Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. Just recently, I happened to accidentally hear an old broadcast of mine over Radio Sai in the series Musings from Prashanti. I was quite absorbed by that talk - it was very much like listening to someone else! I had completely forgotten all that I had said earlier, and every word of that broadcast was very fresh for me. Indeed, often I sat with great expectations - what’s going to come next!

I am not saying this in praise of myself - no way, for I do not ever believe that I am the doer. Then why on earth am I making a plug for that talk? Simply this: That talk had a lot of important things concerning Prayer, especially Swami’s many observations on the subject. I felt that the entire topic was so important, may be I should share it in print also. What I said over the radio follows.

I wonder if you have ever heard the word NOETIC. It is spelt N, O, E, T, I, C, and rhymes with the word poetic that we all are familiar with. This word Noetic appears to have been coined recently, and I certainly could not find it in my dictionary. Why am I talking about Noetic today? Thereby hangs a tale, which I shall presently unfold.

My story starts one morning a couple of months ago. There I was seated for the morning Darshan, and opposite me was a doctor, I was told. Later I found out that his name was Dr. Krucoff, and that he was a cardiac surgeon in the Veteran’s Administration Hospital in Durham, North Carolina, a hospital that has close links with Duke University there. Dr. Krucoff apparently had come many years earlier to Puttaparthi at the time of one the cardiac conferences that were held during the early days of Swami’s big hospital here. By the way, three conferences were held then, and they all were attended by famous surgeons from many parts of the world.

Dr. Kruchoff came to Puttaparthis this time with two objectives in view. The first of course was to have Swami’s Darshan once more. But there was another reason also. It appears that the BBC and the Discovery TV Channel had teamed up to produce a film on a medical project that Dr. Krucoff was engaged in, and the BBC TV crew had come to Puttaparthis along with Dr. Krucoff to do some location shooting. Why?

This exactly is where the word Noetic comes into the picture, along with another word, MANTRA! Don’t worry, I shall explain everything soon.

Let me start with the word Noetic. This word is often used along with the word therapy; Noetic therapy simply means a non-pharmacological method of reducing anxiety, stress, pain, etc. As all of us are aware, a patient suffering from pain etc., is normally administered drugs to give relief.
However, drugs are not the only solution. For ages, people have tried other methods for reducing stress, anxiety, etc., all methods essentially employing some kind of a human approach to the patient. What Dr. Krucoff is currently engaged in is to study quantitatively, in strict scientific tradition, the effect of these alternate therapies. The Project he is engaged in is called MANTRA, which is an acronym for: **MONITORING AND ACUTALIZATION OF NOETIC TRAINING.**

Well, what exactly is this Mantra, and how did Dr. Krucoff get started on this? Let me take up the second question first, and I shall deal with it by quoting the learned doctor himself. But before that, I must mention that the quote is from an interview that Dr. Krucoff gave to Bonnie Horrigan, and is printed in the May 1999 issue of the journal Alternate Therapies.

Incidentally, closely associated with Dr. Krucoff is Suzanne Crater, and prior to starting on the Mantra project they both were involved in dealing with patients with advanced heart disease, patients who were often close to death. These two, quite casually perhaps, used then to talk to patients in a philosophical manner, besides of course administering all the standard medical treatment. Over a period of time they discovered, much to their surprise, that the mortality rate which till then was about 33% came down to 3%! Was this an accident, a coincidence, or was there something more to it? Meanwhile, Dr. Krucoff became associated with a group of American doctors involved in planning the Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi.

At this point, I shall let Dr. Krucoff speak for himself:

This hospital is a 300 bed, 2 digital catheterisation, 5 operating theatres, state-of-the-art, free-care facility that was built by Sri Sathya Sai Baba in a very rural area where, until recently, there was no electricity and most people had never seen a toilet, much less a cath lab. We were involved in the original design. At the end of the first year of operation, the hospital hosted a symposium to review its activities. The day before the symposium we went round the hospital and found ourselves immersed in something we had never seen before.

In US hospitals, everyone basically fights off depression. Patients don’t want to be in a hospital, and their families are worried about them. Cardiovascular disease is almost always shrouded in a life and death atmosphere, and in the western world, death is taken as a bad thing. But the patients in the Institute in Puttaparthi - patients who could hardly breathe, and were waiting for catheterisation or surgery or who had just had surgery - were beaming. As we went from bed to bed, they just beamed. It was a very different kind of atmosphere than we had ever walked through in a hospital setting. And the reason everyone was beaming was clear - this was God’s Hospital!

