

News

We meet Big Hugger



Hold tight ... spiritual superstar Amma cuddles Sun man
PICTURE: STEVE FINN

By DAVE MASTERS

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SHE'S the spiritual guru dubbed the 'priestess of hugs' who's cuddled more than 25 MILLION people, including stars like Sting and Phoebe from Friends.

And yesterday I became the latest person to get a free squeeze from the global superstar they call Amma.

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Her infamous clinches are said to spread peace and harmony through her unconditional love.



Unconditional love ... she's embraced 25 million people
PICTURE: STEVE FINN

Followers in her native India will queue for days for a loving embrace, with more than 100,000 people being seen within 24-hours.

You can see video footage of her in action by clicking here.

And having experienced a cuddle of my own yesterday on the final day of her UK visit, I'd definitely recommend it to anyone.

Whatever your feelings on faith, Amma certainly makes a lot of people happy.

Believe me, Darius would have felt the love at London's Crystal Palace Sports Centre where she was working her magic.

As I crawled up for my turn, people from all religions and races looked on smiling.

Monks in one corner, couples holding hands, babies in arms - all side-by-side waiting patiently, because when Amma hugs, there's no rush - regardless of the tailback.

She takes time, holds you there, pulls you back in and hums in your ear, in what many see as a blessing.

I'm not usually into spiritual things but it's impossible to deny that a good old-fashioned cuddle from Amma - full name Sri Mata Amritanandamayi - feels really good.



Superstar ... Amma is worshipped at home in India
PICTURE: MATA AMRITANANDAMAY CENTER 2006

And as she told me, we should all be at it. She beamed: "People all over the world, irrespective of culture, language or religion, need to love each other and hug.

"But it shouldn't just be a physical thing - it should be a meeting of the heart.

"Through these hugs I am imparting pure vibrations of love and no matter where you are, love is the same.

"That love, that compassion is in everyone - even in the worst criminal who has murdered ten people.

"If that person sees his own child, he feels love and compassion inside and that means it is there, deep down but dormant.

"We only need to awaken it and rediscover that love. People don't express it and that's where all the problems crop up."

Amma has hugged famous faces including Richard Gere and even got to grips with the former President of India.

And animals including dogs, snakes, cobras, birds, rabbits, turtles and even spiders have even received some attention.

Amma's rise to fame began as a farmer's daughter in a remote Indian village.

As a child she devoted herself to caring for others and she soon began offering hugs to locals.

Years on, her mission to spread the religion of love - without asking people to believe in God - has seen her following soar.

And by hugging the millions of people that she has, Amma's won a string of peace gongs and created an institution that generates millions of pounds for charity.

Following the 2004 tsunami she pledged more than £18million in aid to re-build homes, but despite her organisation's wealth she still lives a humble life dedicated to others.

She hopes that by pressing the flesh in her unique way, the inner child in all of us can be awoken - even in world leaders like Prime Minister Tony Blair.



All smiles ... our man after hug
PICTURE: STEVE FINN



Long trip ... Ayumi Gushikata, 43, travelled 6000 miles from Japan to hug Amma
PICTURE: STEVE FINN

Amma added: "In every human being, whether man or woman, there is a child.

"But the child is completely being ignored. The child needs love and compassion - all the feminine qualities.

"By hugging people I am trying to awaken the motherhood in people.

"Unless we give more importance to the feminine aspect society will not grow properly.

"I will hug anybody - if the Prime Minister comes or I happen to meet him I will kindly hug him!

"But not only Tony Blair, everyone - even a beggar. When love overflows your heart, that's the only way you can express it."

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