

Duty, Discipline, Devotion: Living the Message of Sathya Sai

**FAIRFIELD
ALABAMA**

**Memorial Day
Weekend**

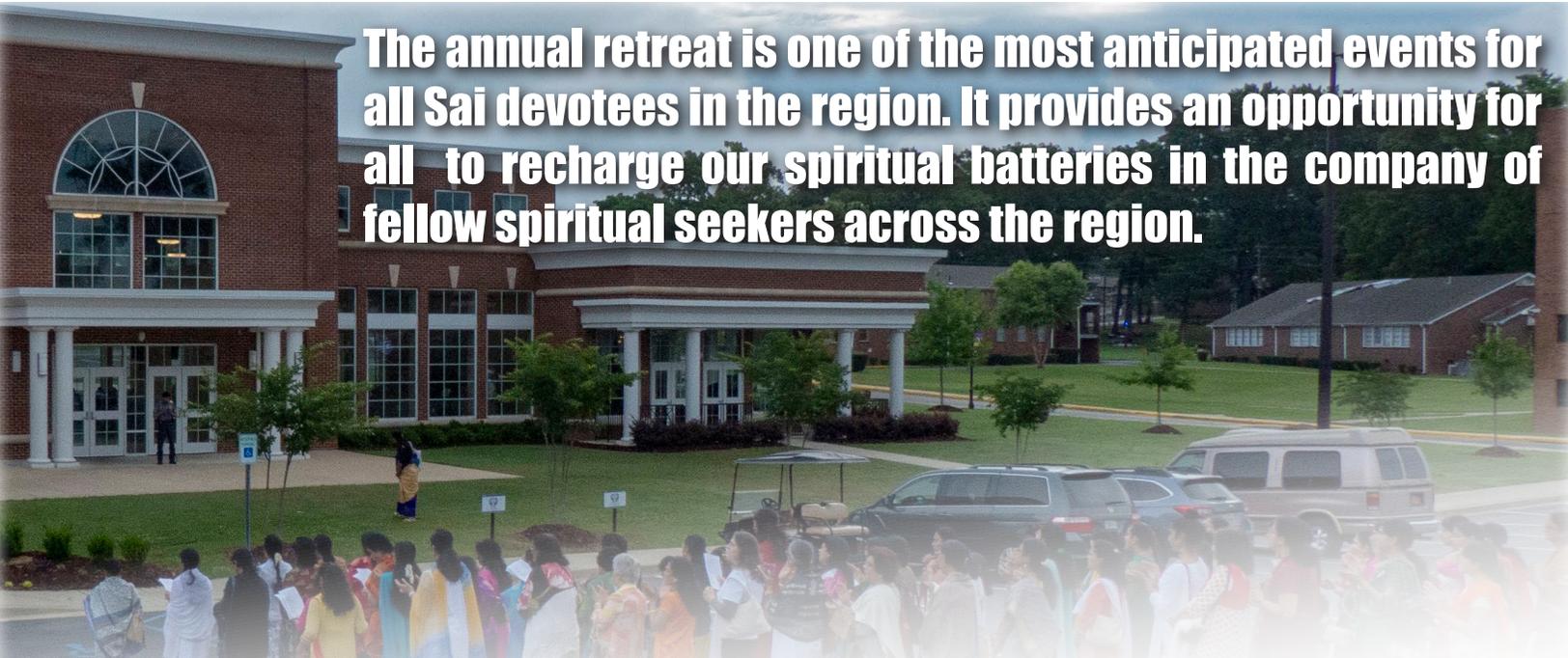
**May 25th - 28th
2018**



**SAI ANNUAL REGIONAL RETREAT
REGION 3 - USA**

Alabama - Chattanooga - Florida - Georgia - North Carolina - South Carolina - US. Virgin Islands





The annual retreat is one of the most anticipated events for all Sai devotees in the region. It provides an opportunity for all to recharge our spiritual batteries in the company of fellow spiritual seekers across the region.

Sweet Home Alabama...

MILES COLLEGE, FAIRFIELD, AL

From May 25th to 28th, 2018, the Southeast Region of the U.S. Sathya Sai Organization held its annual retreat at the historic Miles College in Fairfield, Alabama, drawing 474 devotees from 24 Sai centers and groups across the region, to the Memorial Day weekend event.

With the theme, “Duty, Devotion and Discipline - Living the message of Sathya Sai”, the retreat was an opportunity to experience Swami’s Divine presence and to reflect on Swami’s teachings through a myriad of avenues, including memorable keynote speeches, service activities, uplifting devotional singing, and inspiring workshops. Other highlights included the multiple Sai Spiritual Education multiple activities throughout the retreat, a cultural program by both the SSE and the Young Adult wings, and an enchanting music offering by the Sathya Sai alumni, making the long weekend retreat a must needed treat for the hearts of all present.

