

The WAVE

Walk Along with Values on Earth



Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas Golden Jubilee Celebrations



From the Editor's Desk:

Sairam and warm greetings to one and all!

Welcome to the 4th issue of 'The Wave'. In this issue, our focus will be on the Bal Vikas movement that is celebrating its Golden Jubilee this year. The celebrations began with the Bal Vikas Alumni Meet held at Prasanthi Nilayam on 5th and 6th January 2019, which saw expressions of love, joy and gratitude from distinguished guests, alumni, Bal Vikas gurus, and others who have benefitted from this unique system of value education.

The years 2018 and 2019 are festive years for the SAI world, since we are celebrating the golden jubilees of so many grand organisations and institutions, initiated and started by our beloved Master Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, for the betterment of society and the establishment of Dharma. The epoch-making year of 1968 was witness to – the first World Conference of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations (SSSSO) and the inauguration of Dharmakshetra, both at Mumbai in May 1968. The succeeding year, in early 1969, Bhagawan directed the members of the Mahila Vibhag (women's wing) of SSSSO, to start value based classes for children, and thus was born the Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas, the children's wing of the SSSSO.



An Offering Of Love To
Our Beloved Lord

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Giving and Forgiving month to be observed by all from 24th March to 24th April (Aradhana Day)
- April 7th is to be celebrated as International Cheti Chand Festival (Sindhi New Year) at Prasanthi Nilayam

Voice of the Avatar:

(Bhagawan's loving opening address to Bal Vikas children during the historic International Bal Vikas Conference of 1983, at Prasanthi Nilayam.)

“Premaswarupulara, Embodiments of Divine Love,
Boys and girls,
Heirs to the Divine state of Nityananda (Eternal Bliss)
You are Amrutasya Putraha, you are the Children of Immortality, as expounded by the Shrutis (Vedas),
You are not mere lumps of flesh or blobs of clay;
You are not mere matter (vasthu), you are not the body (deha)
You are verily the form and essence of the Immortal (Amruta) and the Blissful (Ananda)
O pure-hearted boys and girls,
Your hearts that are clean and sacred, are the shrines where Divinity dwells.

Material objects of the world are your playthings, Nature is your playground
The world should be subservient to you; you should not be bound by this world.
That person who is a slave to his senses (vishaya), becomes distant from the Lord of the world (Vishveshwara)
As long as you are controlled by desire, you are enslaved by this world.
But when you conquer your desires, you can win over this world too.
Ravana, the mighty warrior, the one who undertook intense austerities (tapas), and who as a great scientist built Lanka, that rivalled Heaven itself – that powerful Ravana was totally destroyed because he fell a prey to his extreme desire for Prakruti (Nature represented by Mother Sita, born of the Earth).
Ravana disregarded Rama (Paramathma), the Lord, the Master of Sita (Prakruthi) and hence had to be destroyed.

However, if you surrender to God, the Master of this world/Nature, then you can easily attain mastery over this world, and enjoy what it has to offer. If not, it is impossible”.

To listen to the full audio of this discourse, please follow this link:
<http://www.sssbpt.info/english/sssvol16.html> and click on 31: 'Be Exemplars of Sai ideals'



SRI SATHYA SAI BAL VIKAS: A Unique Spiritual Movement

The Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas, which can be translated as the “Blossoming of Human Excellence”, particularly in young children, was started in India, under the direct guidance of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in the year 1969. This movement was launched by Bhagawan as an important step in His mission of spiritualising the world, with its emphasis on moulding young minds. The Bal Vikas programme, echoed Bhagawan’s call to all parents to fulfil the spiritual needs of their children, to assume the responsibility of moulding their children’s character, and familiarise them with the rich culture and spiritual heritage of India that recognizes the inherent unity of mankind.

Bal Vikas is not just a programme. It is a noble movement that took roots in 1969 with the backing of the Sri Sathya Sai Mahila Vibhag – the Women’s wing of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation (SSSSO). Swami instructed the ladies of the Mahila Vibhag to ‘run a Bala Vihar for young children’ where they would listen to stories from the Scriptures, epics, Puranas, and the lives of great men.

During the nine-year Balvikas course, the children are trained to chant stotras, sing bhajans, learn excerpts from the Vedas, enact small values-based plays and are taught habits of duty, devotion, discipline, etc. so that they can experience happiness and bliss in life.

Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas movement has thus been founded by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba to enable a worldwide renewal of individual commitment to an active moral life. Towards this end in view, in each Balvikas class scheduled for about 75 minutes per week, a few simple but effective teaching techniques are adopted like Prayer, Silent Sitting/Guided visualisation, Story Telling, Group Singing and Group activities.

We must be ever grateful to the Lord to have conferred on us through His divine grace, these three great boons

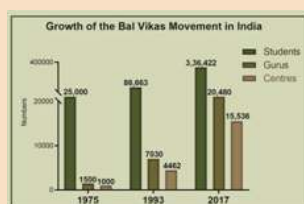
- 1) Human Birth- ‘Jantunam Nara Janma Durlabham’ out of all living beings, human birth is the rarest.
- 2) The longing for liberation
- 3) To be a devotee of an Avatar

We are very fortunate that being born as a human and through the grace of Bhagawan Baba who is the Avatar of this Kaliyug, the seeds of liberation have been sown in us through Balvikas and we are all part of this grand movement.

Bhagawan Baba laid great stress on the five cardinal values of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa, which we Gurus try to inculcate in the children during the nine years of Balvikas. As time passed by slowly and steadily, the Bal Vikas designed by Bhagawan catered to children from the age group of 5 to 13 years of age spanning over 3 groups. Balvikas classes have spread across the country and today we have 3,50,000 children, 15,000 centres and 1600 gurus.

