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CNN TONIGHT

Donations for Hugs Help Orphanages

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LEON HARRIS, CNN ANCHOR: What's an Emmy compared to a hug? That's right, a hug, especially from the lady you're about to meet right now. She can probably make the most of this with our Jeanne Moos.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JEANNE MOOS, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): How many hugs do you average per day? One or two? There's nothing average about this woman's hugs.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: It was like being inside of a cloud.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: It felt like a bolt of electricity through my head.

MOOS: Her followers call her Amma, meaning mother, and she's winding up a 10 city U.S. hugging tour, hugs of pure bliss and hugs of consolation. She plants kisses, and hands out chocolate kisses wrapped in petals. Amma has hugged for 22 hours straight.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Oh, my God, she just sits there. And she never gets up. And when we go out and get coffee or tea or we go to the bathroom eight times and she's

still sitting there.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I've never even seen her yawn.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: She's a fountain of love.

MOOS: In India Amma is treated like a saint. People flock to see her.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: She hugs 3,000 people in one hour. She hugs them. MOOS: Amma even hugs while giving interviews.

The mood was mystical at this Columbia University auditorium.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: It really isn't something that one can explain. MOOS: Amma was greeted with the traditional Indian foot washing then made her way through the crowd to the stage where she commenced hugging. Followers kept count, but this is no attempt to break a Guinness record. Some folks break down, touched by Amma's spirituality.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Sometimes when your heart opens, the tears come. MOOS: The sick come to be cured.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I just went blind.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: She went blind two months ago.

MOOS: Amma makes no promises. She welcomes all religions, her hugs are free.

(on camera): Do you remember your first hug?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I'll never forget it.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Are you going to have a hug?

MOOS: I don't know.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: You have to.

MOOS: OK.

It's me.

(voice-over): Amma whispers while she hugs, repeating for instance, my daughter, my daughter. And though my world didn't rock, it was a hug to remember.

(on camera): Thank you.

(voice-over): I left lipstick on her sari, breaking one of hugging guidelines, tissue off excess makeup. There are CD's and key chains and even Amma dolls for sale, expensive ones, but the proceeds go to hospitals and orphanages in India.

How does Amma's hug stack up against a regular mom's?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: A hundred percent better.

MOOS (on camera): Wow, a hundred percent better.

(voice-over): Like the sign says, please do not hug Amma, let her hug you, and they do.

Jeanne Moos, CNN, New York.