For sadhaks the most important thing to understand is to light the inner fire that consumes all other thoughts other than the reaching of perfection – that is the central meaning of the dhuni.”

— Sri M

Kumbha Mela
24—27, February 2010, Haridwar
— Swami Yogaratna

I had always thought that I’d never get a chance to go to the KUMBHA MELA. It was one of those things I’d postponed for the next lifetime. But when I got a text message inviting me to go, and just a few days to confirm, I immediately checked the calendar, and then decided to accept this once in a lifetime opportunity. How else would one get the opportunity to go to one of India’s biggest spiritual festivals? And in a group too, so that one didn’t have to think about anything, not even booking the air ticket from Bangalore to Delhi. The icing on the cake was that we were going with ‘Sir’ Shri M!

So there I was, no thinking, no planning, except to arrange a relief teacher for my students – and luckily for me, a good friend was happy and eager to help out. The most difficult thing I had to do was to find out what time the airport bus left and what time I should get up – 2.45am!

Almost at the same time, out of the blue, my old childhood friend Nina, sent an email asking if I knew how her good friend Evelyn could go to the Kumbha Mela. Wow! I immediately asked the organisers, no problem at all. And Evelyn and I started back and forth emailing every minutest detail, as she is extremely well organised.

As I’m usually always late, I didn’t want to miss out or inconvenience anyone this time, so I made sure of arriving at the airport 90 minutes, as stipulated, before departure, and was the first to arrive, armed with hot drink in a thermos and yummy home made bread sandwiches, very kindly prepared by my new live in guest. Soon some friends arrived, and recognised and befriended me. After an uneventful flight where I enjoyed views of India from the sky and time to read, we arrived and I started recognising other familiar faces from ‘The Satsang Foundation’ yet I was feeling nervous of living in close quarters with semi strangers – my mind said “Well, you’re a sannyasi so you can handle everything!” “Accept everything, reject nothing give everything take nothing!”

In a central park in Delhi we stopped for tea and snacks. There we met Shri M and we were able to pay our respects to the leader of this spiritual journey to the holiest river in the world, at a most auspicious time, Kumbha Mela.

http://www.satsang-foundation.org

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Q & A with Sri M
Excerpts from an Interview on All India Radio in Madikeri, Coorg
January 2008

Commentator – Sir we are very happy, you have come to Coorg. We welcome Sir Mumtaz Ali, who is also called as Mr. M, to Madikeri. Sir we would like to ask a few questions.

Question – Sir in the path of spirituality, do we have to have a Guru? If so, why do we have to have a Guru? And also, why do anyone have to take to spirituality?

Sri M – The first question can be easily answered. The 2nd question, why do we have to take to spirituality is a very serious question. You really can not answer in a few words. But I will try. We will come back then to the 1st question.

The thing is, most people are satisfied with normal life. They belong formally to a religion. They all go to church. Or they go to a temple. Or they may go to a mosque. And they are happy with that. They satisfy themselves. They do their work. They come back.

There are some people who are not satisfied with that. They want to go into the deeper meaning of life and this happens many a time, when we are faced with certain serious life situations.

Suddenly someone you love, dies. For instance. You don't know what to do. Because here was a person with whom you could talk, you could communicate and suddenly the person has gone away. So you begin to think. Is that person there? Is he gone? If he has gone where has he gone? What was it that was alive until now, with whom I had the relationship?

So all these questions come up. That is when one begins to search for a spiritual meaning in life. There are some who even in that situation, will say, ‘Well it is nothing. What is gone is gone and forget about it.’

But some are gone and forget about it. They also say, ‘Well it is nothing. What is gone is gone.’ They also say, ‘Well it is nothing. What is gone is gone.’

Is he gone? If he has gone where has he gone? What was it that was there? Is he dead? Is he dead? For instance. You don't know what to do. Because here was a person with whom you could talk, you could communicate and suddenly the person has gone away. So you begin to think. Is that person there? Is he gone? If he has gone where has he gone? What was it that was alive until now, with whom I had the relationship?

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from that will come an understanding of what death is. And then we will probably know what will happen after the death actually takes place in the physical body.

**Questioner** – Sir, the world speaks of, Rama, Krishna, Christ, Buddha and there are so many names. Whom should we consider as great? Or is there anything which is more powerful, and greater than these names?

**Sri M** – Regarding this question, which you have asked, I think over thousands of years different people have come and gone. Different beings. Different human beings have come and gone. According to their spiritual stature and according to their spiritual achievements, we have given them a godly stature. Right?

Why are they being given a godly stature? Because they seemed to have understood, first who they were and what was their connection with outside world. And they sort of, sorted out the spiritual search and attained it. At least we think they have.

So therefore, we give them great respect. And we try to understand what they said and try to understand from their life’s experience. And so on. It is always easier to understand from a biographical story, rather than from plain notes. In the same way, then there are scriptures like Ramayana and Mahabharata. There are so many books in story form trying to describe to you what happens in spiritual quest.

If you ask me if something is greater than that I would say that the greatest thing that should be given our respect is the Supreme Reality which is behind this whole universe. So, even if you respect a personality and you consider that person great, it must be because of the content not because of the form. That does not mean we should not respect. My father or my mother also have form and I respect them. But I may respect my teacher perhaps more – whose spiritual content is greater.

**Shivaratri Satsang**

Madanpalle, 12th February 2010

We meet again this year for Shivaratri. There are many reasons why Shivaratri is celebrated and night vigils are kept and people fast during the day. Now, this is a very important day in the year. Actually every fourteen days after the full moon, it’s supposed to be an important day, but when it occurs in the month of Magha then it is celebrated as Shivaratri. It comes every fourteen days actually – on the fourteenth day of the month.