Over the years, training modules have been developed, research studies have been undertaken, and with Bhagawan’s continuous guidance Balvikas is today following a structured syllabus covering 9 years and at the end of the 9th year, the students are conferred a Diploma in Sathya Sai Education (SSE).

by Smt. KAMALA PANDYA, National Coordinator for Mahila Vibhag and Bal Vikas, SSSSO, India



TIMELINE of Important Events of Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas in Bhagawan’s Divine Presence:

Date : Events

- 1969 : Bhagawan instructs the ladies of the Mahila Vibhag to start spiritual classes for children, called ‘Bal Vihar’.
- 1971 : Bhagawan renames this initiative as Bal Vikas, a unique initiative leading to the ‘blossoming of human excellence’ in children. Classes are conducted every Sunday for 1 hr. 30 min. Under Bhagawan’s guidance, Bal Vikas quickly expands world-wide, and crystallizes into a 9-year non-formal course for children between the ages of 9-15 yrs.
- 1979-80 : 1st International Bal Vikas Gurus’ Conference held at Prasanthi Nilayam. Bhagawan sets up the Sri Sathya Sai Balvikas Education Trust and lays the foundation for Sri Sathya Sai Education in Human Values – SSS EHV. Bal Vikas now becomes a more structured program, also conducted in schools across India.
- 1983 : 1st International Conference for Bal Vikas and pre-Seva Dal students at Prasanthi Nilayam. Highlights included a rally by the participants, cultural programmes, and presentation of ‘floats’ from many states depicting different aspects of human values, at the new Hill View stadium
- 1994 : International Conference for Bal Vikas Gurus at Brindavan ashram, Whitefield, Bangalore
- 2005 : Historic Bal Vikas Children’s Meet, called ‘Festival of Joy’ at Prasanthi Nilayam
- 2010 : 1st Bal Vikas Alumni Meet and presentation of diplomas in Bhagawan’s Divine Presence, which now continues annually.

TESTIMONIES: Experiences of BAL VIKAS Alumni

The most effective way to test an idea or a theory is by its practical application. All movements, revolutions and crusades begin in a small way, by the enactment of a root idea. Bhagawan sowed a seed, the seemingly simplistic program of Bal Vikas, where a Guru, usually a lady, narrates stories and imparts values through songs, prayers, and other small activities, once a week, to a small group of children. Today this has grown into a gigantic tree that is BAL VIKAS, extending its cool shade and benevolent protection to lakhs of children across India, and in many countries around the world as SSE (Sai Spiritual Education). The best people to gauge the IMPACT that Bal Vikas has had, are the recipients of its gracious influence, the Bal Vikas children and alumni themselves. Read on to learn how some flowers in this beautiful garden of Bhagawan's transformation module, experienced its grace. (Ed: These stories have been edited from original articles for the purpose of this newsletter)

SAI CHOOSES

Sneha Rai

Kalimpong, West Bengal

I started Bal Vikas when I was 6 years of age. My mother had taken me to the class for the first time, roughly about 30 minutes' walk from my home. On the first day of Balvikas I still remember, how our guruma had taught us the 'Omkar' mantra and the power of Om, and after that she also told us some stories. Since that day, my life changed completely, I made friends there, and every Sunday, we used to sing bhajans and value songs, on our way to the class. When I was a 3rd group 3rd year student, all my friends had left Balvikas because they didn't have time, for they were always busy with other things. Without them, I too felt like skipping Balvikas. The very next morning, when I was doing Jyothi Meditation, Swami came to me in a vision and gave me vibhuti. He then said, "You never choose Sai, but Sai chooses you". My eyes teared up as I couldn't believe what had happened, Swami had come to me! I was not a good speaker and I was always afraid to talk in front of public. However, I got a chance to share my Balvikas experience at the district level Balvikas convocation, and thanks to Swami it was a great success. Since then I have been able to overcome stage fright, and I also went on to win the district level PowerPoint presentation. Till date, my journey of life has been successful because of Swami's divine grace over me, and I hope and pray for Swami's guidance throughout my life.



BAL VIKAS-ENTRY INTO DIVINE LIFE

Dr. Aditi Das

Guwahati, Assam

I consider my entry into Bhagawan's CHOSEN WORLD of Bal Vikas as the 'Golden Moment of my Life'. Bal Vikas is not just an educational programme. It is the essence of all spiritual knowledge, the practical way of righteous upbringing of the young, the innocent and the ignorant. Through the chanting of Omkara, Veda Stutis, Slokas and Bhajans, the young children unknowingly enter the complex world of spiritual awakening with much ease. The roots of their spiritual path are planted and firmly grounded at a very tender age, in a very delicate and subtle way in the Bal Vikas class by the Guru. Bhagawan's Bal Vikas programme is so tactfully designed that it is all comprehensive, contemporary and a lifelong experience of learning. My parents, who were ardent devotees of Bhagawan Sri Satya Sai Baba put me and my dear brother into the Bal Vikas Class of Prof. Santwana Barua. Whatever seed is planted, a corresponding tree sprouts out - this is the law of nature. When seeds of human and moral excellence are sown at a young age, they become deep rooted in an individual and consequently become his or her second nature. Bal Vikas gave us the theoretical basics and concepts of spirituality and goodness, which were practically followed without questioning at our home, under the strict vigil and loving care of our parents. Teachings of Bal Vikas formed the pathway to Loka Vikas - the enlightening of the self, which leads to lighting up the world. It helped me understand the purpose of one's life on earth - to Know, Love and Serve God, thereby fostering in me the spirit of 'Manab Sewa' (Service to Mankind), the highest form of 'Madhab Sewa' (Service to God), through selfless service to mankind irrespective of caste, creed, colour, sex, nationality and creed. Education in Human Values helped in strengthening the value system in me, through rigorous assessment of the self, of what is good and what is evil. Teachings at Bal Vikas class immensely helped myself to strike a balance between Thought, Word and Deed, thereby checking the existence of hypocrisy and pretence in my day to day life. Bal Vikas taught me to be fearless. Through the thought provoking and morally inspiring tales narrated by our Guru, I was convinced that human life is full of misery because of slavery to the mind, more than the body. With age, maturity and experience, I realise that human values taught at our Bal Vikas class have become so deep rooted in me that they have made me a fearless human, who has the patience, perseverance and spiritual logic to listen to the Voice of the Conscience, be truthful, not only to others but to myself and thus strike a balance in my thought, word and action.