As devotees arrived from different states of the region, the accommodation team was all geared up to assign the designated rooms (dorm style) to all attendees. Friday’s program started with 3 wonderful speakers who shared their personal experiences with Bhagawan.

The first speaker was sister Jayshree Narayan, who currently serves as the Charlotte center president. She spoke on Swami’s advice on how to overcome the Mind:

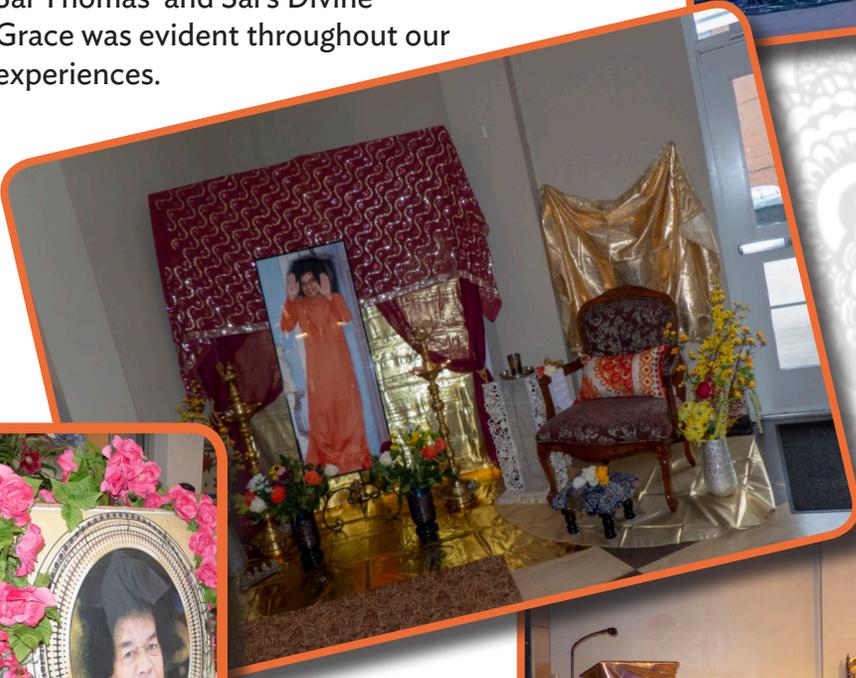
1. Be aware that this is not our real nature – we are just playing a role.
2. Ask Swami for this awareness if problems still linger – because we must first ASK Him for His help. Otherwise, without asking, He won’t interfere.
3. Distract and divert the mind whenever feeling down or upset. Immediately change your mind to something sweet you may remember, or focus on happy memories of Swami.

The second speaker was Dr. Stanley Wetschler and wife Janey, from Asheville, NC.

He spoke about his recovery from having Stage 4 colon cancer. Then they both shared about the miraculous experiences with their son Matt. While out surfing in breaking waves, Matt sustained a spinal cord injury which left him with a concussion, fractured cervical vertebrae and paralyzed from the head down. He was unable to do anything but scream for help while nearly drowning. He disappeared in the water for about 10 minutes. “Coincidentally” and ICU nurse and an ER doctor were passing by and the first to arrive at the scene to administer lifesaving CPR until the ambulance arrived. Then the Wetschlers showed a video of the breaking news of Matt’s accident, and shared many of Swami’s miracles which followed in the months of Matt’s recovery. Now he is able to once again walk, and

has given the world new hope in the treatment of spinal chord injuries, showing that recovery is possible after receiving a prognosis of quadriplegia.

The last speech of the evening was Mona Madhwani from St. Thomas Island. She showed aftermath photos of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria (both Category 5 storms which went through their island in September 2017). She said of rebuilding: their foundation was Swami, one pillar was developing the spirit of Oneness, another pillar was the transformation which came from the service projects. She said that it brought new focus on Ceiling on Desires because with no running water, no refrigeration, no lights at night, and having very little resources they remembered Swami's teachings: "Don't waste time, food, energy, or money." The island of St. Thomas was dubbed by Prof. Anil Kumar as Sai Thomas and Sai's Divine Grace was evident throughout our experiences.



DIFFERENT ALTARS DURING THE RETREAT

Keynote Speakers...

Dr. Joe Phaneuf

The first speaker on Saturday was Dr. Joe Phaneuf, National YA Advisor. Here are some take aways from his talk on Swami's teachings on communication:

- Read "Prema Vahini" (The Stream of Divine Love) by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba
- See God in everyone. It will make us better communicators.
- When you see God in the other person, you will automatically speak with Love.
- When the God in front of you is misbehaving, remember that Swami will not give you a test that you can not handle.
- 5 proclamations from Swami: have these affirmation always in mind:
 - 1-) I am God, I'm no different from God
 - 2-) I am the indivisible the absolute supreme
 - 3-) I am Sat Chit Ananda (being, awareness and bliss)
 - 4-) I am ever content, fear can never enter me
 - 5-) Grief and anxiety can never affect me.