Now the concept here is the concept of Shiva. In the night one sits on a vigil like a yogi - you know Shiva is the symbol of Maha Yogi. Even in our Parampara - the Nath Parampara - the first Guru, the first teacher is supposed to be Adinath and Adinath is none other than Shiva. Shiva and Adinath are indistinguishable. Since Shiva is considered to be the Maha Yogi and since yogis, according to the description of Krishna in the Bhagavat Gita, are those who stay awake when others sleep and sleep when others are awake, therefore Shiva, who is considered to be the Maha Yogi, Adinath, is considered to be the source of all the Nath Parampara. Of course when you say Nath Parampara it means the Yogi Parampara. It is one of the most ancient Orders from where the practice of Yoga has come. So therefore, people sit at night and meditate and try to go deep within oneself to show that what is night to the ordinary man is day to the yogi, and what is day to the ordinary person is night to the yogi. Which means—what one would naturally and normally be attracted to in this world is not very attractive to the yogi and what you are not attracted to, or, we are not attracted to, is very attractive to the yogi. Our attraction is usually in the outward world, the yogi’s attraction is to the inner world. So therefore this night is a symbol of turning inwards.

You know how Shiva is represented? Shiva is represented with three eyes, two like us and the third which, normally, we do not have. So when Shiva meditates he closes these two eyes. People always ask if Shiva is God why is He meditating, what is He meditating upon? Which means, even when you have a concept of Shiva as Shankara, to meditate upon the inner core one has to shut one’s eyes and go inwards. It’s a symbol of going inwards than outwards.

Therefore when Shiva meditates with His eyes closed, the third eye opens, which is called the eye of knowledge, the eye of understanding. It’s not any organ situated here, you cannot open the third eye with a screwdriver. You can only open it through unfolding of the inner wisdom, that is the third eye. So Shiva represents that. Shivam, in Sanskrit, also means auspiciousness and bliss. It can also be used as a substitute for ananda - which we all seek. Therefore Adinath is considered to be no other than Shiva who taught the path of the practice of Yoga so that one may turn inward and find the source of one’s being, the source of all happiness and the source of all knowledge. This is the concept of Shivaratri.

Now you look at the idea of Shiva, how beautifully it has been created. Most of the other Gods and Goddesses require a lot of paraphernalia to be worshipped, look at Maha Vishnu we need all...
You have a concept of Shiva, who wears a tiger skin or deer skin which is found in the forest, smears his body with ashes, has matted hair because he cannot be expected to have a dip everyday. He doesn’t need to have a dip because the Ganga is supposed to descend from Him. This concept of Shiva, who sits cross-legged like a yogi, either in Padmasana or in Siddhasana, has a crescent moon on His head. The crescent moon is a symbol of Shakti, you see it in Durga and Kali, the Navadurgas all have a crescent, now crescent is also the last digit of the moon either when it is going off or when it is coming back. Therefore it is considered to be the sixteenth letter of the sixteen lettered Shri Vidya. This little moon, the crescent moon is an ancient symbol which has been popular in many parts of the world. This crescent moon is a symbol of Shakti and moon is also called as Soma Shekhara - one who keeps or collects or retains Soma. Now Soma has two meanings. One is the moon, as the physical moon, the other is that, the imagination is always associated with the moon. The moon in Greek is called Luna, therefore when you are going close to Shiva you become more and more lunatic. In the sense, your reason is not the ordinary sanity that we normally have, but something is slightly turned off. In this world of inner exploration you can’t stick to two plus two is equal to four, you have to go a little off the tangent. It may be six or five or eight, which is not Newtonian mathematics, it may be Quantum, but not Newtonian. Some holy men behave like they are mad. Although you think they are mad, they think you are mad.

Soma is also that which when imbiber, causes the consciousness to ascend to different levels. Like the Soma which was drunk in the Vedic ages to transform the mind, to raise it from the ordinary state of consciousness to a higher state of consciousness. Some people say that Soma is a herb, maybe, which is lost ages, which remains inactive in most people but resides in all human systems, and the level of wisdom and higher consciousness that a person ascends to is when this energy uncoils itself and moves upwards. Of course, in an anatomical hall you cannot see any snake lying anywhere in the body, it’s not that! It’s not a physical thing! It’s a symbol of energy rolled up in potential form which has to be awakened by the yogi and Shiva again is the symbol of that awakening where the human being becomes a God.

One more thing that I have to tell you is that Shivaratri also, traditionally, is supposed to be the day when Samudra Manthan was done and the poison came out. You know that story about the churning of the ocean - the Manthan - and when the churning took place, first a very powerful poison called ‘Halahala Visha’ is supposed to have come out. It would have enveloped the earth, for the fact that Shiva was supposed to have drunk it up. It stopped in his throat and it became blue, so He is called Neelkantha. Now this is a fact which is applicable to all symbols, not only to Shiva. When you churn your mind in meditation, which means, when you delve deeper and deeper into the layers of your mind, the first thing that comes out is not Amrit. The first thing that comes out is poison, because, that’s the only way it can come out and disappear, which is why, many people who start the practice of sadhana, after a while, give up sadhana and take on to other things because that poison has come up. They get carried away by the poison, or they drink the poison. There is no Amrit nowadays, unfortunately, to drink the poison for us. This is something which every practitioner of spiritual exercises should keep in mind — that when you practice and go deeper and deeper, all the tendencies that have been hidden in your subconscious mind till now, bottled up, they will all come to the surface, that is the poison.