THE POWER OF HIS NAME

Bhairi Meenakshi

Jharkhand

Travelling back in time to the year 2014, I was writing my three-hour accountancy paper. I felt quite confident and satisfied after the ten-minute reading time for I knew all the answers and expected it to be an easy paper. I started answering the questions, and without even my realizing, time just flew. Meanwhile I glanced at my watch and to my horror 45 minutes had passed by and I did not even complete the very first question!! I was panic stricken! And all I could think and do at that moment of time was - Swami save me!! And then I got reminded of the Ashtottara Shatanamavali (108 Names) and the essence of each and every name of Bhagawan that I had learnt in Balvikas. I put my pen down and started chanting Om Sri Sai Kaalateetay Namah, (SAI - the One who transcends time), and after a few minutes I resumed answering. And yes, Swami did come to my rescue, miraculously I completed my entire paper on time and even qualified in it. Swami listening to our prayers and coming to our rescue without fail is a fact, but the question that comes to mind is where does this instinct that I should surrender to Swami, be it anything - big or small, come from? Well, for me this comes from Balvikas and my Balvikas Guru, my mother, who used to chant Om Sri Sai Sarva Roga Nivaarane Namah (SAI - the One who destroys all disease), while stirring Vibhuti in water and made me drink it when I was diagnosed with Blood Cancer at the age of 14. I am thankful to Swami because today I am here due to Swami answering my mother's prayers. Another very special incident is of a stage dance performance. I was given the role of Krishna in the dance and my costume included the Vasuki Naag (Serpent) being tied to my back and we had rehearsals well in advance for more than a month. But suddenly my exam date sheet at school got revised and the dates of exam were clashing with that of the performance. I was disappointed. Talking to the principal was in vain. So once again all I did was pray to Swami and rehearse, pray to Swami and rehearse. And once again our Karunamayee Sai Maa did come to my rescue. The exam dates got revised, I boarded the train and could perform. Now you must be wondering why a mere stage performance was so important for me. Well this was no ordinary one. It was March 2010, the stage was the magnificent Sai Kulwant Hall in Prasanthi Nilayam, and the dance was presented by the Balvikas students of the then Bihar and Jharkhand as a part of the auspicious Holi celebrations in the Divine presence. After the performance was over, it was for the first and last time I had Bhagawan's Divine darshan so close, like never before. Swami looked at the Vasuki Nag, stared right into my eyes for some two to three seconds, talked to the other children and eventually all of us got photographed with Him.



A SECOND HOME AND AN EXTENDED SAI FAMILY

Dr. Dalima Kalita

Guwahati, Assam

I still remember the days when, as a little girl of 9 yrs. I used to attend Bal Vikas class with my younger sister. On the very first day as I was late by 10 minutes, I learnt the lesson to be punctual. Our respected Guru told me "Start early, drive slowly, reach safely," which got deeply imprinted in my mind. That day I was introduced to Bhagawan Baba and I started my journey of endless learning and self-transformation. I started liking the class immensely, attended regularly and also got involved with the Sai Samithi. My days started with the "Karagre Vasate Lakshmi" prayer and ended with "Karacharana Krutam Va" seeking Baba's forgiveness for all the mistakes I did all day. The ambience of my home became more lively and enriching as I shared whatever I learnt in the class with my mother. Learning the Veda mantras, practising bhajans, rehearsing for Eashwaramma Day celebrations, imbibing moral values by taking part in role plays and storytelling; all these have been the golden moments I spent in the Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas. Bal Vikas class soon became my second home and Sai family my extended family. Our Guru was not just a teacher, she was also a mentor, a friend in need and a motherly figure showering bounty of love and affection. This environment had an indelible impact on me and brought unwavering faith in Swami. "Why fear, when I am here?" became my life mantra. Whatever I learnt in Bal Vikas, helped me overcome many adversities in life. Professionally, being a dentist, I try to look upon each patient as Swami's reflection as we are taught to treat each human as God, resonating with the idea that 'Service to man is service to God'. Before starting any treatment, I pray, "Baba, be with me and you do everything through me," and surrender it to Him. When I motivate and educate the patients to take care of their teeth, oral health and general health, I remember the times we were taught about healthcare in Bal Vikas. Today, from being a silent, shy person to being a confident, blessed soul, is due to the encouragement and appreciation I received through Bal Vikas and my Sai family.

DIVINE LOVE and UNFORGETTABLE LESSONS

CA Sree Harsha BV

Andhra Pradesh



When I was six years old, my mother actually forced me into Balvikas to get rid of my noise and naughtiness for 2 hrs. on Sundays. But after my 6th class I started realizing the real fragrance of Balvikas, and with the showers of blessings from Bhagawan, I was able to complete 3rd group of Balvikas and served there for 2 to 3 years as a Guru too.