He also shared some valuable techniques to improve our communication skills:

- 90% of communication is non-verbal (body language).
- THINK before you speak.

Truthful?

Hurt anyone?

Improve on silence?

Necessary?

Kind?

- The damage we can cause with unkind words can cause even more harm than an atomic bomb.

- If someone is very angry, give them love, give them a hug.

- If you put enough love into any situation, no matter how difficult it is, it will turn out good at the end.

- The first spiritual practice: to stop seeing the faults in others and focus on your own self improvement.

- You should listen more than what you speak.

- How to check for understanding: If you are the receiver: Listen carefully. Repeat back to the speaker

to summarize. If you are the transmitter: "I just want to see if I explained things properly, please tell me what you understood".

- First Understanding - then Adjustment. Swami said, "First you must understand each other. After that adjustment is easy. 90% of people try adjustment first. This is the wrong way. First is understanding."

- Acknowledge the emotions. Example: "I'm so sorry to hear that; it must have been very hard. Is there anything I can do to help?"

- Don't start a conversation with "At least..."

Empathy is more powerful than sympathy.





Dr. Sunam Gyamtso

It is said that Baba revolutionized the way Bhajans are sung, and Dr. Gyamtso is indeed a key player in that revolution, being an outstanding singer, composer, he was instrumental in writing most of the Bhajans we sing today in our Sai centers worldwide. Here are some of the key points he mentioned in his soulful speech.

- Bhagavan never quotes any texts, because He's the source of the texts. "When I speak about the Gita, it's not referring to the Gita, but re-telling you the whole of the Gita!" Swami explained.
- "Until I manifested as the Avatar, I was the distant goal. But then the goal becomes the guide." Swami said. He is the refuge, the resting place, and the friend.
- Swami started each discourse with a sloka or Telegu poem. It's a beautiful masterpiece that He slowly unravels. Then He expands on that theme, with examples and ornamentation, and then discourse ends with a powerful

- It's time for each of us to believe that we are Sai – we should ask ourselves how should we think, how should we act?
- In the bhajan hall, Swami once asked a student, "What do you want?" The student replied: "I want nothing. I want you." Swami then said, "Nothing is everything. Everything is nothing."
- Sometimes it's wonderful to live in the void. You have a cup of water, and some sugar. Two different entities, but once they are mixed, one drop of totality is the same as the whole.
- Protect the body. Bend the body, then mend the senses and the mind. If I throw you in the water, you will kick your arms vigorously so as not to die. You cut the water behind and then you cut forward to swim. The water will help you. Discrimination and Detachment are your two arms to swim through this water.
- Do you get inspired by nature? If inspired by nature, have you

composed poems or done any painting on nature? So many people play by picking up a leaf or flower and destroying it without thinking; not realizing they are killing nature.

- Give yourself the respite of a pensive mood, a quiet moment, the bliss of solitude. Remain resolute and undisturbed.
- We should ask ourselves constantly these profound questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? Because we change as we grow.
- The Sai name is very profound in itself.

**Service
Adoration
Illumination**

**Spiritual
Awareness
Individual**

**Simple
Adorable
Informal**

**Standardization
Accreditation
Inspection**

Dr. Gyamtso kept the audience captivated by interspersing his talk with songs that he composed, explaining the meaning and how the song came into existence in the Divine Presence. Every song has a deep significance filled with lessons for all of us.

WORKSHOPS

Every year all the attendees get an opportunity to choose from an array of workshops on multiple topics. This year was no exception and we were blessed to have such beautiful diversity in both facilitators and content. These workshops are a great opportunity to dwell deeper into multiple aspects of His message in a very interactive way. This year topics ranged from Communication, Divine Romance, the Healing Power of Love, Importance of Natural Food and Diet, the Law of Karma, Why Does Swami Ask us to Serve and Sai Humour just to mention a few.



SAI SPIRITUAL EDUCATION RETREAT SUMMARY



The SSE experience at the 2018 Regional Retreat this year was new and more engaging for the children. Heartfelt thanks to Swami for this wonderful opportunity to spend two days with all of them. We started Saturday morning with yoga, prayers and Bhajans. Then, Sister Arthi taught them Native American songs and led them in a singing session. She brought props that got the children excited! Brother Joe Phaneuf, then came to interact, talk with, and sing with the children. His lessons greatly impacted young children as well as the teachers.