Now that is where you might get some help from a teacher, who knows how to handle it, otherwise, everything will go berserk. It has to be someone who knows how to handle this poison. Suppose somebody thinks that he is not angry at all but he has other qualities which he would like to deal with, and then he starts intense and sincere sadhana. After six months he finds that his anger level has gone up. Why? Because that little bit of anger which was inside us and which is usually hidden by smiles is coming out. We hide! All that is hidden has to come out, if it doesn’t come out it cannot evaporate and go. It’s almost like heating water to make tea - you heat it, the bubbles have to come, the glug, glug sound has to come, then it will become vapour. So you have to watch out at that time. That’s another important symbol of Shiva’s story of drinking the poison.

The third important aspect is the Tandav Nritya. Shivaratri is also considered to be the day when Shiva did His Tandav Nritya. It is also supposed to be the day when He met Parvathi in the Himalayas. Here Parvathi indicates Shakti, Shiva indicates Kundalini, Shiva who followed a wisdom religion. The snake also is the symbol of the Kundalini, which remains inactive in most people but resides in all human systems, and the level of wisdom and higher consciousness that a person ascends to is when this energy uncoils itself and moves upwards. Of course, in an anatomical hall you cannot see any snake lying anywhere in the body, it’s not that! It’s not a physical thing! It’s a symbol of energy rolled up in potential form which has to be awakened by the yogi and Shiva again is the symbol of that awakening where the human being becomes a God.
indicates that energy, that Supreme Consciousness, which is seated in our Sahasrara Chakra. So when they say Shiva met Parvathi, it means, that this energy, which is known as Shakti, has ascended and touched there. It has touched Shiva and they are together. In fact, the coming together of Shiva and Shakti is what is celebrated by Shankara in the beautiful verses called the Soundarya Lahiri.

I think the most important thing we should stress on today is the Tandav Nritya. They say that when Shiva dances the whole world shakes and is about to collapse, He pulls Himself together, otherwise everything will collapse. This is a symbol. You know, we are taught in our Parampara, that when Shiva or Adinath dances his Tandav Nritya, he destroys all images, he explodes all the images that we have created and without that destruction of the old and the stratified and the calcified and the fossilized, nothing new can come up. Like death! What would happen in this world if the people who were born in this world were still alive? But people move, they come, they go, new people come. Now that going is destructive and that is the dance of Shiva – who is also called Maheshwara, the destroyer. Now that “destroying” is only a “transforming” because unless the destroyer. Now that “destroying” is only a “transforming” because unless you are an individual different, and not the same as everybody else. So if you are ready to embrace the dancing Shiva, then you are free, if you are not, then you are not free. You can choose.

So, the Tandav Nritya of Shiva is meant to free you from all the conditioning, all the images, all the attractions and repulsions that keep you rooted and standing that you are an individual different, and not the same as everybody else. So if you are ready to embrace the dancing Shiva, then you are free, if you are not, then you are not free. You can choose.

Shiva is not a dictator, although, one of the symbols that Shiva carries is the paasha. Do you know what is a paasha? It is a noose. You see in the Tandav Nritya that in one of the hands, there is a noose, this noose is called a paasha - which can be thrown and pulled. Now this noose is only thrown by Shiva on those who are ready to take the noose, it is not thrown at random, because, most of the time even when Shiva throws the noose people duck out, they don’t want to be caught in that noose. Believe me, it is a beautiful noose, once you are caught there, which is also the reason why Shiva is called Pashupathi. Pashu means all the instincts which we have as animals and this is the noose that pulls that animal and makes it do exactly what He wants, this is called the paasha. Therefore He is called Pashupathi. We all are actually paasha although we think we are manushya, deep down we are all pashus and Shiva is the Lord who presides over us, so He is called Pashupathi.

I must tell you this story which comes from a different tradition. If you go to Delhi, there is a railway station called Nizamuddin. It’s built because of the name of a great saint, a Sufi saint, who used to live there, called Hazrat Nizamuddin. The story is that he never went for public prayer except on Friday, the rest of the days he would sit quietly in his room and meditate. He was a great practitioner of meditation. On Fridays he would go for public prayers. Now, because he went on Fridays for public prayer, large crowds used to gather there, mainly to see him. He had this peculiar habit that when he went on Friday for the public prayers, he used to tie a black blindfold and go. Everybody used to wonder, “What is this? He had to be led to the mosque because he had this blindfold. One day one of his close associates asked him, “Sir why do you tie this blindfold? Can you tell me?” The saint said, “Do you want to try?” The saint said, “Okay, you take the blindfold today”, and he gave it to him. This fellow went to the mosque, before the prayer started, everybody was sitting down, lots of people. He covered his eyes with the blindfold and he was shocked, terrified! Because through the blindfold, which was acting like a kind of optical filter, he saw that all the people sitting had human bodies but they had animal heads. The fellow sitting next to him looked like a wolf, the fellows sitting near were like a cat and tiger although their bodies were all human. He got terrified. He was sitting next to the saint and he said, “Sir, please take this off, what is this?” The saint said, this is their real characteristic. They have only human bodies but they are pashus: Now you know what Pashupathi means?

The linga also represents Shiva. This is a unique concept, it’s unique in the world, that there is no need of a human image of God. God can be represented by a simple symbol, which is the symbol that stands like a pillar. You know the pillar is the support, without a pillar you cannot have anything horizontal. The whole edifice stands on pillars. Today also, if you want to have big buildings, you have pillar foundations. That represents Shiva as the single principle around which all other activities take place, but, for the activity of the linga, you’ll find that in any place, in any temple, there is a linga, there is another little thing down, that’s called the yoni. It is the womb. It is usually linga-yoni, the whole of production, creation, movement, everything depends on the linga and the yoni. Which plans, as the energy of the linga is there, so also there has to be a womb to receive it. So Shiva and Shakti here together, represent the entire creation of the Cosmos. It is so simple that you just need a little stone kept there. Shiva doesn’t need any elaborate offerings, give him a ‘bilva’ leaf and a little cold water. That’s how a yogi’s life is as well. He doesn’t need anything, he needs water to drink and perhaps some food to eat and he is happy with that. Therefore, Shiva represents the perfect Yogi. Shiva represents that symbol of the creation of the entire universe.