The moment I hear 'Balvikas', memories of programs which we did in front of Swami flash in my mind. For one of the programs, Swami was extremely happy with us, and gave His divine message for 20 minutes for all of us, and also gave us clothes. At the end of the programme, Swami called us for a group photo, and we all being so young started falling upon Swami in our excitement. When our guru was warning us not to touch Swami – Bhagawan immediately smiled and said in Telugu, “Why shouldn't they touch, let them come to me”. Bal Vikas gave me the following life-long precious gifts: Motherly love of our Gurus: I cherish the time which we spent with our gurus. During Balvikas day functions, our Gurus used to feed us like our mothers did, while our makeup was being done for some cultural activities. They used to encourage us to tell stories, recite slokas etc. and organized cultural events, where we danced, sang, chanted, spoke and performed. Because of this exposure at an early age, I conquered my stage-fear, when I did not even know its meaning. It helped me to start my teaching career at the very young age of 18 years with just 20 students in a class. Today, Swami has provided me with the opportunity and courage to teach more than 1000 students in a single class. Friends for life: It is in teenage, that friends play a major role to decide whether life moves in a negative or positive path. It was in Balvikas, where I met my real friends who guided me in the right direction, and do so even today after almost a decade. When the rest of the students at our age were engaged in discussions of films and TV, we were engaged in Bhajans and Seva. This made us stand apart, and this made us go ahead. Habit of Reading Books: During our childhood, our guru used to quote Swami on how TV is not Television, TV is “Tele-Visham” (visham: poison) and explained to us the joy of reading books. The habit of book-reading which was cultivated during that age, makes us different even today. Meditation and Silent Sitting: Meditation was something which we have learnt, during our 2nd group and 3rd group of Balvikas. Today many corporates are organizing training sessions by spending lacs on meditation and silent sitting for their employees to manage their emotions during pressure. Schools can develop IQ (Intelligent Quotient), but life requires EQ (Emotional quotient) and SQ (Spiritual Quotient), much more than IQ, and these were developed in us through the medium of Balvikas. How for a pencil to write well, we need to sharpen it with a sharpener, to realise the purpose of life, we need to undergo some pain and effort. Today I feel, it was Bal Vikas, which was a sharpener for our life, which helped us to realize our purpose and dreams.



BLOSSOMING OF INNATE POTENTIAL

Atreya Raghavan

Mumbai

It was in Balvikas that I took baby steps into the amazing world of stories that my Balvikas teacher told us every Sunday. The characters came alive in my imagination and slowly the God in many of the lovely epic stories became my Best Friend. Every evening, I would recite some of the Balvikas prayers and then my mother would make me do a minute of Silent Sitting. Now I hated sitting quietly, so I would close my eyes and tell Swami the day's secrets. In short, I was slowly developing a bond with God in which He became my confidant. This I guess, is Daiva Preethi – Love for God that I learnt through Balvikas. I was barely six years old when I took part in a Balvikas story-telling competition. And today, I know that my Balvikas elocution training was a stepping stone for that magnificent moment, when I spoke at Prasanthi Nilayam. Taking part in the Mumbai Ashadi Ekadashi dramas is another memorable part of being a Balvikas student. A few years ago, after an Ashadi play, I was praying ardently that Swami should talk to me. In my mind, I confessed all the naughty things that I had done and I promised to do all the right things, if Swami talked to me. After my prayer, as I opened my eyes, I saw that Swami's chair had entered my row. My heart skipped several beats as I waited expectantly to see if Swami had heard me. Then, Swami suddenly looked at me, smiled and asked, “What is your name?” to which I mumbled – “Swami... Athreya.” To this, Swami said in Telugu “Bangaru” and patted my cheek. This indeed was indeed the "Bangaru moment" – Golden moment of my life. At that moment, I realised that my Balvikas teacher's words, about Swami being omnipresent were true – clearly, He had read my mind and had answered my heart's fervent prayer. Swami's love made me feel so special but now, I had to keep to my end of the bargain for I could not think of displeasing my omnipresent Swami. This is Paapa Bheethi – Fear of Sin that we again learnt in Balvikas. While still on the topic of the Balvikas Ashadi dramas, something very interesting happened to me. I was elated to be allotted the role of Shiva but soon I realised that as Shiva, I would need to start my act with a classical dance piece. Now, I was terrified on hearing this, for, I do not like dancing and no amount of cajoling by friends and family had convinced me to dance in the past. And here I was, staring at the prospect of having to perform a classical dance in front of a huge audience at Puttaparthi. After the initial panic subsided, I realised that dancing and acting in Swami's presence was a huge honour and so, I resolved to do my best to learn the dance. Later that evening I began training with my aunt. The training continued for many days and when Nimish Uncle, our guru, who has considerable drama exposure appreciated my dancing, my father commented that a miracle had happened, because I had turned out to be a graceful dancer. In my heart, I knew that I had tried my bit, because of an imminent chance to dance in the presence of Swami.

This, my friends, is what Balvikas has done for me. It has helped me discover facets of my personality that I never knew existed. It is indeed a gift of the Divine. Sri Sathya Sai Balvikas has given me and all of us – the foundation for a lifelong journey to live in the love for God. Bhagawan in His infinite grace and compassion sparks the lamp of love in each of our hearts at a very young age and Swami's omnipresent love carries us through life.

RUNNING TOWARDS GOD

Akshay Kulkarni,

Dharwad, Karnataka

My Balvikas journey continued with Late Smt Kamala Mulgund. She was one of the nice gurus, who used to treat Balvikas children as her own. She used to insist on Self Audit a lot. She inculcated this habit and made sure that we are practiced this. I continue to practice this and while now I talk to college students for Personality Development programs, under the HOPE Program, I too insist on the benefits of doing Self Audit. During the year, 2016-2017, while my career was going through some challenging times, I used Self Audit to introspect and bounced back to perform at my peak. I Thank Swami and Balvikas movement for inducing such noble qualities in me right from my formative years. When I look back and ponder on my Balvikas Journey, I realise that Love for God inculcated and induced during the early tender age is a strong foundation, indeed, a very strong foundation for one's life. My father, late Sri Chidambarrao Kulkarni was my first Balvikas Guru. We used to have informal sessions in the Veranda of our house followed by Bhajans. He used to make me sit on his lap and teach me Slokas, Bhajans and narrate small moral stories, Chinnakathas. The first Bhajan he taught me was “Hey Kamala Vadana Sai Ranga, Kaivalya Panduranga”. I was too small to understand the meaning of Kaivalya. I thought Kaivalya means 'I don't want my hand', as the word Kaivalya in Kannada is two words, Kai meaning 'hand' and Vale/Valya meaning 'don't want'. Then my father explained, it is not that I don't want my hand. It is, 'I want my Hand to be in your Hand'! Today, when I try studying Kaivalyaavastha in Raja Yoga, I understand that what my father put in simple terms is absolutely right. It means Detachment, Solitude and Surrender!

