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Spiritual Leader Visits Bay State

She Offers Hugs

BOSTON, 7:23 p.m. EDT July 16, 2001 -- An Indian religious leader came to Massachusetts Monday to offer her spiritual embraces.

NewsCenter 5's Amalia Barreda reported that her followers say a hug from her is like a blessing from God.

90-year-old Muriel Lendh said that she has spent a lifetime studying spirituality. A hug from the Indian religious leader

Ammachi left her practically speechless and near tears.

"I never have had an overwhelming experience like this. It's tremendous," Lendh said.

Ammachi's name means beloved mother. And hundreds came to Andover from across the country to get Ammachi's intense hug, which ends with a shower of flower petals and the gift of a Hershey's chocolate kiss.

"In the beginning somebody brought Hershey's kisses and some flower petals and so she started giving that. It became a kind of tradition. But anyhow Amma says life should become sweet and also life should become like a flower," translator Swami Amrit said.

Ammachi made her first trip out of India in 1987. Her supporters say her phenomenon grew by word of mouth. Small gatherings began in people's living rooms and expanded to events.

David and Meara Ginsburg, who came for their hug from Santa Fe, admit the power of Ammachi's embrace is a mystery.

"There is no real answer except that those hugs break your heart open and bring you so much," Meara Ginsburg said.

"After a while, you begin to wonder how a being like her can just do this over and over and over every day -- day in and day out," David Ginsburg said.

One reason is to raise money. All proceeds and donations are said to go to the many charities Ammachi supports in India.

She wants people to understand more about giving. People should not be just mere takers. They should be givers as well.

Some were too young to articulate what, if anything, they felt. But no child pulled away from her.