Now there is a mantra which is invoked whenever you say Shiva and

Continued on page 10...
The bus journey was blissfully long, enabling me to keep enjoying my book, in between wondering whether Evelyn, a new comer to India, had noticed this or that which I saw from the window. Lunch stop helped in further orientation to the group, with Shri M and Evelyn. She was smart enough to find the coolest breezeiest place where we could chill out while awaiting others.

At last in Haridwar, we arrived at ‘Camp Nirvana’ after dark but there were so many bright neon lights that we could easily find our luxurious tent and settle in ready for a late dinner with all blissfully plenty of tomato soup! Unfortunately one of our members, Shri, tripped and fell requiring stitches to her cheek which our travelling Doctor Rajendra Prasad was easily able to minister same evening at the local hospital.

These tents are so luxurious that they have carpet inside and out, an attached bathroom complete with luxury basin, shower stall, toilet mounted onto a wooden stand and hot water on tap. Poor Evelyn crashed as soon as we arrived while the rest of us had the good fortune to hear Shri M’s introduction to lineage in the ‘Nath’ sect and how he got the name Madhukar Nath from his guru, Babaji, who he lived with in the Himalayas for 3 years, as we sat around the dhuni (spiritual camp fire). Shri M also showed us how to use the Chimta (tongs) and explained the significance of the Trishul (trident). He initiated us into the Nath mantra for that retreat and told us that for this time, we could consider ourselves as Nathas (Wolves).

That night I went to sleep, not tired, but buzzing with excitement at being blessed by the direct disciple of Babaji.

Next morning, usual 4.30 am wake up and cold bath. Followed by hot tea (5.30) and meditation with Shri M (6.30). Although I have known Shri M for well over 15 years, this is actually the first time I was attending his meditation. It was like my usual meditations, struggling with monkey mind only a little shy at being in group and in Shri M’s presence.

Asanas by Uma Singh at 7am were the same way to follow instead of lead, and gave the body a wonderful warm and loose feeling that brought energy and suppleness to the rest of the day. After breakfast we had our 2nd satsang with Shri M in which he started telling us more about the Naths and the Gorakhnath’s text - the ‘Goraksha Shataka’ which means “Hundred verses of Gorakh Nath”. During the talk Shri M spoke about a few commonly held misconceptions such as on Hatha Yoga.

He said, “Many people have the misunderstanding that Hatha Yoga is something to do with asanas. In the Nath Sampradaya when, we say Hatha Yoga it does not mean physical exercise. What it means is that the system recognizes two types of energies operating in the body on either side. One is called the Ida and the other Pingala. The Ida is the left and Pingala is the right. Just like you have two nostrils. They are supposed to be the two pranas active in the system, in the right and left. Pingala on the right is plus and Ida on the left is minus. I am deliberately saying plus and minus avoiding the terms positive and negative. That’s because minus does not mean negative and plus does not mean positive. It is like two poles of a battery—two terminals of a battery. Neither of them can be called negative or positive except that they do two functions. One sends and the other receives and they are very important except otherwise there is no circuit created. So it is like the anode and cathode.

The right side pingala which is the plus is represented by the sound “Ha” and Ida which is the left is represented by the sound ‘Tha’. When you say Hatha it means that which involves the movement of energies here and there to form the right circuit and there can be a spark that ignites the Muladhara and the energy begins to act through the central channel which is called the sushumna. This is the meaning of Hatha.”

Shri M then read and explained some of the verses from the Goraksha Shataka which deal with the practice of yoga. The text talks about the best asanas suitable for the practice and how the fruits of this yoga bring an end to the misery of this world. It mentions that “this by will, the mind is tuned away from sensual enjoyments and is attached to the supreme spirit is a ladder to final release; this is the cheating of death.”

At lunch time we had the good fortune to be able to give free feeding to 50 Sadhus, who came in a bus. I was thrilled to see the variety of sadhus because though I’ve been a sadhu (sanyasi) for over 25 years, I’ve never had the chance to mix with many outside of our own ashram (Bihar School of Yoga) and found myself too shy to introduce myself and talk to them though I felt so good to be in their presence. It also reminded me very much of my main ashram (Bihar School of Yoga, Rikhi Peeth campus) where we fed the poor and children and local villages regularly. I felt a little uncomfortable ‘gawking’ at the sadhus. I did mind joining in their pre-prasad (food offering) kirtan (singing), and enjoyed at the end when departing they vied to sing and impress Shri M with their wisdom. As one devotee said “What hardship they endure, all for the search of truth!” Could we live like that?

That afternoon we all 60-80 of us went to our annual Ganga. I had no idea what it would be like, imagining a sea of humanity stampeding towards Mother Ganga. But the Hari Ki Powdi area of Haridwar was very orderly, so orderly that there were police with rifles and machine guns at check posts at strategic points. Bags were searched.

After walking towards the river in awe of our new surroundings being a sanyasi, I was keen to get a head shave before dipping (there are 2 types of Sadhus in India, those that never cut their hair and grow dread locks that are usually wound around their heads, and those who keep a clean shaved head; both practices symbolizing detachment from physical vanity). Luckily, our wonderful guide, Kamal Jeet Singh of Skylark Nature Tours, took us (Evelyn decided to renounce her hair and enjoyed giving up to Maa).