We had gone to Brindavan for Swami's Darshan, which was my first Darshan. Those days, there was the old Sairam Shed covered with bed of sand. There used to be a huge tree under which Swami would come and sit. As soon as Swami came out, the story of a devotee (which my father had narrated to me, of how Bhagawan in the interview room had showed this devotee a golden snake), flashed in my mind and I started running towards Swami to ask Him for GOLD! A few Mahila Sevadals started chasing me and they managed to catch hold of me few meters away from Swami. I still remember the smile on Swami's face afterwards. Balvikas taught me to run towards GOD! Later on, from my Balvikas Guru, late Smt Kamala Mulgund, who used to treat Balvikas children as her own, I learnt the practice of 'Self Audit'. She inculcated this habit in us, and made sure that we applied this in our lives. I continue to practice this and now when I talk to college students for Personality Development programs, under the HOPE Program, I too insist on the benefits of doing Self Audit. During the year, 2016-2017, while my career was going through some challenging times, I used Self Audit to introspect and bounced back to perform at my peak. I Thank Swami and Balvikas movement for inducing such noble qualities in me right from my formative years.

I offer my deepest gratitude to Swami, and to all my Balvikas gurus.



ON THE SAI PATH

Ashim Khawas
Kalimpong, West Bengal

With the blessings of Bhagawan I was chosen as a Balvikas student and completed my course by the year 2012. Also from nursery to class XII, I studied at the Sai School (Sai Institute of Education & Research, Kalimpong). In the year 2010, I got an opportunity to visit Prasanthi Nilayam from school as part of a pilgrimage tour. It was the first time I was going to meet Swami. When I reached there and the moment I entered the ashram, I went totally blank, with nothing inside my mind. This was the first time I experienced such a feeling. It was the first touch of Swami's vibration in my body. From that moment on, I was totally transformed.

After returning from Prasanthi Nilayam, I totally devoted myself to His work and service. After completion of my Balvikas I joined our Kalimpong town Samithi Youth wing, and was immersed in organization work and also served as a Balvikas guru. With His grace, I was appointed as an Education Coordinator of the Kalimpong Town Samithi in 2017. It was on May 6th, Eashwaramma Diwas, when along with my Balvikas students, we started a mission to make a "PLASTIC FREE ENVIRONMENT" in our locality. From then on, every Saturday and Sunday mornings, 5:00 am – 7:30 am our mission was on, which has made a huge impact in our society. The work is still going on and we even received a Memento from the Driver's Association club. In the same year, a strike (shutdown) was called due to political turmoil in the Darjeeling Hills, and all educational institutions were closed. However, with Bhagawan's blessings I was able to manage an education centre at our location, from East Main Road, Kalimpong, involving our Sai center and many nearby houses. We conducted classes from Nursery to class XII with separate Boards. An overall of 267 students and 30 teachers participated, for 47 days of classes at no cost. The endeavour was a huge success. In July 2018, I got an opportunity to attend a "Go Green International Conference" at Prasanthi Nilayam, and it helped me to do more things regarding "Plastic Free Movement" and to love our mother earth. Last, but not the least, currently I am working as a Mentor, running my own Educational Institute "LIMITLESS" and helping students to reach their goals by motivating them, along spiritual lines. Balvikas has taught me to live a life full of gratitude.



'BE HONEST, BE STRONG'

Victoria Devi
Manipur

I am now in the 1st yr. of Group III of Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas. I was introduced to the Slokas and Stotras of Group I when I was just four years old, at an age when I used to memorise nursery rhymes and the English alphabet. My Grandpa and Grandma used to tell me beautiful and inspiring stories in the Bal Vikas classes. I also enjoyed going with my grandma to Sai Bhajans held at the Sai Samithi. I used to love attending the Bal Vikas Meets and take part in the Painting competition and cultural programme organised by Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Manipur. With Swami's Grace, I received the 1st prize in recitation competition held at District level during the Eashwaramma Day Celebration in the year 2017, on the theme 'Mother', and another Prize for painting. These were really memorable moments for me. Even in the Cultural Programme held at my school, I always grab the opportunity to recite some Stotras and Slokas, which my teachers and friends appreciate in me. I thank my Swami from the bottom of my heart because I have learnt these slokas and stotras in Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas classes from my Bal Vikas Guru, my grandma, whom Swami had chosen especially for me. Another anecdote I would like to share with you all is relating to a dream with Swami. I have a friend at school, whose name is Manika. One day I had a dream that a boy pushed her and she fell down. Suddenly Baba appeared and said to me, "Be Honest. Be strong" Next morning when I was at school, the same incident happened during the lunch-break and my friend Manika lost two of her teeth. Since I saw the boy who pushed her, I reported him to my teacher and he was punished for his misbehaviour. Swami gave me the courage and strength to speak the truth by saying – 'Be honest, be strong' in my dream, the previous night. Even now these golden words still keep echoing in my ears and the very thought of them makes me feel stronger always. My association with Swami is all due to Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas classes and I cherish every moment I spend here.



SUBTLE Influences, VALUE lessons, 'NARAYANSEVA' and the JOY of BAL VIKAS

Vibhuti Rao,
Madhya Pradesh

I distinctly recall our dance performance before Swami in 2010. We were all extremely worried that we might forget few steps, dancing before so many thousands of people, but the moment we saw Swami smiling right before us, a divine current flowed through us and the performance went flawless. As children, we awaited the very last segment of the Balvikas sessions, in which we played value games. Our all-time favourite was "Maa kehti hain Maa kehti hain (Mother says so, Mother says so)", and we didn't even realize that by obeying our Guru in that game we ended up obeying our mothers as a natural habit and duties. Balvikas and my parents have groomed me in such a manner that perhaps now I know what is right for me and what is not. I have the strength to make my own personal world full of values, truth and pure love. My father being my Balvikas Guru has helped me imbibe the quality of pure love. Baba says true love and only true love has the power to bring about a change. As Balvikas students we also performed Narayan Seva on Sundays. Everyone used to bring homemade food packets and we distributed them to the people outside a local city hospital. The big smile, unfathomable love and umpteen blessings that they gave us in return were beyond measures and very dear to all of us. Baba practically taught us the adage, that 'people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel'. I recall once I had a really bad mathematics test. I was sad beyond measure. In the evening, we had bhajans in Balvikas and all that sorrow completely melted and turned into happiness. Balvikas has helped me to be happier in difficult situations and feel more confident about myself. I am so grateful to Beloved Swami for whatever I am today. My parents' act of enrolling me in Balvikas has made me a better person. I pray to Swami to give me the strength and opportunities to be an instrument in his Divine Mission.



