
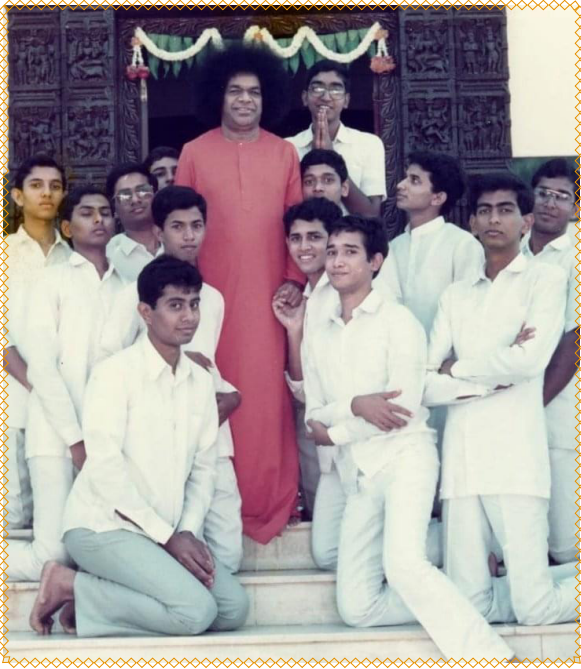


Hospital Helpline Call

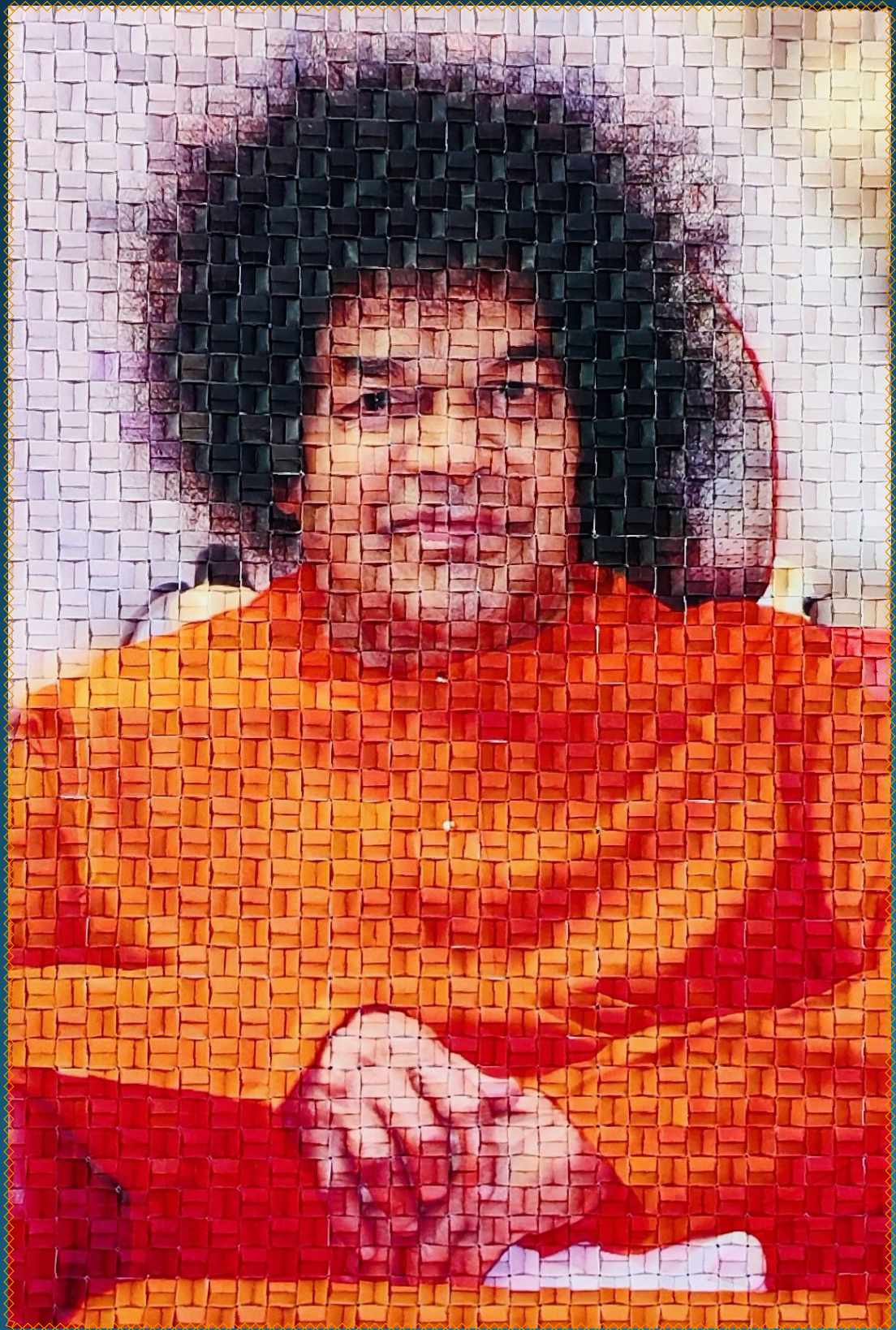
This service was started in Dec 2020 as part of Premabandam seva activities and has successfully completed two years. As part of this service, alumni families and devotees respond to calls of patients calling to both Super Speciality hospitals' dedicated helpline for setting up the appointment. The average number of calls per day is currently 1000. Around 400-500 volunteers are trained to manage this helpline. The calls are backed up on cloud and can be played back for reference. The service also includes missed call seva i.e., if the patients' call have been missed during the working hours, they will receive a call back to cater to their needs and provide the information they had sought. There is also a quality control team based

overseas given overseas volunteers cannot take voice calls. The performance review of the seva is regularly done by the hospital director and a team of managers which includes alumni brothers. The seva is delighting the patients coming from far off regions to get the healthcare services from Bhagawan. Alumni looking to get involved in this seva can reach out to Brother Venkatadesikan (Ph 9632422311) or Brother G Manoj (Ph 8073292851)









Losing Individual Identity for a Larger Picture:
Origami Art with 30,000 folds by Brother Vijay Y, MBA 2001

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