By the time we went back, most had already had their dip and were on their way to the opposite bank of Hari ki Powdi. So we quickly went towards the bank. The water was a beautiful aquamarine and fresh as if alive and full of energy, rushing past at an alarming rate so that we had to look for a fairly safe place. The banks were well constructed and there were police with rifles, so you could hang on to. We chose our spot and went in, in such hurry that I forgot to take my glasses and watch off. I kept the glasses beside the leg of a nearby wooden box stand and forgot totally about the watch which also had a chance at bobbing up and down in the waves like us two bold goons, cleansing our sins away. It was so fresh and invigorating! We filled up our bottles with holy Ganga water and headed to the change area dripping like drowned rats. Luckily there is a separate area where women can change, while being harangued by the tough boisterous women owners of wooden beds used to put your stuff on. Sweet and innocent, we raced back up the stairs to the other bank where everyone was watching the Ganga flow in front of the ‘Maha Kumbha Mela’. There were the sorts of sadhus, pandits (priests) and devout pilgrims, singing, chanting, praying and dipping to remove their sins and woes. This was really the only ‘crowd’ we saw the whole time.
Everyone was sitting silently and peacefully. I was able to get very close to the bank. There were government men selling donation tickets for the upper part of the pilgrimage site, they sounded like auctioneers but it was quite entertaining and I think a great way to collect donations! As the sun went down the loudspeaker music of chanting and puja got louder and life savers began coming up and walking on the bank. I was imagining hoards of pilgrims pushing us all in while they vied to get to Ganga Maa at sunset to put in their little offerings (a leaf boat with flowers, and flame) for blessing their ancestors. I put one in for all my students and friends (this is for you!). As the light faded, the temple lights got brighter and the bells got louder until on the stroke of sunset, suddenly the speaker began to blast Maa Ganga with fervent offering their leaf boats to here and there started rushing past (shades coloured heaving serpent, which was like a rainbow all reflected in the river so that it was kept alive ceaselessly). I felt bad that I hadn't volunteered at the beginning, but this desire for perfection burns and I went to bed in order not to be up all night and sleep the whole of the next day. The dhuni reminded me also of Tratak (candle light meditation) and Sai Nath's Akhanda Dhuni and I wanted to know more and more about it. Early the next day even before 5.30 tea, quite a few were already at the dhuni soaking up its heat, life and mystery.

After another intense meditation in the presence of our Nath Master, and loosening up with jovial humour, we had a wonderful satsang from Shri M on the significance of the dhuni. There were government men selling donation tickets for the upkeep of the pilgrimage site, they sounded like auctioneers but it was quite entertaining and I think a great way to collect donations! As the sun went down the loudspeaker music of chanting and puja got louder and life savers began coming up and walking on the bank. I was imagining hoards of pilgrims pushing us all in while they vied to get to Ganga Maa at sunset to put in their little offerings (a leaf boat with flowers, and flame) for blessing their ancestors. I put one in for all my students and friends (this is for you!). As the light faded, the temple lights got brighter and the bells got louder until on the stroke of sunset, suddenly the speaker began to blast Ganga ki Aarti and all the poojaris started waving their lights and the colour and sound of devotion was all encompassing. This was all reflected in the river which was like a rainbow coloured heaving serpent, rushing past (shades of Kundalini?). People here and there started offering their leaf boats to Maa Ganga with fervent prayers for Blessings.

We all finally rose up and started following our Master with elevated spirits. As we walked back to collect our shoes and then to the buses waiting for us, other pilgrims seeing Shri M's stature and his devotees all following, started coming and paying their respects by touching his feet. Back at our Camp Nirvana, our head in a whirl and we dispersed for dinner, kirtan and the dhuni. Shri M had suggested that devotees should mind the dhuni for an hour each night through the day and night so that it was kept alive ceaselessly (akhanda dhuni). I felt bad that I hadn't volunteered at the beginning, so I asked for a chance and was lucky enough to get one immediately while others were eating. Luckily there was someone there to show me how to do it and I got the hang of how to place the logs and branches on so that they burn slowly and easily without becoming a roaring fire, smothering in smoke or going out completely. Then I sat and relaxed in front the fire, gazing into it and remembering the scenes of people sitting in front of their own hearth in European homes. The fire was really mesmerizing and I was wondering how I could have never realised just how beautiful a fire can be. I got so involved in its attraction that I started mentally talking to the flames, asking them to communicate to me, to reveal their mystery to me. They kept dancing like little fairies or nymphs, almost teasing me. Whether is was the little fairies jumping up and down to a silent music, reaching their arms to the skies or the cool blue shy smudges hovering around the coals or the slender white arms wrapping themselves around the logs, it was more and more captivating until I felt drawn to the fire, inch by inch until I was almost touching it. Yet I didn't feel at all sleepy, in fact I felt more and more fascinated, wanting to penetrate into this secret.

Finally the spell was broken and I went to bed in order not to be up all night and sleep the whole of the next day. The dhuni reminded me also of Tratak (candle light meditation) and Sai Nath's Akhanda Dhuni and I wanted to know more and more about it. Early the next day even before 5.30 tea, quite a few were already at the dhuni soaking up its heat, life and mystery.

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"Looking at the fire is one of the most beautiful experiences especially at night. I was taught to completely open your eyes and watch the flame. And then to close your eyes and visualize it inside. It actually burns off many of the leftovers from our past just as it does physically. It is the symbol of burning away of all desires. That only a fire can do. You can't wash away all desires with water but fire can burn away everything. And it also keeps you constantly exposed to the fact that this is the end that we are all going to come to. The same thing about it. Early the next day even before 5.30 tea, quite a few were already at the dhuni soaking up its heat, life and mystery.

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traditional lineage of Nath's and Babaji's, so subtle and mysterious that only by sincerely following the instructions for daily practice can we imbibe the secret essence of the Masters.