ADAMANT DEVOTION, DIVINE INTERVENTION

Shrunkhala Kaushik,
Nasik, Maharashtra

I am a Post Graduate student doing my Masters in Community Medical Sciences in Physiotherapy, at a Medical College in Maharashtra. How I came to be studying here is a miracle of Swami. I had joined the college in 2012 for my undergraduate programme, from where I graduated by Swami's grace as a topper. Though I never had any aims of doing Post Graduation, I wrote the PG CET, due to my father's insistence. Also, I felt maybe it was Swami's wish, since Swami's students are mostly highly qualified academically. Being a Balvikas alumnus, probably Swami wanted me to educate myself to the highest possible level in my own field, so as to serve my patients with the best of knowledge available. I decided I would give the exam but at the same time, I prayed to Swami intensely to give me admission in my own college, which was in my home city. Now there was a reason behind this prayer. I wanted to continue my Balvikas classes without disruption, which I had been conducting for the past 5 years. Moreover, I did not want that my other Samithi activities such as medical camps, bhajans etc. should be disturbed, because these were what defined my existence. Even today, if I do not do any Sai activity for a week, I start feeling restless and demotivated. Swami's seva activities are like my lifelines. So, I bargained with Swami – I will write the CET exam for the sake of it, but Swami would have to ensure that I get admission in my own college! I was so adamant on this that I filled up the name of just one college, my own college, as 'preferred college' in the college preference form list which we have to fill up prior to selection. I was extremely firm about this – I do the PG Course only at the college where I was currently studying, and my father too agreed to this.

By the grace of Swami, I got the 13th rank in the state, with the 13th number seat exactly in my own college in the first round itself, in the branch I had always desired for! Such is the infinite love of our beloved Bhagawan on each and every one of us. Indeed, if our intentions are pure, Swami gives us what is best for us at the right time! Many miracles followed thereafter, for with Swami as your dearest friend, almost everyday is miraculous. To cite one example, our college Principal, who is a spiritualist, a strict disciplinarian and a very pious human, seeing my conduct and achievements, has started sending his own child to my Balvikas centre and that was a special moment in my life. The glory of being a SSS Balvikas student is like no other.

BAL VIKAS – A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

Akshara
Tamil Nadu

My Balvikas journey began 8 yrs. back, and since then, I have not missed a single class. As small children, we never understood the significance of Balvikas, but today I realise how in Balvikas, everything was a celebration. All the Seva activities like rolling laddoos, making vibuthi packets, sweeping and mopping the floor, making floral decorations, arranging the slippers in order during big festivals – no work was small or big. It was fun being together, working together, eating and sleeping together during meets... every moment was a

golden moment! While at home we looked for all the comforts like air-conditioner, soft bed, yummy food during each meal and so on, during Balvikas meets, the company we had made all the difference and why wouldn't it? With Swami it is always love, love and more love. While at school we were taught festivals religion wise, here in Samithis, we were celebrating all the festivals with the same enthusiasm. Everyday is a celebration in Balvikas and each moment is a golden moment. The best offerings that we Balvikas children could make are the gifts that Swam loves the most, and they are – unity, love and service. And these very gifts are offered in myriad forms whenever we undertake any activity together. Every April, when my friends at school plan to spend their summer vacation at various holiday spots, my Balvikas friends and I, enjoy the whole month practicing for the cultural programs for Eashwaramma Day celebrations. While doing this, we derive a lot of happiness by working together, since our aim is to please God. When I look back on all these occasions, I realise that these events have helped to inculcate many values in us. Our Gurus used to say that it does not matter if the role one plays in a drama is big or small, all roles are equally important and should be done to please God. I realise now that the same is true in life. We are all playing different roles in a cosmic drama where our Swami is the Director. If we realise that our only duty is to play our role to perfection and He is always nearby to prompt us and will never let us fail, we can always live without worries. One of the gifts Balvikas has given us is that we get an opportunity to learn Veda Chanting. More importantly I felt blessed that it enabled me to participate in the mass Veda Chanting program, at Prashanti Nilayam during the first International Veda Conference in November 2017. Living with God is true education. Eight years in Balvikas have passed like eight minutes. May we all make best use of every minute, imbibe His teachings and through them transform our lives.

BALVIKAS - A TRANSITION AND TRANSFORMATION

Uthra Chandhiramouli
Chennai



I was basically a very short tempered, moody and introvert kid but after starting my Balvikas, my behaviour slowly changed. I started to control my anger by diverting myself and started to attend all activities in Samithi and slowly became an outgoing person. Slowly, I could realise nobody liked a moody person, but when I started mingling, I could get lot of acceptance and praises from society. Once during Balvikas days, during a Samithi bhajan, my friend had darshan of Swami and was showered with vibhuthi. When I looked at her, I too saw Swami in her, lying down and so I rushed to Him (my friend) and served Him, by pressing His Legs. To note, only we both had the opportunity to have His darshan. It was the most blissful day in my life. Presently, Swami has given me an opportunity to be a Balvikas Guru and as a Guru, I can realise that not only in the lives of students but in the lives of parents too, there are transformations happening. One of the Samithi activities is conducted at the residence of a Balvikas child, where they eat non-vegetarian food. However, slowly, post the Samithi activities at her home, the mother has completely stopped cooking non-vegetarian food at home and stopped eating it as well. The kids too are cooperating as they are Balvikas students. This was a great surprise to me but I realise that for Swami, who does many wonders in this world, transforming people is not a big deal.

