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## Religion



### These hugs aren't ordinary hugs

06/23/2001

For more than 20 years, the woman who is known as Amma, Ammachi ("Mother") or the "Hugging Saint," has sought to ease people's suffering with her embrace. On world tours and at her home ashram in Kerala, India, thousands of people will wait for hours to receive her hug – and she will sit and continue hugging until she's seen everyone who seeks the embrace.

"Amma's hugs and kisses should not be considered ordinary," Amma, who often speaks of herself in the third person, says in her biography, *Amma: Healing the Heart of the World*, which is written by Judith Cornell and published last week by William Morrow. "When Amma embraces or kisses someone, it is a process of purification and inner healing.

"Amma is transmitting a part of her pure vital energy into her children. It also allows them to experience true, unconditional love. When Amma holds someone it can help awaken the dormant spiritual energy within them, which will eventually take them to the ultimate goal of Self-realization."

Her current tour brings Ammachi to the Dallas-area on July 1 and 2, beginning at 10 a.m. both days at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 14135 Midway Road, Addison. (Call 972-380-0951 or visit [www.ammachi.org](http://www.ammachi.org)).

Rob Sidon, a communication liaison at the Amma Center in San Ramon, Calif., said Ammachi's program typically begins with a brief meditation in the morning and then *darshan* (hugging and blessing) until 3 or 4 p.m. She comes back at 7:30 p.m. to give a talk in her native Malayalam

and lead about 90 minutes of devotional singing, called *bhajans*.

Then she starts hugging about 9:30 and continues often until well into the night.

Mr. Sidon said her endurance "boggles the mind." When asked how she continues the pace, Mr. Sidon said her response is "where there's love, there is no effort."

– *Marcus Stewart*

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