After this visit to Puttaparthi in the early nineties, Dr. Krucoff was convinced that healing had other dimensions to it than mere procedures and medicines. And slowly the MANTRA project took shape.

Four types of Noetic treatment was considered for use in the MANTRA
Project, as a supplement to all medical treatment normally administered. They were:

Stress relaxation, imagery, touch therapy, and prayer. Imagery means talking soothingly to the patient about a place liked by the patient, thus relaxing him or her. Relaxation by touch seems to be an adaptation of various oriental techniques, the details of which do not concern us now. It might however be mentioned, that bedside therapy such as stress relaxation, imagery and touch therapy were accompanied by helping the patient to adopt what is called soft abdominal breathing.

OK, all this is about bedside Noetic therapy. Incidentally volunteers were trained who could assist in such bedside therapy. What about prayer, the fourth technique? Here, there were no bedside helpers. In this case, it was what might be referred to as distant therapy. This technique is really interesting. Each patient’s name, illness, and procedure were supplied by email and phone to eight groups in different places, and belonging to different faiths, and all these groups prayed intensively for the patient. The groups involved were: A church in North Carolina, a Baptist Congregation again in North Carolina, a Jewish group in Israel, a Buddhist Monastery in France, another Buddhist Monastery in Nepal, a Catholic Monastery in Maryland and one more prayer group in North Carolina. The details are not very important. The point simply is that different groups in different places were requested to pray intensely for the well being of specific patients.

What about the results? The full details are available in the paper published in the American Medical Journal, which, by the way, is a peer journal of the American Medical Community. In brief the results were as follows: In all, 127 patients were chosen for this trial study. 27 of these formed the reference sample, that is they were not administered any supplementary Noetic therapy. 28, received additional stress relaxation therapy, 24 the benefit of touch therapy, 24 the benefit of imagery therapy and 24 were prayed for, shall I say. I must here add that Dr. Krucoff has been very careful in taking all the precautions necessary in any kind of statistical study, which incidentally is quite common in agricultural science and in pharmacology, to mention two examples.

What about the actual findings? Well, in general it was found that there was about 25 to 30 % reduction in adverse outcomes in the case of patients who got extra Noetic treatment as compared with patients who did not. In particular, the best results appeared to be for patients assigned to off-site prayer. Of course, Dr. Krucoff is careful to stress that these results are (a) quite preliminary, (b) merely suggestive and (c) that further and more detailed studies are required to confirm the present positive indications.

The results have aroused widespread interest, especially the prayer part.

The TIME magazine has done a cover story, there has been a TV story on the ABC network, there have been magazine interviews and so on, and as I mentioned earlier, the BBC and the Discovery channel are collaborating on
producing a full documentary, for which purpose they came here with Dr. Krucoff. There are of course people who have great reservation about this entire exercise. A medical doctor named Gary Posner is quite critical and dismisses the whole study with the caustic remark, “I suspect that fifty years from now, people looking back at this kind of prayer research will shake their heads and call it junk science.” Stanley Hauerwas, Professor of Divinity in Duke University and hailed by the TIME magazine as America’s most influential theologian comments, “This study seems to say that what we really care about is not God but our health. That makes God a function of our narcissistic needs. I don’t think God wants to play these kinds of games.”

OK, so much for the Mantra Project, what it is all about, and what people think about it. When Dr. Krucoff came here a few months ago, I knew nothing about this project but recently I was given a file complete with copies of the scientific paper, TIME magazine article, various web printouts and so on. Given my own scientific background, I became quite interested in all this material and studied the folder with keen interest. I then put the folder away and began to reflect. The basic question in the minds of all these people seem to be: “Does prayer really work or does it not?”

God has given man a head as well as a Heart - I mean a spiritual Heart that is. If it is the head that is asking the question, it would never be able to grasp the answer no matter how many times the answer is repeated, and forever it would be subjected to doubts. With the Heart, the situation is different. Prayer is a communication addressed to God whose permanent residence is of course the Heart, as Baba often reminds us. Thus the Heart readily understands the language of the Heart - no surprise in that at all.

In other words, the Heart is easily able to comprehend when prayer works, and also how.