After the 2nd day of Sadhu Feeding after which Shri M and the sadhus talked, some of us raced up to Manasi Devi temple on top of the hill over looking Hari ki Pau. The deities: Sri Manasi Devi and Gayatri Devi were beautiful and the whole temple had an ancient and classical air. The trip up and down in the cable car was absolutely fantastic! We had panoramic views of Haridwar and the Ganga and the ground directly beneath had been planted with masses of coloured flowers which added greatly to the joyous atmosphere. To get there we had to race through the winding streets of local markets which were full of temple wares and pilgrimage paraphernalia adding richness and depth to our experience.

We got back in time to accompany Shri M to the Juna Akhada, the living place of the Naga Sadhus which literal means 'naked holy men'. Actually they 'clothe' themselves in ash, rubbing the ash from their dhunis over their bodies keeping them warm and purified by the ashes. The akhada was an area of lots of tents separated by winding lanes and with our big group it was difficult for all of us to go in and see the Sadhus. Some seemed to be 'out of it' and others austerely sitting erect by their dhunis. The walk through the akhada and a glimpse of the way the sadhus live was quite an experience!

Our last evening by the dhuni back at Camp Nirvana was highly charged! After our walk thru the Sadhus Akhada and knowing it was our last night, everyone was expectantly crowding around the dhuni. Bhajans and kirtans were sung and luckily I had enough courage to pluck up to offer singing and all enjoyed raising spirits further till we formally thanked Shri M and he blessed us by giving each one a tilak (annointing the third eye) with ashes from the dhuni which had been infused with everyone's mental mantra chanting as they had tended the dhuni throughout our time there, and with

Where they learn...

**To discover**

**The Satsang Vidyalaya**

The people at the Satsang Vidyalaya probably do not see themselves as exceptional. However, they are role models for a hundred children or more, as they look to embrace life and meet its challenges head on. Come with us and meet some of them here.

Like us, you will also delight in knowing that these children have cleared the Zila Parishad exams with distinction and have gone on to the next step in their education ladder - on to higher classes in government schools.

Krishnaveni, was a little child playing carefree, She was happy to go to school - The SatsangVidyalaya, close to where she lived. One day she developed considerable pain and discomfort in the eye – so much that led her to believe that there must be some cure for the malady, that a doctor would know. Though she got well, soon enough, the determination in her remains of what she felt. She wants to study well and become a doctor – an Eye doctor!

She has a good friend and classmate - Pushpalatha, who studied with her in The Satsang Vidyalaya and is also interested in becoming a Doctor – as she wants to help people by serving them. She says that she is fortunate to get the quality education that is required, to realize her ambition and goal along with the hard work and study which she puts in.

Bharathi & Sahana, are from a family of six brothers and sisters. They have no father. Their mother works in a hospital close by. Sahana is very good in academics and is the top scorer for the school. Bharathi looks up to her sister and wants to follow in her foot steps.

Smt Indira is the Principal of The Satsang Vidyalayas since the last eight years and going by the way the
school has grown, her involvement and passion for the children, is self-evident.

Indira started her career as a teacher. Early on, at ‘Neelbagh’, David Hosborough, was her mentor and shaped her thinking. David, an Englishman, had founded Neelbagh, a rural school for the needy, at Rayalpad, close to Madanapalli. Indira has also served in Rishi Valley, another exemplary school.

Indira cares deeply for the children and the teaching staff. She is a one-man army in marshaling facilities, shaping the curriculum and driving the pedagogic approach.

Should you be staying in Madanapalle for more than a day, it is likely that you will eat at the school mess and you are sure to bump into her then and see her magic in action.

We wanted to make the school real to you, so we have introduced these few faces to you from the school.

Today Indira and 9 other committed teachers/support staff help more than 130 children believe in themselves and their bright future. follow in her footsteps.

Memoirs of a trip

To Trivandrum and Kanyakumari

March 2010

-Srikumar M

It was, as always, quite uplifting…. travelling with Sir, especially this time to many places of spiritual significance in Trivandrum and Kanyakumari. I would try to visualize whenever he recalled moments of the experiences with many masters he had met during his early days. This is a general recollection of those moments with Sir. Some of the details of his discourse on ‘The Alphabet of Reality—‘Om’ are also part of this short recall.

In Trivandrum, we entered every place that Sir visited with eager hearts to, hopefully, assimilate a past experience for posterity. We visited the house of his friend and were told by the friend’s sister that Sir’s predictions from the time he was 16yrs old had always come true for them. Saw the courtyard behind Sir’s childhood house where the first meeting with his master had taken place.

We visited a saint’s samadhi where once used to be a forest with a lot of snakes. Sir used to meditate there and had heard the sound of ‘Om’ chant coming from the samadhi on a few occasions. This saint had asked for some air vents to be made for his samadhi. Sir also had some terrifying experiences during meditation at this particular place. Gopalaswami Pillai mentioned in Sir’s book ‘Jewel in the Lotus’ used to meditate here.

We also visited the place where Poojapura swami used to stay. Sir said he used to kick people to bless them, presumably to clear or activate the energy centres in the body. He had once kicked Sir pretty forcefully.

In Beemapally beside the sea, we paid obeisance at the tombs of Beema Ameen and Abdul Qader (her son). Long time ago, two coffins were found floating beside the sea shore by the locals. When they opened, the mother and son sat up and decided to stay in that village. These saints used to treat people with psychiatric disorders and also people who were possessed. The area around the campus of the tomb is lined with dwelling for people who need treatment. After the saints passed away, their tombs serve as healing centres for the mentally disturbed patients. Next to this was the tomb of Kaladi Mastaan where too, we paid our obeisance. Sir had requested the qazis at both the tombs to chant prayers while all us stood with folded hands in supplication. We prayed at the tomb of Thuckalay Peer Mohammed Sahib enroute to Marudvamalai.