*“Wherever you look,
I am there.
Wherever you walk,
I am there.
Whomsoever you
contact,
I am that person.
I am in each, in all My
Splendour.”*

On Sunday morning, the kids did a Walk with Values. The highlight of Sunday morning was the SSE carnival- the kids gathered in the football field to play various games (ex. tug of war, sack race) along with coloring, face painting and henna stations. Not only did Swami change the weather from rain to shine but children also got His blessings in the form of a 360 degree rainbow with sun in the center right above the area where children were playing. Thanks to Swami who has the love of a thousand mothers. After lunch, Brother Sunam Gyamsto, another of our keynote

speakers, came to share Swami's stories with the children and give them advice on playing and practicing instruments for bhajans. After, the children set up for the SSE exhibition and explained with great energy their learning to the adults who came to see it. The exhibition encourages their public speaking skills and also gives them a platform to share their ideas from SSE. Pre SSE was equally busy with artwork, story time, games, and experiments. The SSE children went and played with them too, and the Pre SSE kids very much enjoyed them! Guest speakers visited them and

shared stories for 5-10mins which was appreciated by the kids and parents. Pre SSE also participated in the Sunday carnival games and the SSE exhibition.

Meeting the keynote speakers really influenced the children and having a sports day promoted teamwork and unity. The feedback from parents was also positive. The SSE kids this year encountered new and different experiences which had an impact on their lives.

The Region 3 YAs offered a unique cultural program at the regional retreat in Fairfield, AL. The play revolves around 3 YAs at the retreat who are preparing for a musical offering. All of a sudden they are transported to another world called 3D - an interactive spiritual gaming experience. They meet Hologram Host who explains to them the 3 challenges they have to go through - one for each of the three D's: duty, discipline, and devotion. Upon successful completion of each task, they will be given a clue. Put the three clues together and they'll find the key to return back to the retreat!" For each of the challenges, one of the 3 YAs picked people from the audience to represent them to play the game.

Each of the 3 games involved audience participation. In the first game, based on Duty, the 3 main contestants were assigned 1 of the 3 senses - eyes, hands, and lips. Their task was to pick up randomly spaced objects on the floor and put them in the basket. They could only communicate with their senses allotted to them. In the first round, they were unsuccessful. In the second round, they realized they could use Swami's help (played by one of the 3 main characters). With that, they were able to accomplish their objectives much quicker.

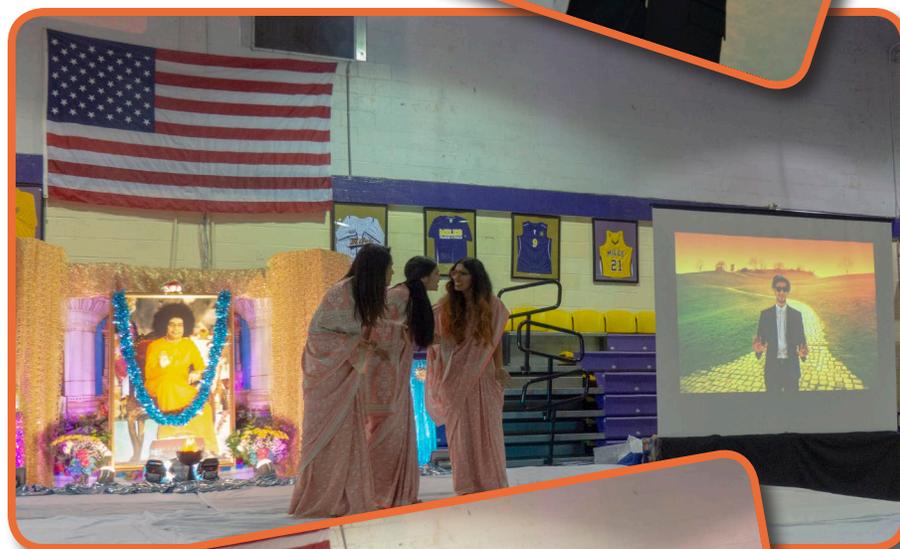
In the second game, based on Discipline, one adult participant along with 4 SSE students played in a trivia game called 'Are

you more spiritual than an SSE student?" similar to the game show, "Are you smarter than a 5th grader". The main contestant was asked a series of questions based on Swami's teachings on discipline.

In the 3rd game, based on Devotion, 7 adults participated in a game devotional musical chairs game.

After successful completion, the 3 YAs put the clues back together and returned back to Sweet Home Alabama!

3D - An interactive spiritual gaming experience



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS...



YOUNG ADULT SESSION



MORNING YOGA

SSE WALK FOR VALUES



NAGAR SAMKIRTAN



ALUMNI MUSIC PROGRAM

We pray to Bhagawan that this blessed 3 day retreat gives us all Divine opportunities to reminisce, reconnect and recharge our spiritual batteries as we share in the wonder of Pure Love called Sri Sathya Sai.

Jai Sai Ram



www.sairegion3.com