Many of you may be aware of the famous story of how Savithri actually brought her dead husband back to life with prayer. Mind you, this is not mere cure but bringing back from the dead. Skeptics may, however, dismiss that as mere legend. OK, in that case, let me quote for you this piece from Kasturi’s book, Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram. About the value of prayer, Kasturi says:

Listen To the experience of Dr. V.D.Kulkarni of Chandchan in Bijapur District. He writes on 2nd November, 1961:

A Muslim lady (aged 60) Badooma Kasim, suffering from pneumonia in both lungs was admitted in my clinic last month. On the fourth day, I came home at about 8 P.M. after examining all patients and finding them progressing well. About midnight, however, her son came running to me and I hastened to the clinic to find that her heart was sinking. I administered Coramine orally and by injection, and waited for an hour by her bedside but found it ineffective.
The son started weeping in despair. I came home at 1 A.M., had a bath, did Puja to the picture of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and prayed:

“My efforts have all become vain; I know no other course except to surrender to You. On You now is the responsibility of making her come out alive.”

I then quietly took to bed but could not get sleep. Even before sunrise, I hurried to the clinic. I found Badooma sitting up. “What happened last night? Had anyone come?” I asked her. “Yes! On this bed, near my pillow, someone with a pile of hair sat. He placed His hands under my ears and stroked the face softly. So, I could rise and sit up.” I showed her the small photograph of Sri Sathya Sai Baba I had with me. “Yes! This very person”, she said. How lucky is this Muslim woman! She got a new lease of life through His Divine Touch.

From just prayer for cure, let me move on to the revival of the dead. There is, for example, the famous Walter Cowan incident about which most of you must surely be aware. I have read a 30 page account of the entire Cowan episode compiled by late Dr. Hislop. In brief, Walter Cowan who had come to Madras along with his wife Elsie, passed away and Swami brought him back to life. Walter Cowan’s revival back to life is also briefly described by Kasturi in Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram. The important point here is that Walter’s wife Elsie did not even know that Walter was actually dead. And, without any prayer from her side, Walter was brought back to life.

What does this show? It shows that when one has intense Love for God, then God acts even without a prayer. Hislop describes an incident where he was miraculously saved from an accident. Once evening while returning from Brindavan to Bangalore city by a taxi, Hislop’s car was speeding towards a head on collision with a car racing from the opposite direction. Hislop and party were saved, even though they did not even think of praying to Swami.

The following morning Swami told Hislop that since he, that is Hislop, had surrendered, it was Baba’s responsibility to save even without being asked.

At this point, I think I should quote from a very important conversation between Hislop and Bhagavan, regarding the entire issue of prayer, Swami responding and curing, and all that. Once, at an informal gathering, a devotee asked Baba, “Swami, what is the secret of the cure that many afflicted persons experience in your presence?” Baba replied, “My Love flows out to everyone for I see everyone as Myself. If a person reciprocates My Love from the depth and purity of his heart, My Love and his meet in unison and he is cured of his affliction. When there is no reciprocity, there is no cure.” Hislop seems to have picked up from there, and this is how the conversation between Hislop and Baba went on from there.

Hislop: But I had thought that God knows each problem, that if it were appropriate to remedy the trouble, God would do so without being asked.

Swami: No! It is your duty to ask God. Words must be said, and the words must correspond to the thought. The thought must be put into a true word. It
is true that Divinity knows all. But He requires that the true word be said.

The mother may know that to maintain life, the child needs food. But the milk is given only when the child cries for it.

**Hislop:** It is not clear when one should ask God and when one should not. For example, there is a headache that doctors seem unable to cure. I do not ask Swami to cure the headache. I do not pray for a cure. However, in a letter, Swami wrote: “How is your health? Do not worry about that. Your God is always with you, in you and around you.”

**Swami:** That is right. For you, the body identification is weakening. You have a headache today, a stomach pain tomorrow. Let it go. Don’t worry about it. Once Baba has told you not to worry, no need to ask Him about it. Don’t identify.

**Hislop:** Does Swami mean that for persons still fully identified with the body, a continuous headache might be a proper subject for prayer?

**Swami:** Yes but why bother Swami with a mere headache?

The topic then changed to the subject of cancer, since Swami has, in a flash, ‘cancelled’ the cancer of many a devotee.

**Swami:** Cancer. It develops from a small pustule. There is inflammation, some gas, and from this the cancer develops.

**Hislop:** Swami can cure even terminal cases of cancer?

**Swami:** Oh yes. A certain person, whom you know, is a good example of that.

She was filled with filled with cancer. The doctors gave up, removed tubes, sewed up incisions, and gave her only a few days to live. Now she is strong and healthy, and works all day.