Climbing Marudvamalai to the cave where Sir used to meditate took us about 2 hours. Sir used to meditate in this cave for 3-4 hours in sheersasan with legs in padmasan. He has met several saints like Naina swami here during his visits. Sir said this is definitely a power centre. Marudvamalai (‘medicine mountain’ in Tamil) is home to the sanjeevani herbs that fell here when Hanuman’s cargo could have created such a big mountain. We rested outside the cave in the cool air after a tiring and hot climb. Personally, I have never felt the enormity of these physical efforts when Sir is around (Kailash trekkers would agree). Marudvamalai has attracted a number of saints including Sri Chattambi Swamikal, his teacher Ayya Vaikunda Nathar and others. We had visited the ashram of Swami Abhedananda in Trivandrum and this ashram was one of the many dedicated to Sri Chattambi Swamikal.

We reached our destination, the Vivekananda Kendra in Kanyakumari in the afternoon. During the 2-day stay at the Kendra, we had meditations, yoga sessions and satsangs with Sir. I really liked the walk with Sir to the beach for viewing the sunrise. It was breath-taking to view the greatest force of nature reveal itself with such beauty and grace. In comparison, one wonders at the ego, a smaller force which manifest itself with false pride in violent forms when there is so much to learn from watching the wonders of nature.

During the satsangs, Sir answered many questions with characteristic clarity. He mentioned that in order to become a disciple, one has to be ready because mental struggle and the eklef that is required are enormous. He said that the force that comes from realization is more powerful than a nuke bomb and one has to be prepared for it. He also stressed on non-consumption of external chemical stimulants during practise of kriya. This includes

http://www.satsang-foundation.org
avoiding frequent intake of strong tea and coffee.

In the *MahaGanapatī Temple* at Trivandrum, Sir gave a talk on the alphabet Om and the relation with Lord *Ganesha*. Lord *Ganesh*, being the son of Shiva and Parvati, is supposed to represent the whole of consciousness, the Om. If one looks at Lord *Ganesha* from the side, his figure gives the visualization of Om as written in Sanskrit. He holds the *Pasha, Ankusha* and the *Modaka* or poppy fruit in his hands. The pasha is used as a noose to pull a *sadhaka* towards the supreme consciousness. The ankusha is used to goad the seeker repeatedly to tread the path of realization. The holding of the *modaka* symbolizes that Lord *Ganesha* holds the fruit of realization or the supreme consciousness in his hand. What I found inspiring was Sir’s description of the meaning of the rat, the carrier of consciousness. If the rat, a lowly creature, found commonly, is a carrier of *Ganesha*, who is the supreme consciousness—Om, means we can also become the carrier of this consciousness or become one with it.

Sir had also elaborated on the *Mandukya Upanishad* at the start of the trip at the palace in Trivandrum. While it is pointless to try to repeat what he said about Om, the central topic in the *Upanishad*, the interesting point is about the meaning of *Mandukya*. While some say that it was written by a sage called *Mandukya*, it means the following: *mandukya* means a frog; a tadpole by losing its tail in water, becomes a frog and jumps on to the land. It becomes amphibious i.e. it is able to survive in the material world (land) and also swim in the ocean of spirituality (water) after losing its tail (the ego). May we all lose our tails forever...

that is called the Shiva *panchakshara*. It’s called *panchakshara* because it has five letters. *Om*, of course, is the *pranava*, which is added to all mantras, and then you have *na*’*ma*’*shi*’*va*’*ya*. So it’s called Shiva *panchakshara*. Now all these five letters represent the ascent of consciousness through the different psychic centers of the human system. When the *Shaiva Siddhanta* practitioners practice meditation on the *chakras*, they start with *Om* (gesturing to the centers in the body), *na* *ma* *shiva* *ya*— fixing each letter on each center. This *panchakshara* has so many variations that, chanted in different ways, it brings about different effects in the consciousness. Sometimes it is chanted as “*na* *ma* *shiva* *ya*”; sometimes it is chanted as “*shi*- *va* *ya* *na* *ma*”; sometimes it is chanted as “*va* *shi* *va* *ya* *na* *ma*”; “*va* *ya* *na* *ma* *shi*”, there are different variations, depending on which teacher teaches you and for what purpose. *Om* is usually added, one or two *bijaksharas* are added and it is chanted according to the effect. So you see this whole theory and practice is the symbol of Shiva as the Supreme energy, in co-operation with Shakti, which creates the entire universe, and it is linked to our inner system by which we can actually touch those parts of the energy which are active in us. It’s a whole topic of what we call *Shavism*.

The *bhasma* is put because Shiva is also represented as living in the cremation ground— a place where everybody fears to go- which shows that every one will end here... destruction! So, if somebody can stay and win over that where everybody ends, then he is an ultimate winner and, therefore, he smears the ashes from the cremation ground. “*Bhāmsa antam shārim, bhāmsa antam shārim*”— so says the Ishavasya *Upanishad*. Finally that is what happens, ashes, and Shiva represents that. What does it mean? It is actually auspicious to have ‘vibhuti,’ why? Because your body has been turned to ashes and your soul has ascended to the higher spheres. It’s something to celebrate, not something to cry about. Actually when a child is born in the world it comes crying. I have never seen a laughing child. The first sound you hear is its cry, because somewhere deep down in it’s subconscious I think it feels “Oh God! Now we have entered!” Generally, even when you go, you go crying, or we go crying! We are saying that we cannot do anything about coming crying, but we can do something about going laughing. Now that going back laughing can happen only if you understand this concept of Shiva. I am not saying that by twelve thirty we would have understood this concept of Shiva. I’m only saying that if it is understood, then you can be free, and this may be a good starting point, when we sit down with the fire. I hear that some wonderful people are going to also chant the Soundarya Lahiri, so hopefully, we can also enjoy the bliss of Shakti and Shiva coming together. And look at the fire and see how your inner energies may be turned to the pure *agni* and transported to the higher spheres.