BALVIKAS – MOULDING LIVES

Saisha
Uttar Pradesh

Balvikas has transformed many lives across the world and in this vast ocean of Swami's love I'm just a small drop. Being a Balvikas student in itself is a great achievement in life. Every human being in the world shares with others some common features – they are made up of same flesh and blood, same number of bones and all the biological functions are the same too – respiration, perspiration, circulation, neuron transmission etc. Then what is the basic difference between a Balvikas student and others? The difference lies in the mental attitude, in the thought-process. A 5 yr-old child who enters into the atmosphere of Sri Sathya Sai Balvikas and emerges out as a young person of 13, undergoes many changes, and all for the good – this person is not afraid to face the outside world, he or she is imbued with spiritual energy, they think always of the well-being of society and become well-behaved. This is the boon of Balvikas. On the basis of 3 C's – Courage, Commitment and Conviction and 5 D's – Discipline, Devotion, Dedication, Determination and Discrimination, a sea change takes place in the child. Bal Vikas children shine like stars in society. Like the Dhruv Tara (Pole Star), they mould the society with their deeds. In the year 2010, I came to Prasanthi Nilayam with my Balvikas troop and in that year, we celebrated Diwali with Swami in the Hill View Stadium. It was the spectacular moment of my life with the sparkling of fire crackers, their blazing light in the presence of our Para Brahma Avatar; that moment was the golden moment of my life that I'm never going to forget. In 2009, I got a chance to play a role of Mother Teresa and I myself got inspired by playing that role. I understood the value of SEVA. Every activity in the world is centred around money. When you request someone to sing a song or do some small work for you they will immediately ask you for money. But seva is the only activity that is free of cost, which gets work done not by earning money but by developing faith and devotion towards God. The practice of rendering seva totally depends on our feelings as it gives mental peace which creates self-satisfaction that cannot be expressed in words.

THE LORD'S GUIDANCE

Trayambak
Delhi



Right from the time of joining the Balvikas wing of Shri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, I have been a blessed child. Though I joined the Balvikas classes when I was seven years old and was enjoying the little shlokas, kathas and the beautiful experiences with Swami that my guru used to share in each class, and looked forward to the Prasad at the end of each class, there was a break because my guru had shifted far away. In my heart of hearts, I was yearning deeply and missing the classes. One thing about Swami, which I have experienced is, if you surrender to Him and pray, your prayers are always answered. My present Balvikas guru met my mother at a friend's house and said "Why are you not sending your son to Balvikas?" and my spiritual journey continued. Swami guided me to my guru. Balvikas, meaning blossoming of a child, is a beautiful experience for each child because its aim is to foster character development and inculcate spiritual transformation and at the same time, it also inculcates self-respect in the individual. Today, we are living in a world of controversies. There is so much of exposure and pressure that each one of us should develop absolute self-control to become responsible human beings. At such testing times in my life, Swami has been and is always with me and guided me to take the right decision. Being a very loud and straightforward child, I used to end up in trouble always putting myself and my parents in a situation of embarrassment. At the right time, he blessed me with a spiritual teacher in school who understood my shortcomings and helped me nurture my talent. Today, I am known as a table player, a good dramatist and of course, I am learning a little diplomacy which is required for the peaceful and harmonious living in this Kaliyug. Swami has helped me discover my inner talents. The first poem I wrote on Swami was a playful one when I was eight years old. But, with that I have been writing many poems, and some of them have been published in my school magazine also. To further improve my skills in writing, Swami has chosen me to be a part of the prestigious Wave Magazine, this e-magazine being published in the national website, right from the time of its inception. What more can I ask for? Swami is very close to my heart, thanks to my parents and my gurus who have guided me to Him.

THE GURU'S LOVE

Ananya Doshi
West Bengal



It was my Guruma, my Balvikas Guru, whose selfless love and affection made me hooked to the classes. She understood our feelings and responded to all our trivial queries with equanimity. She taught us to discriminate between good and bad, and inculcated moral values in us. She spared no efforts in teaching us Swami's principles and His Mission. Apart from the regular classes, we had so many activities. We visited so many places like the blind school, eye operation camp, Kalighat mandir cleaning, to name a few. We performed for the blind school on several occasions. Along with these, I participated in drawing, elocution, drama, bhajans and so on. During peak summers, we distributed water to the pedestrians and actively took part in Narayana Seva. Every year we celebrated Eashwaramma Day with a grand function and then we would all eagerly wait for the prize distribution ceremony. I vividly recall the annual vacation during the Durga Puja and the excitement of meeting our Gurus on the day, when the classes reopened. In the course of time, I put my son into Balvikas so that he can also be a part of this beautiful programme and receive God's Grace. I thank Swami for bringing him into His fold right from the tender age. To sum up my thoughts, I would tell that we were fortunate to have such Gurus who were perfect instruments of Bhagawan. We should always strive and put our best to be like them. I pray to my Mother Sai to give me enough strength to carry on His work and try to make each and every Balvikas student a real gem in His Garland and see to it that they also have so many golden moments to cherish with their future generations.