**Hislop:** Does Swami effect such a cure only when the Karma of the person is appropriate?

**Swami:** No, if Swami is pleased with that person, He heals that person at once. Karma cannot come in the way.

**Hislop:** This is extremely important information, because when people fail to get cured, they put it down to the fact that they still have some Karmic debt.

**Swami:** If the person has a pure heart and is faithfully following the teachings of Swami, Swami’s Grace is automatic. No Karma can come in the way.

**Hislop:** Swami, people make conflicting statements about the use of vibhuti. Should a devotee of Swami use vibhuti as the only treatment for sickness and injury?

**Swami:** Do not give any importance to minor sickness or injury. In more serious matters, it is best that prayer be made to Swami. This is important; vibhuti may or may not be used but there should be prayer.

**Hislop:** How about the help that is ordinarily available?

**Swami:** Some people have faith in doctors and some people have faith in Swami.

**Hislop:** But Swami, that exactly is the problem! People are afraid that if they
use anything other than vibhuti, they are demonstrating lack of faith in Swami.

**Swami**: Actually, both can proceed together. The doctor can be consulted and vibhuti also can be used. But, regardless of the degree of faith, it is best to pray to Swami for His Grace.

**Hislop**: Some devotees go the extreme. No matter how serious the disease or the trouble, they declare they will use vibhuti only and never go to a doctor.

**Swami**: If they wish to do that, they may. Swami’s preference is that that ordinary means of help be given their due place.

There are so many other things I would like to say on the subject, but there is no time for all that, at least today; may be some other time. I would, however, like to place before you the following episode narrated by Ravi Mariwala. Ravi is one of Swami’s students, meaning that he is a graduate of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. He holds a Master’s degree in Business Administration. The Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi came into existence just at the time he was graduating. Many boys, especially with MBA degrees, volunteered to serve in the hospital, and Ravi was one of them. Ravi Mariwala operates the Heart-Lung machine, the vital instrument in cardiac surgery. Over now to Ravi:

A patient being operated for a congenital defect was unable to recover heart function sufficiently, to come off the heart-lung machine and generate adequate systemic pressure. We tried everything but nothing seemed to work.

Everyone was beginning to despair. We discussed the matter, rested the heart again, and added some more drugs. We only failed once more. We were absolutely helpless. It occurred to me that we had tried everything but prayer. Prayer for a person not known to me? Would it work? I think that is why it did.

As I had been in the theatre for five hours already, I was briefly relieved by a colleague. I came into the corridor outside the theatre and stood silently for a minute, trying to recollect Sai’s face in my mind’s eye.

I said a silent prayer for the patient’s recovery. Immediately thereafter, I returned to the theatre. The situation had changed completely. The blood pressure had improved, and the heart had recovered!

Strangely, no one knew how or why; I did not say anything to anyone.

The incident passed. The patient’s recovery was smooth. On the Sunday that followed, Swami came to me, created vibhuti, put it into my hands and lovingly said, “This is for the prayer that you said for that patient.”

He then proceeded to describe the incident to others. Here was Swami rewarding me for the miracle cure that He in His Mercy had effected!

I suppose I have said enough to convince you about the efficacy of prayer.

Before I conclude, I have to draw your attention to what Swami once said about the relative perspectives of spirituality and science. He said: **All scientific investigations are based upon the intellect. All spiritual explorations are based upon the**
Heart or Consciousness. In the spiritual field, man alone is important and not the machines. Scientists put their faith in machines. The spiritual seekers place their faith in Mantras.

One is a scientist and the other is a saint. The saint believes in Fullness or Poornatva. The scientist is content with half the circle. Spirituality represents the full circle. The beginning and the end met in full circle.

When this circle is divided by half, you have a half-circle resembling the letter C. The C is science. It starts at one point and ends in another.

Between these two points, there are endless doubts!

So you see, as long as the efficacy of prayer is explored scientifically, doubts will never cease, no matter how tight and rigid the experiment is!

I shall conclude with what Dr. Bhat often says. By the way, Dr. Bhat is eight plus and still going strong in Swami’s hospital, with one heart attack behind him! Dr. Bhat observes, “The surgeon merely cuts; it is God who actually heals!” In all of Swami’s hospitals, this is the guiding principle.

JAI SAI RAM.