In the *Nath Parampara* wherever the yogis go, they light a *dhuni*. *Dhuni* is a very important part of their tradition. It is the fire that is lit outside, it represents the fire that is inside. The fire in the Vedas, in the *Mundaka Upanishad*, termed the *Nachiketas* fire- the fire of *Nachiketas* the fire of sacrifice, the fire that burns up everything and leaves only the pure consciousness intact. This is the concept of *Shivaratri*. *Shivaratri* has started, thank you!
Sri M at the India Club, Dubai

Sri M’s Dubai Visit
January 2010 - K N Reddy from Dubai

Thanks to the efforts of at Dubai that we were able to work out an itinerary for Sri ‘M’, (hereinafter referred to as Sir) to make his visit to the UAE (Dubai & Abu Dhabi) a delightfully enriching experience for us all. Also, when Sir decides to visit, we have always experienced several issues being resolved by themselves leading to joyous experience for all. Sir’s visits to the UAE have always been filled with joy and laughter for us as we get to interact with him. We have also managed to receive profound insights into spiritual uplifting from the Master.

Personally I have felt great joy in his presence, but then such is the state of my Sadhana that when he is not around, every now and then I slip back into my usual samsaric follies that impede sustained growth of the spirit for consistently experiencing that inherent joy which he so easily brings out in us in his presence.

Many of us went to receive Sir at the airport on the 28th of Jan ’10 in the afternoon and we drove him to the offices of Manav Enterprises in the afternoon and we drove him to the DAFZA. Sonjib was at his place they call the “Third Eye” evening Sir attended a get-together at a sky scraper in Dubai. This meeting was at a place they call the “Third Eye” an independent group that promotes spiritual discussions and pranic healing etc. Here I was fortunate to listen to Sir in what I felt was really an absorbing & powerful discourse. After this one of the families here had a big gathering waiting for Sir’s darshan at their place where we all had dinner after which every one paid their respects to the Master.

Next morning, meditation was at Sudha’s place where there was a sizeable gathering. After breakfast, Sir came to our place where there were several one-to-one meetings. That evening we had arranged for a small function at the India Club wherein Sir would speak to a gathering of 60-70 people. Also on display and sale were Sir’s books, CDs and DVDs. We did experience brisk sales. Prior to Sir’s discourse Sudha had arranged for 3 musicians and we were treated to live rendition of bhajans/carnatic music. A lamp was also lit to start the function. Sir spoke about his experiences right from his young age, those beautiful years he spent with his Guru in the Himalayas, and several other experiences which was absolutely a treat to watch and listen Everybody listened in rapt silence as the master communicated various facets of spirituality in his own inimitable style. This was followed by dinner. Sir came home to retire for the night.

Next morning (2nd Feb) was started with meditation after which we had breakfast. More people had one-to-ones till lunch time. Ladies together made lunch for all of us. That evening we took Sir to the Burj Khalifa up to the 121st floor (the tallest building in the world). We all had a great time at the Dubai Mall as we went around the aquarium as well. Sir’s flight was that night and we all paid our respects to the Master and fondly wished him goodbye.

At 0630 hrs and then had breakfast. There was an outing to Al Ain in a bus with around 40-50 people. The journey was great with people exercising their vocal chords. We came back around evening after sighting some flamingos from afar in Dubai’s bird sanctuary. We had meditation at 1830 hrs after which we all had dinner.

On Saturday, Sir and some friends went to Abu Dhabi and returned in the evening from Abu Dhabi and went to Params’ place in Sharjah where we were with him. Sir blessed Param & Siham’s new born baby boy and we all had great time and then were served dinner.

Next morning was Sunday, the first working day of the week over here. Sir visited a few friends after which Sir went for lunch. Towards evening Sir attended a get-together at a sky scraper in Dubai. This meeting was at a place they call the “Third Eye” an independent group that promotes spiritual discussions and pranic healing etc. Here I was fortunate to listen to Sir in what I felt was really an absorbing & powerful discourse. After this one of the families here had a big gathering waiting for Sir’s darshan at their place where we all had dinner after which every one paid their respects to the Master.

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In Your Love

I’m but a child in your arms
You knew me before I was
You will know me after I am
But I still do not know myself

You gave me mum and dad
Who taught me life’s lessons
I have tried to learn them
And I’m still learning today

Life has been good at times and
Life has not been so good at times
My mind fails to understand
Why life cannot be happy at all times

A deep yearning was stirring
Even when the child in me was
Until it grew so big that the adult in me
Now asks what exactly am I looking for

Then you came along and took my hand
Your look showed me the depths of love
Your words were balm to my heart
Your longing now engulfs me

Night and day, day and night
All relationships seem merged in you
I now know my anchor
Please don’t let me go

In your love let me be
Wherever you may place me
Whatever happens to my lot
Hold me close to your heart

Shaila Saldanha (Australia)

Without You

It is obvious
I am not Arjuna
But I have an invisible chariot
On the flag of that chariot
Is sitting an invisible Hanuman
I haven’t seen him

But incidents indicate
I have a charioteer too
Like Krishna
Who has saved me so many times
From total destruction.

I do get wounded
Once in a way
But without this charioteer
This chariot and this Hanuman
I would have been
Completely annihilated

So many times so long ago.
Why am I saved
Again and again
What merit do I have
What is to be achieved through me
And why does that not get done?
Who knows?

Ajai Kumar Singh

http://www.satsang-foundation.org
**List of Books, CDs, DVDs by Sri M**

**CDs**

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<th>No.</th>
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<td>75.00</td>
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<td>In Search of Happiness</td>
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