DOWN MEMORY LANE: how Bal Vikas IMPACTS

Nandita Sarma

Assam

Bal Vikas, which I attended every Sunday morning from 9 am to 10.30 am at our residence was a class with a difference, something which school education could not cover. The spiritual aspect of a child's development for holistic progress could be completed only because of the Bal Vikas classes. Those moments, which I recall now were too precious. We, the children who regularly attended Bal Vikas classes those days, can observe its impact upon our personality, now. We experience the positive impact of scriptures, ancient texts and Holy books on our thought process. The contents from Swami's Chinna Kathas, Ramayana and Mahabharata and other stories from different religions made us quite well-informed. Knowing the two epics thoroughly created an indelible impression on our minds. The impact of those stories and relating them to the present day situations helped enormously in emotional balancing. Yes, gone are those days when all the children of our locality, would come to attend the Bal Vikas class. Starting with "Sai Ram Guru Maa", sitting in Padmasana, back bone straight, starting with three Omkaras and Ganesh sloka, followed by other slokas. The entire room would vibrate with the chanting of around 25-30 children of different age groups. Learning to sing bhajans and listening to the stories being narrated by "Guru Maa" – were the most eagerly awaited moments. 'Flash back effect': Way back to the year 1976 and in the years that followed, we would always eagerly wait for 6th of May to come to celebrate "Eashwaramma Day". What fun and frolic we used to enjoy with programmes in "Jur-Pukhuri Sai Baba Mandir" in Guwahati (Assam). Students of Bal Vikas from various centers would come to participate. Numerous competitions were organized – Rangoli, Recitation, 'Go as you like', Bhajan, Skit and the like. The best part was "Narayan Sewa". What a joy it was to serve the daridra narayans. We learned so many things -- Slokas, Stories, Bhajans, Social Service, Meditation, Dramatization, to mention a few. Leadership qualities also developed in us. 1979 was the most memorable year, when along with our guide, Devobala Chaliha Baidew we five Bal Vikas students were selected to perform in front of Bhagawan Baba, the skit of "Sarva Dharma" in the Poornachandra Hall. Bhagawan Baba after our performance on the back stage gave toffees, simply by moving his hand. Being a Bal Vikas student, I learnt to be humble, honest, spiritual, polite, helpful, simple, understanding, obedient, respectful and kind. These wonderful qualities would have remained dormant, but Bal Vikas gave an opportunity to bring them to the forefront and be a part of my personality. The evils and negativity which tends to dominate at times, do not get an upper hand. Those golden moments taught me the five D's - Duty, Discipline, Devotion, Dedication and Discrimination. Bal Vikas taught me to respect parents, siblings, other religions and every profession. It developed my communication skills, made me smart, decisive, and also work for society. Bal Vikas is the golden chapter of my life.

The Importance and Relevance of Bal Vikas in the Modern World

We live in very complicated times. At present, we are in the age of information and specifically, the internet. It has become a challenge to teach discipline to children during this period, when whether good or bad, terabytes of information are available to everyone, through television, smart mobile, computers, etc. This phenomenon that started in a small way has taken various turns and deviations to be where it is currently. It has started defining and even harming our culture. The many attractions on the web, available with a single click, in turn, hurt our innocent children. All of us are responsible for protecting them. The only thing we need to do is to follow that way our beloved Bhagawan suggests.

"From the most impressionable years, the children should be taught to cultivate love for all. Love leads to unity. Unity promotes purity. Purity leads to Divinity", says Swami, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

A magnificent way prescribed by Him, is the program of Bal Vikas.

Bal Vikas as the name indicates, was launched by Bhagawan to facilitate the blossoming of today's children to future citizens and leaders of tomorrow. This movement, founded in 1969 has grown into an international campaign under the auspices of SSSSO. It trains children from the age of 5 to the age of 15, complementing the school education by emphasising on the five cardinal human values, viz., Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa.

Bhagawan had introduced 'Education in Human Values' programme as early as the seventies. He felt that it has to begin right from the early childhood days when boys and girls are of an impressionable age. They could be introduced slowly and gradually to Indian ethical and spiritual thought through the study of stories of our great seers and sages and some of the facets of world scriptures. These ideas gave shape to this unique Child Development programme in the country. There are thousands of such centres where this process is going on systematically. Lakhs and lakhs of children have blossomed into youth of character through this movement over the years, and there are thousands of teachers, known as Bal Vikas gurus guiding these young aspiring minds to a better tomorrow following the divine teachings and guidelines of Bhagawan.

Baba says. "What we need today is not a new system of education, nor a new social order, nor even a new religion. What we need today are noble and high minded men and women". Bhagawan also predicted, "The Bal -Vikas children whom you are guiding and inspiring will be the leaders of tomorrow. The virtues you impart in them and the examples you place before them will remain carved in their memories and transform their outlook and behaviour in the days to come" (Sathya Sai Speaks, 1967:7).

Baba pointed out that, "The idea of Bal Vikas is to raise a generation of boys and girls who have a clear conscience. The actual syllabus is not so important as the creation of an atmosphere, great habits where

ideas can grow and fructify. Bal Vikas pupils attend the classes only for one day a week and visit their usual school on the other days".

(Sathya Sai Speaks, 1982:13).

It has been observed that the young students who have attended the Bal Vikas classes and their parents all over the world have paid glowing tributes to the richness of the programme and its impact. It has helped the students to discover their real identity, improve their behaviour, intellect and intuition. For them, it was a complete transformation. The parents equally have expressed their gratitude to the programme for making their homes vibrant and worth living. Bal Vikas children have brought about a complete change. The houses have become 'Sweet Homes' where nothing but love vibrates and covers the whole cosmos.

Today in India, lakhs of children have benefited from the Bal Vikas programme. It is due to the dedicated efforts mainly of the ladies of the Mahila Vibhag. Thus, Bal Vikas has become an essential and vital part of the Sai Divine mission. In so many cases, Bal Vikas children have transformed the entire family.

BALVIKAS is a journey 'from Bhagawan, in Bhagawan, and to Bhagawan'!

Sri Sathya Sai Balvikas is Swami's Open University. The best teaching one can get here is to centre our lives on GOD! Once when a group of Bal Vikas students from the Andheri-Bandra Samithi visited Puttaparthi in 1990, they were called for a private audience with Baba. One of the teachers asked Baba, "How do we bring about transformation in the children, Baba"? Baba replied, **"Inspire the children, tell them stories from the lives of great people... You don't worry about transformation, that is My job"**. How very true! We all have to play our parts to perfection for this world to be a better place to live.

By Akella Suryanarayana Murthy, District Spiritual Coordinator, SSSSO, Medchal Malkajgiri District



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